

First Sunday of Advent 2023
Villancicos y Cantos Navideños
at Olvera Street, Downtown Los Angeles, California

Schola Choirmaster Vicente Bastidas-Elizondo conducted his 30-student concert choir of nearby Immaculate Conception School, at the rotunda of the Olvera Street Pueblo of Los Angeles Historic Park, on the First Sunday of Advent, Dec. 3, 2023, in a program entitled, *Villancicos y Cantos Navideños* (Christmas Carols and Choruses).

The students from kindergarten to eighth grade, processed to the plaza's gazebo singing *Humildes Peregrinos* (Humble Pilgrims), a traditional Mexican *posadas* song (nine celebrations from Dec. 16-24) remembering the journey of Holy Mary and St. Joseph from Nazareth to Bethlehem before Jesus' birth.

Then the children were joined by members of The Schola Cantorum of the Pacific®: sopranos Cynthia Bih, Marilu Reyes and Louinn Lota; altos Alisa Benitez and Gennesis Tadeo; tenors Abraham Tadeo, Garrett Hill; and bass Mike Tabor. Fr. Ted Ley, SM, DMA, founder of the Schola, accompanied on digital piano.

The combined choirs sang *Campana Sobre Campana* (Bell Upon Bell), an Andalusian carol describing the ringing of the bells in Bethlehem inviting shepherds to come see the Baby Jesus.

Announcements were made in English and Spanish by elementary school students Aaliyah Rodriguez, Jenedith Vasquez and Imer Melara. Eighth-graders Miguel Rodriguez and Joey Linares each soloed on *En Belén Tocan a Fuego*, a Castilian carol describing bells ringing loudly at the gate of Bethlehem as if there was a fire (*fuego*), with the rest of the singers chiming in on the chorus.

Then two *villancicos* were sung by both choirs: Schola tenor Garrett Hill played the glockenspiel to intone the *Ukrainian Bell Carol*, followed by a quiet new canto by Fr. Ley on an historic *posadas* text, *Noche Serena* (Serene Night). The eight adults then sang the Schola's arrangement of *A La Nanita Nana*, the traditional Mexican lullaby to the newborn Jesus.

Seventh-grader Ellaine Cameras introduced *La Primavera* (Springtime), an early waltz popular in the California Ranchero Era and once danced at the Plaza. The choir children sang this in *vocalise* song-without-words style, while high school students Alistair Campos and Alondra Cornejo danced to young Alistair's choreography.

The children then sang the "*pa rum pum pum pums*" as boy soprano Iyecyn Perez, 8, sang the story of *The Little Drummer Boy*. All choristers sang, a cappella, *Dios Te Salve Maria*, the Hail Mary of the Spanish California Missions. The choir adults contributed *Adeste Fideles* (O Come All Ye Faithful, in Latin). The combined choirs completed the program with the Schola arrangement of *Stille Nacht* (Silent Night) in German, English, and Spanish. After taking their bows, the children sang as their encore, Immaculate Conception School's Alma Mater, "Spirit Song."

This was the first general public concert by the children's choir of the school music program founded two years ago by Immaculate Conception School with the co-sponsorship of The Schola Cantorum of the Pacific®. After the closure of Assumption School in Boyle Heights during the pandemic, the Schola sought a new school in which to continue the development of this specifically Catholic School program. All the children of Immaculate Conception School receive instruction in

basic music reading and performance skills in choral and vocal music, with related instruction available in violin, classical guitar and piano.