

The Hispanic-Anglosphere from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Century

An Introduction

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Material Culture: Prints, Manuscripts, Objects, Images, Locations

Master Lacy, the Famous Young Spaniard

JOSÉ BROWNRIGG-GLEESON MARTÍNEZ



Figure SII.1 'Master M. M. I. R. Lacy, the celebrated young Spaniard', courtesy of New York Public Library Digital Collections, Music Division, <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47df-f944-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>.

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On 24 March 1806, a ‘Young Spaniard’ hailed as a musical prodigy gave a violin concert at the Hanover Square Rooms in London (Figure SII.1). According to an advertisement placed in one of that day’s newspapers, the visitor could be considered ‘one of the brightest examples of musical talent and application that ever engaged the attention of the amateur, or enraptured an English audience’ (*The Morning Post*, 24 March 1806).

Born in Bilbao in July 1793 – and not in 1795 as held by most of his biographers – this ‘celebrated young Spaniard’ was Miguel Rufino Lacy, the third of five children of Francis Lacy, originally a shoemaker from Carrickmacross, Co. Monaghan, Ireland, and Catherine MacDonald (sometimes ‘MacDonall’ or ‘Donall’), probably also of Irish origin.

Prior to his arrival in England, Rophino Lacy – as he would come to be known in the Anglophone world – had debuted in Spain and studied in France, where in 1804, he had performed for Napoleon. Although he was engaged for a time as a violinist in London, Dublin and Edinburgh, by late 1808 Lacy had taken up a career in acting. Throughout his life, he was to also try his luck as a playwright, theatrical manager and composer, but it was as an arranger of operas that he would be most successful. Having lived for some time in Liverpool, Lacy visited Paris in 1831 and toured the United States in 1845. He died impoverished in London in September 1867 and was survived by a wife and two daughters. In spite of his ‘Spanish’ moniker, Lacy is commonly included in separate studies of English, Irish and Basque musicians.

This portrait of Lacy, painted by John Smart (c.1740–1811), who specialized in watercolour miniatures on ivory, and engraved by Antoine Cardon (1739–1822), was published in England in May 1807, shortly after he had given a concert at the King’s Concert Rooms in Haymarket, London. Judging from its inscription – ‘born in Bilboa (sic), July 19, 1795’ – Lacy would have been eleven years old at the time, yet church records in Spain demonstrate that the young musician was actually two years older than what his contemporaries were made to believe. The way in which his age was misrepresented in this image and more widely in early adverts for his concerts suggests that his parents might have been willingly misleading the public to exaggerate the precociousness of his talents.

Sources and Suggested Reading: *The Morning Post*, 24 March 1806; *The Times*, 17 March 1807; *Freeman’s Journal*, 27 August 1807; *Caledonian Mercury*, 25 July 1808; *Belfast News-Letter*, 2 January 1818; *The Musical World, A Magazine of Essays, Critical and Practical, and Weekly Record of Musical Science, Literature, and Intelligence* (London), 2 April 1840; *Evening Mirror* (New York), 13 November 1845; *Gaceta Musical de Madrid*, 5 August 1855; *La semaine musicale: musique sacrée, concerts, musique dramatique, littérature et beaux-arts*, 17 October 1867; Ángel Sagardia Sagardia, ‘Lacy, Rufino, instrumentista’, *Aunamendi Eusko Entziklopedia*, <http://aunamendi.eusko-ikaskuntza.eus/es/lacy-rufino/ar-84229/>, accessed 22 May 2018; Axel Klein, ‘Lacy, Michael Rophino’, in *The Encyclopaedia of Music in Ireland*,

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The Risky Appeal of the Common People

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Figure SII.2 Sculpture in terracotta by José Cubero Gabardón (1818–1877) at National Trust Tyntesfield [© National Trust Images (Image: NT 32653)].