

María Asunción Flórez Asensio.
*Sirena de los tablados:
 Teresa de Robles. Recorrido vital
 y profesional de una “hija de la comedia”.*

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IN HER GROUNDBREAKING WORK, Flórez Asensio provides a meticulous and insightful examination of the life and career of Teresa de Robles (1663–1727), an exceptional actress-musician in early modern Spain. Through extensive archival research, the author illuminates the pivotal role of actresses like Robles in shaping and consolidating the “fiesta real cantada, auténtico teatro musical hispano” (200). Flórez Asensio’s comprehensive knowledge of early modern musical theater enables a thorough exploration of Teresa de Robles’s life and professional endeavors.

The study draws from diverse sources to comprehensively analyze Teresa de Robles’s life and career, offering a multifaceted view of her professional journey. Flórez Asensio utilizes administrative documentation such as drafts of company members, wills and testaments, letters of payment, receipt of dowries, and requests for loans, preserved at the Archivo Municipal de la Villa and the Archivo Histórico de Protocolos de Madrid. Some of these sources are transcribed in the documental appendix. The author also leverages library resources, particularly the Biblioteca Nacional de España and Biblioteca Histórica Municipal. She analyzes theatrical sources, such as comedias and entremeses, to elucidate Teresa de Robles’s versatility as an actress and musician. Moreover, Flórez Asensio incorporates musical scores and compositions to assess the actress’s exceptional vocal abilities, adaptability across different musical genres, and integral role in baroque theatrical productions.

In exploring her vocal technique, Flórez Asensio emphasizes Robles’s mastery of breath control and diaphragm management. The author demonstrates how the actress-musician’s technical proficiency allowed her to excel in singing tender and loving lyrics with airy and graceful tones. The author also discusses Robles’s ability to infuse emotion and expression into her vocal performances, detailing the particular skills that she deployed to captivate audiences, such as sweet harmony, dexterity, and conceptual acuity. The book traces the evolution of Robles’s vocal technique through

her roles in different plays, highlighting how she adapted her singing style to suit the musical compositions and characterizations required for each role. Integrating Robles's singing with the broader theatrical performance, Flórez Asensio emphasizes its role in enhancing the dramatic narrative and engaging the audience.

The book is structured into three chapters, each delving into different facets of Robles's remarkable journey. Chapter 1, "Genealogía y trayectoria profesional de una 'hija de la comedia,'" traces Robles's early activity in the theater company of her grandfather Antonio de Escamilla, highlighting her flexibility as *tercera dama*, where she was particularly successful in the comic role of *graciosa*. Like her aunt, Manuela de Escamilla, one of the finest *graciosas* and singers of her time, Robles's ability to seamlessly transition between various vocal styles and roles, like the *mojigangas* and *entremeses*, showcases her versatility and adaptability on stage.

In chapter 2, "El gremio de representantes," Flórez Asensio situates Robles within the actors' guild, the *Cofradía de la Novena*, and underscores actresses' social and economic significance in baroque society. She explores the actresses' defense of professional rights, interactions with municipal authorities, and encounters with royal figures. As concerns Robles in particular, her success as a professional actress belonging to the *Cofradía de la Novena* earned her recognition, significant social status, and financial stability, providing her with a comfortable life. Robles's parents, Ana de Escamilla and Juan Luis de Robles, and siblings were also members of the actors' guild. However, none of them achieved her level of fame.

Robles's musical contributions take center stage in chapter 3, "Teresa Robles, sirena de los tablados." Flórez Asensio delves into Robles's remarkable vocal prowess, shedding light on her technical mastery and expressive depth. Her versatility emerges as a defining trait, allowing her to navigate various vocal styles and theatrical roles seamlessly. Robles enchanted spectators through her aforementioned range of vocal skills, keeping them spellbound with her compelling renditions. Additionally, Robles's evolution as a vocalist allowed her to adapt to changing musical landscapes across different theatrical productions as she competed with her Italian counterparts during the reign of Felipe V, who favored Italian operas.

Flórez Asensio analyzes two notable zarzuelas, a form of Spanish musical theater characterized by its fusion of spoken dialogue, song, and dance. The first, *Júpiter y Yoo*, is ascribed to the composer Marcos de Lanuza (1650–1708), with the libretto potentially crafted by Juan Gómez de Navas (1650–1719). Its music, preserved in scores and compositions, provides valuable insights into Spanish theatrical musical style and conventions during this period. Flórez Asensio dissects the composition, analyzing its structure, melody, and thematic motifs to discern the nuances of Robles's vocal performances. Additionally, the author explores the zarzuela's libretto and dialogue, examining how Robles's singing meshes with the production's broader narrative and theatrical context. Furthermore, Flórez Asensio contextualizes *Júpiter y Yoo* within the larger framework of early modern Spanish theatrical music, tracing its influences and contributions to the development of the zarzuela genre. Through meticulous analysis, the

author illuminates how Robles's participation in *Júpiter y Yoo* exemplifies her versatility as a performer and her significant impact on the cultural landscape of Spanish theater.

In the second musical production, *Acis y Galatea*, credited to the composer Sebastián Durón (1660–1716), Robles, as *tercera dama*, would have portrayed the character of Galatea. Flórez Asensio emphasizes how Robles's singing enriched the overall theatrical experience, underscoring her role in enhancing the dramatic narrative and engaging the audience. Through Flórez Asensio's analysis, this zarzuela emerges as a testament to Robles's artistry and her lasting contributions to the vibrant tradition of Spanish musical theater.

Beyond her artistic contributions, Robles's success on stage elevated her social and familial status, evident in her use of the title of "Doña" in her will in 1700 and her election as the majordomo of the Cofradía de la Novena in 1705. Despite personal challenges such as divorce, Robles maintained her economic stability through her continued activity as an *autora* and her support of her family, serving as a matriarch and benefactor to her descendants.

In sum, by celebrating Teresa de Robles, Flórez Asensio invites us to recognize the resilience, creativity, and agency of women who defied societal norms to shape the cultural heritage of their time. *Sirena de los Tablados: Teresa de Robles* is a testament to the enduring power of artistic expression and the voices that resonate across centuries. This book is a critical addition to the growing body of scholarship on early modern women in Spanish theater. Flórez Asensio's attention to detail and passion for uncovering hidden narratives make this book essential reading for scholars and enthusiasts alike.