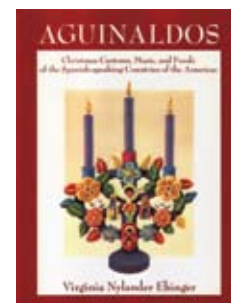


Aguinaldos

By Virginia Nylander Ebinger
Sunstone Press, 2009



Teachers familiar with the books of the late Gin Ebinger know them for their rich collections of Hispanic musical culture. *De Colores*, her first book, is a collection Spanish language songs for children, and *Niñez: Spanish Songs, Games and Stories of Childhood* offers Orff teachers even more material for the classroom. Gin's last gift to us, *Aguinaldos*, is the richest of all.

Aguinaldos is a collection of Christmas songs from the Spanish-speaking countries of South America, Central America, the Caribbean Islands, and Mexico and New Mexico (the only state in the United States that is officially bilingual). But this book is

much more than a song collection. There is a fully developed section of the book that describes each country's geography, history, peoples, and their various Christmas traditions. And yet there is still more to this book! There are recipes (lots of them) from each of the countries included in the book for special dishes customarily served during the Christmas holidays.

The book's essence is captured in the title, *Aguinaldos*. This title was suggested to Gin by Sofia Lopez-Ibor, and the definition of the word tends to vary among Spanish-speaking peoples and throughout history: "To some it is a small gift, usually candy or fruit, given to children who go from house

to house during the Christmas season 'begging aguinaldos,' or the verse by which they ask for these treats" (pp. 11–12). The word also applies to traditional gifts of money to employees—the Christmas "bonus." To many, the word also means that the particular body of Christmas carols that are sung by carolers as they walk through the streets and visit one another. These songs, *aguinaldos*, are folk-like, most often in triple meter and are accompanied by folk instruments.

The heart of this book is the rich song collection. There are 53 songs, with a majority of them having religious texts. Some of them have a long history (Riu, Riu, Chiu, for instance), but most are folk songs. The meters include 2/4, 3/4, 6/8 and mixed meters, and most of the songs have chords indicated, so that simple guitar or piano accompaniments can easily be made. The chords rarely go beyond I, IV, and V in harmonic complexity, so they lend themselves to functional harmony settings for Orff instruments. There are two Puerto Rican songs arranged for voice and hand drum by James and Isabel Carley and a two-part vocal setting by Pilar Posada included in the collection as well. There are also songs in the first part of the book where specific holiday customs of specific countries are described. These songs are part of religious dramas that have come through history from medieval Europe. "Las Posadas," "Los Pastores," "Los Tres Reyes Magos," and "Los Comanchitos" are among them.

While a review of a cookbook may well be a first in the pages of *The Orff Echo*, a cookbook review is perhaps long overdue. It seems quite probable that a high percentage of Orff Schulerwerk teachers are also good cooks. After all, a really good cook knows well

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all the ingredients, the elements, necessary in the creation of a dish, knows the cooking process, and also knows how and when to improvise. Does this not also sound like an Orff Schulwerk teacher's set of talents? Those who have had the pleasure of eating from Gin Ebinger's kitchen know full well her talents as a cook. The inclusion of recipes here in her song collection makes perfect sense.

Aguinaldos is really a genre unto itself. It is surely unique among materials published for music teachers, in that it is one of very few books that physically demonstrate the multifaceted-ness of the culture of a people. *Aguinaldos* is at once scholarly, engaging, and exceedingly useful. The layout of the book is in three distinct sections: information about the countries, the song collection, and recipes. Because many of the songs and recipes overlap countries, this division into three parts makes finding exactly what you need a fairly simple task. The book also has a helpful glossary, which covers unfamiliar words and phrases found in both the songs and the recipes, and there are references and resources listed at the end, as well. The publisher has even chosen an elegant typeface, so the overall impression is that the book is a thing of beauty.

Once *Aguinaldos* has been used and enjoyed in various ways, one is left with the dilemma of where to store it so that it will be handy when needed. On the music shelf? Ah, but then it would be too easy to forget the book when hunting up a good recipe for chile or tres leches. Perhaps it belongs in the kitchen, then? Well, no, the book needs to be among music books, in the holiday section, for convenience in planning lessons and concert programs. The solution? Two books!

Aguinaldos was published just days before Gin's death. She will continue to speak to us through this book that so beautifully demonstrates her love of Spanish language songs and culture ... and cuisine. ■

Carol Erion retired from Arlington County Public Schools in Virginia and is a former member of The Orff Echo Editorial Board.

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