

Congratulations

48. Las Mañanitas

(Traditional Mexican)

arr. William Melton

Las Mañanitas (Traditional Mexican)

Las Mañanitas, a true folk song, is sung across Mexico for birthdays* (before the cake is cut), anniversaries and other celebrations, often as a morning serenade. The lyrics extend to many verses, but begin with a reference to the morning Psalms sung by King David, and then go on in praise of mornings as a joyful renewal of life, nature's own benediction for the birthday celebrant:

Estas son las mañanitas, que cantaba el Rey David,
Hoy por ser día de tu santo, te las cantamos a ti.
Despierta, mi bien, despierta, mira que ya amaneció,
Ya los pajaritos cantan, la luna ya se metió.

Que linda está la mañana en que vengo a saludarte,
Venimos todos con gusto y placer a felicitarte.
Ya viene amaneciendo, ya la luz del día nos dio.
Levántate de mañana, mira que ya amaneció.

*These are the little morning Psalms, that King David sang,
Today for your Saint's Day, we sing them to you.
Wake up, my dear, wake up, see that dawn has already come,
The little birds are singing, the moon has already set.*

*How beautiful is the morning on which we come to greet you,
We all come with pleasure to congratulate you.
Already the sunrise is arriving, already the light of day is here.
Get up this morning, see that dawn has already come.*

The graceful melody, with its parallel thirds and sixths, is often performed in instrumental arrangements, where a touch of mariachi flavour is quite appropriate.

Text by William Melton

*The singing of “Happy Birthday to You” is ubiquitous at private celebrations in many parts of the world, but there are a number of cogent reasons to exclude it from a collection such as this. Though the brief ditty was the product of two Louisville sisters in the late 19th century, it was first copyrighted in 1935, renewed in 1963, and the U.S. copyright will extend through 2030. In theory, anyone performing the piece in public is subject to multiple costs: first paying more for the arrangement that is being played (the publisher of which must pay royalties for its inclusion, making any collection that contains it more expensive), and again every time it is performed.

There is also an aesthetic argument for avoiding the song: it is simply awful music. There is no necessity to analyse it in depth (within its scant duration, it still manages to be woodenly repetitive, the initial dotted rhythm opening every one of its four short phrases) to recognise that only the most enthusiastic rendition could make it work. But loud is not necessarily synonymous with joyous, and the latter is a far more suitable mood for any birthday celebration.