

# Sweet Harmonies with the Rossini Choir for a Historic Milestone: Bilbao Celebrates 725 Years

Section: Art and culture

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Bilbao's 725th anniversary is being marked not merely with ceremony, but with a multisensory celebration that combines music, memory, and tradition. On Tuesday, May 7th, the **Rossini Choir** held a press conference to present "*Estampas bilbaínas – Bilboko irudiak*", a choral project that honours the city's past through artistic expression and culinary heritage. Developed in collaboration with the Guild of Artisan Confectionery and Pastry Makers of Bizkaia, the initiative offers a cultural journey through the boroughs of Bilbao – a narrative that amplifies not only the city's collective voice, but also the often-silenced contributions of its women.

Councillor for Culture and Governance, **Gonzalo Olabarria**, opened the event by highlighting the cultural significance of the project. He praised its emotional resonance and originality, noting how the performance serves as both tribute and innovation. At the heart of the production is the work of **Carlos Imaz**, a renowned Bilbao-born composer and former director of the Rossini Choir. His music provides the narrative arc for the performance. "Who better than someone

who knows Bilbao intimately to translate it into music?" remarked **Félix Primo**, the choir's public relations officer.

Imaz described the piece as a sonic portrait of a once-industrial, often-grey Bilbao, a city shaped by adversity and transformation. Performed with piano accompaniment, the compositions travel through diverse neighbourhoods, mirroring the city's topography and social history. "The piece features humorous, dramatic, and nostalgic moments," Imaz noted. The inaugural performance took place on **9 May** at the Rekalde Municipal Centre, with subsequent concerts scheduled through **13 June** across various city districts.

Artistic director **Ana Begoña Hernández** described the creative process as organic and collaborative, calling the final product a demanding yet deeply rewarding work for the ensemble. Among the featured compositions is "*Sirimiri*" – named after the Basque word for a gentle drizzle – which she described as a nostalgic homage to Bilbao's poetic atmosphere.

In addition to its musical and geographic dimensions, the project embraces a powerful social theme. Choir director **Gorka Teijeiro** emphasized that the performance seeks to make visible the women who sustained their families during Bilbao's industrial era. "We dedicate the piece '*Bilbainitas*' to them, they are the backbone of our society," he stated. This gender-conscious framing shifts the work from commemoration to active remembrance, affirming women's central role in Bilbao's narrative.

The performance also weaves in another key element of local identity: its sweet traditions. Partnering with the city's artisanal pastry guild, the choir pays tribute to the culinary symbols of Bilbao. **Elena Espeso**, director of the guild, expressed her appreciation for the collaboration. During the event, **Professor Jon**, a pastry instructor, shared the backstory of the *Carolina*, a classic Bilbaína pastry named by a local baker for his daughter, which inspired a song in the

programme.

The composition "*Carolina*" not only tells the tale of this iconic treat but also honours other beloved local confections such as *bollos suizos*, *bollos de mantequilla*, and *pastel de arroz*. As Primo noted, the choir hopes this cheerful tune will become a familiar melody in pastry shops and cafés throughout the city. At each concert, attendees will have the opportunity to win baskets filled with these traditional pastries, a literal taste of Bilbao's cultural heritage.

Through this initiative, the **Rossini Choir** invites the public to experience Bilbao not merely as a historical site, but as a living tapestry of stories, voices, and traditions. With women's histories moved from the margins to the stage, "*Estampas bilbaínas*" is more than an anniversary concert, it is a civic ritual of remembrance, resilience, and joy.