

Report on *Hearing Faith: Music as Theology in the Spanish Empire*

This book makes a highly original contribution to several overlapping fields of inquiry with relation to the Spanish-texted villancico, in terms of composition, underlying theology (and ideology), performance and reception, with a particular emphasis on listening practice. It is very well researched, and the contextualisation of the villancico in terms of the theological beliefs, practices and tendencies of the period through the reading and interpretation of contemporary religious and devotional texts is quite exceptional. This rich primary source material has been little studied by music historians and is essential to the understanding not only of the texts of early modern villancicos but also as regards their function and, most original of all, their impact on the listeners of the time. The writings of Spanish theologians, including religious tracts, sermons, exegesis and doctrine, are prolific (the works of Luis de Granada alone are very extensive), and often dense in expression, and it is much to the author's credit that they have confronted and drawn so fruitfully on this hitherto largely neglected material. Inevitably, the author has made selective use of it – it would be impossible to do otherwise –, but their readings of the passages quoted are detailed and convincing, and display a sound knowledge of the wider cultural and spiritual tendencies in relation to the composition and performance of this relatively little known repertory.

Indeed, in general, villancicos have been very little studied in this way: their ubiquity in churches throughout the Spanish empire, and various cultural phenomena related to them – such as, their function, use and re-use, transmission (through printed texts and manuscript copies of the music), and eclectic approach to more popular musical idioms, including dances – have been studied in more depth in recent years. The individual studies, in particular, of Illari (2001, 2007), Baker (2007, 2008), Davies (2009, 2013) and Torrente (2014, 2016, 2019), and two collections of essays (Knighton & Torrente 2007 and Borrego and Marín 2019) have added much to our knowledge of the villancico as a genre and its performative context, and the author shows excellent command of this secondary literature. However, these studies have only touched on the reception of villancicos and how they were listened to and understood by those who heard them in their own time in the context of theological debate and spiritual practice. Indeed, the study it most closely approaches is Andrew Dell'Antonio's analysis of listening as spiritual practice in early modern Italy (2011), although the geographical-political area, historical context and musical genre considered by Dell'Antonio are quite different. Also important is the collection of essays edited by Daniele Filippi and Michael Noone, *Listening to Early Modern Catholicism: Perspectives from Musicology* (Brill, 2017). A further useful contributions to the Spanish historiography – not cited (and perhaps not consulted) here because it concerns a different genre – is the research by Todd M. Borgerding, based on the Latin-texted motet, but drawing on some of the same primary sources as regards the theological context in which music was conceived and heard in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The author might like to take a look at this when revising the final text for publication, but the study presented here generally combines synthesis of previous research, meshed with a rich array of primary sources and the ability to present a new and compelling argument in a highly impressive way.

There are a couple of other specific points where existing secondary literature (quite often appearing in slightly recondite publications) would enrich the debate, without changing its basic premise. The link between Christ's crucifixion (and bodily suffering) and stringed musical instruments is considered by Luis Robledo ('El cuerpo y la cruz como instrumentos musicales: iconografía y literatura a la sombra de San Agustín', *Studia Aurea* (2007); Antonio Corijo Ocaña, 'Amores humanos, amores divinos. La *Vita Christi* de sor Isabel de Villena', *Scripta* (2014) – both in on-line journals). On the dynamic between the writings of St Augustine and neo-Platonic thought as regards music in early modern Spain, and the

question of ‘silent’ music, see: Tess Knighton, “‘Through a Glass Darkly’: Music and Mysticism in Golden Age Spain”, in (ed.) Hilaire Kallendorf, *A Companion to Hispanic Mysticism* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 411–36; and Juan José Rey on ‘Musica callada’ on his website Veterodoxia. For a more generalised discussion of Spanish religious writers’ attitude towards music in church in this period, see: Knighton, ‘Voces angélicas, voces femeninas: música y espiritualidad en la época de Santa Teresa de Jesús (1515-1582)’, in *Santa Teresa o la llama permanente. Estudios históricos, artísticos y literarios en el V centenario del nacimiento de la Santa (1515-2015)*, (eds) Esther Borrego & Jaime Olmedo (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Europa, 2017), 57–70. It might also be useful to include a synthesis of Hernando de Talavera’s contribution to the use of villancico in Christmas matins around 1500; though rather earlier in terms of chronology, this offers perhaps one of the first examples of introducing villancicos into the liturgy to attract more people to church (notably, in this instance, the recently converted muslims (or *moriscos*) in the kingdom of Granada where he was the first archbishop); a summary can be found in Mercedes Castillo Ferreira, ‘Chant, Liturgy and Reform’, in Tess Knighton (ed.), *Companion to Music in the Age of the Catholic Monarchs* (Brill, 2017).

One interesting area for possible (if limited here) expansion is that regarding the teaching of Christian doctrine through music. Recent studies have shown the extent to which the catechism was taught throughout the Catholic world through setting the words to popular melodies (in various vernacular languages). The links between this didactic process, closely related to church reform, and the composition and use of villancicos might prove interesting. The following studies would offer a good starting-point for exploration: Alfonso de Vicente, ‘Música, propaganda y reforma religiosa en los siglos XVI y XVII: cánticos para “la gente del vulgo” (1520-1620)’, *Studia Aurea* (2007); Kate van Orden, ‘Children’s Voices: Singing and Literacy in Sixteenth-Century France’, *Early Music History* (2006); Daniele V. Filippi, “‘Catechismum modulans docebat’: Teaching the Doctrine through Singing in Early Modern Catholicism” (2017), in the Filippi and Noone volume cited above; and Daniele V. Filippi ‘A Sound Doctrine: Early Modern Jesuits and the Singing of the Catechism’, *Early Music History*, 2015.

All these references (and the further references they include in terms of bibliography) might be more or less useful to the author; they are recommendations rather than stipulations. It might be interesting to note, however, that several of these studies have been published by Brill, and it is clear that this book would fit very well into the approaches developed and the debates addressed as regards listening to music in the history of early modern Catholicism. The focus on the villancico, whereas several of the other studies have concentrated more on Latin-texted repertory, would thus be complementary (there is almost no overlap and there would be no sense of duplication), and lead to a broader synthesis of musical expression and impact in the Catholic world of the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries.

The book is commendably coherent: each chapter follows on logically and explores ideas then developed further in the following chapter. The argument thus develops organically and highly convincingly, and is enhanced by the detailed and insightful analyses of the music of the villancicos. If there are flaws as regards the theological interpretation, this reader has been unable to pinpoint them, and the synthesis and presentation of material that is often quite arcane as a highly readable text is very skilful. This book will be a major contribution to the Spanish music historiography and, while it is primarily addressed to the academic community, anyone interested in the villancico – from the viewpoint of a variety of historical and cultural disciplines – will find it an indispensable read. A possible area of contention is present in the discussion of the *villancicos de negros*, an aspect also addressed in Baker (‘Latin American Baroque: Performance as a Post-Colonial Act’ (*Early Music*, 2008) and Rogério Budasz, ‘Black Guitar Players and Early African-Iberian Music in

Portugal and Brazil' (*Early Music*, 2007). The author handles the issues sensitively, but the recent writings of Olivia Bloechl might also be useful to help place this aspect in a broader theoretical context and the collection of essays edited by Kate Lowe and Tom Earle, *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe* (CUP, 2005) would enrich the discourse further through its interesting chapters based on literary as well as documentary sources. The sensitivity of the issue for the present author is clear, particularly as regards what was considered to be humorous (and expressed as such in music) then and now: a point of debate that is very difficult to address without possibly causing unintentional offence. As the author mentions, very few villancicos are performed and recorded in general; issues of racism will inevitably have to be confronted in the *villancicos de negros* and the musical (and linguistic) representation of their presence at the crib; the intention behind these villancicos and their historical and cultural reference points in the early modern world is undoubtedly potentially problematic for those listening to villancicos today.

The book is written well, and it would not need a major copy-editing; there are some minor typographical errors which caught the reader's eye, with some (but very few) sentences in which words are repeated in close proximity or the grammar is not easy to grasp, but no more than in practically all book manuscripts, and in general it is very 'clean'. Occasionally, the reader wished to be able to consult the original text of quotations presented only in translation. Clearly, to include all original texts would increase the length of the volume quite substantially, and is probably not practical. Perhaps the author, in revising the manuscript, could keep an eye out for anything that might be interpreted differently or seems ambiguous or puzzling in translation: 'and its accidents are doing it' (p. 62) or 'dexterity in hope' (p. 106 et passim) are examples (where the original is presented) of unclear or infelicitous translations. Of course, the *conceptismo* of villancico texts makes translation very difficult (at times, almost impossible), and the author generally provides careful readings and explanations, on which they are to be congratulated, as it is no easy task.

I would place the book in the top 5-10% of works in the field, and would strongly recommend publication. Not only will it become a standard work of reference in the field of villancico studies, it also opens up new directions for future research and analysis as regards a multi-faceted and fascinating musical genre that represented *the* musical experience, on an annual or cyclical basis, for the vast majority of those attending church services on major feast days in the early modern Iberian world.