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Development and Dissemination: Deliberations on Spanish Renaissance Music

Personal experience is often the best way to pique my interest in a topic. This is certainly true in my desire to research elements of Spanish music. In the summer of 2014, I had the opportunity to travel to Barcelona, Spain and visit the various tourist destinations of that beautiful city. While I was there, I was able to attend a flamenco dancing performance. I was amazed by the talent of the dancers and musicians, who used rhythms and tones that were somewhat unfamiliar to my classically trained ears. The poetry of the music seamlessly fit in with the music of the guitars and the steps and expression of the dancers. What made this music so different, yet so similar to music I heard in concert halls in America? On another day I was there, I was able to hear a choir sing in the Cathedral of Barcelona, filling the enormous space with rich harmonies and resounding melodies. I was intrigued by the difference in the two genres—flamenco and sacred chorus—living and developing together in the same historic city. These experiences served to ignite my interest in the musical culture of Spain and how it was developed throughout history.

In this paper, I will explore the various elements that created a unique environment for Spanish Renaissance music to develop and disseminate. First, I will explain how the interaction of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism created a diverse and distinctive musical environment. This interaction was sometimes friendly and sometimes antagonistic, and both atmospheres affected the musical culture. Second, my paper will describe how Spain's unified government played into the development of Spanish music. Spain was in a unique position at the closing of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth with the marriage of Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella I of Castile. Their

marriage signaled the unification of Aragon and Castile, creating the nation of Spain. Other Western countries at this time, such as Italy and France, remained a collection of dukedoms and somewhat independent states. Certainly, such an unusual system of government would create a likewise uncommon culture of music in Spain. Lastly, I will illuminate the ways that Spain's involvement in the new world facilitated the spread of Spain's unique musical culture beyond its own borders. Ferdinand and Isabella's sponsorship of Christopher Columbus' historic quest led to centuries of Spanish involvement in the conquest of the New World. While much of the cultural exchange involved the passing of Spanish customs and values, the natives of the New World also passed some of their own traditions on to the conquistadors. My paper will explore both types of interaction. These three items considered, Renaissance Spain offered a unique environment for the development and dissemination of its musical culture.

Throughout history, some of the richest cultures have actually been a mixing of several cultures. Spain is a great example of this. Prior to the Renaissance, Christians, Muslims, and Jews occupied Spain. These three religions and cultural units created a rich diversity of culture in Spain, not only in daily life and beliefs, but also in musical practices. Although there was certainly conflict—sometimes very intense conflict—between these groups, they created a distinct “Spanish” culture.

The Moors arrived in Spain in the early eighth century.¹ There is some dispute about whether Muslims coexisted peacefully with Christians and Jews already living in Spain. Some say that the groups struggled bitterly until Ferdinand and Isabella united all of Spain by expelling all non-Christians from their borders. Others say that the mixing of

¹ Américo Castro, *The Structure of Spanish History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 1954), 84.

cultures was peaceful, since Spain offered religious freedom to the cities that they conquered. Jonathan Shannon describes the time of peace between Jews, Christians and Muslims as the *convivencia*, or “the living together.” According to Shannon, during this *convivencia*, Muslim culture thrived, rivaling Baghdad, the Islamic cultural center.² Unfortunately, conflict did exist between the three religious groups during this time as well. The years in between the arrival of the Moors in AD 700 and their ultimate removal in 1492 were also filled with conquering and reconquering different Christian or Moorish cities, each interaction creating another opportunity for the exchange of culture.

The Islamic religion affected every aspect of Muslim life. Américo Castor stated that this meant that Spain as a nation was quite slow in developing an objective or rational view of the world because its people held fast to their religious ideologies and beliefs.³ However, it also created a passionately religious culture in Spain, even after Catholicism became the dominant religion. More than any other nation, Spain has been willing to go to great lengths to defend and establish its national religion. Spain’s religious zeal triggered events such as the Spanish Inquisition and its handling of native tribes in the New World.

Besides bringing fervor for religion, the Moors also brought with them Greek culture and language and integrated them into the Spanish culture. In his article about the Greek origins of Flamenco music, Manolo Sanlucar claims that Spanish Muslims are

² Jonathan H. Shannon, “Performing al-Andalus, Remembering al-Andalus: Mediterranean Soundings from Mashriq to Maghrib,” *Journal of American Folklore* 120 (2007): 312.

³ *The Structure of Spanish History*, 81.

considered the most direct link to the spread of Hellenistic culture throughout Spain.⁴ Jonathan Shannon agrees that Flamenco music is a direct result of the development of Arab music in the Muslim-populated areas of Spain.⁵ While most people attribute the development of flamenco music to Flemish culture, there are records of it existing in Spain long before the Flemish records of 1550. In addition, these records predate the development of the tonal system in the Western world, again pointing to origins besides those of the Western world.⁶ The Greeks used what is known as the “overtone series,” which is the theory that a single pitch suggests or produces a number of notes around it. Overtones are prevalent in the singing of flamenco music. In his research, Sanlucar discovered an obvious connection between the Greek Greater Perfect System and the “tonal pallet” of Flamenco music.⁷ In the Greater Perfect System, Greek musicians utilized four main modes: Dorian, which begins on “E;” Phrygian, which begins on “D;” Lydian, which begins on “C;” and Mixolydian, which begins on “B.” Rearranging the succession of tones and semitones, or whole steps and half steps, respectively, creates these different scales. From these building blocks, musicians can create different inversions of each mode, creating even more structural options for compositions.⁸ A typical mode used by flamenco musicians was the Dorian mode, which begins on “E.” This mode is created by two identical, descending tetrachords, with the pattern “Tone, Tone, Semitone,” or “T, T, S.” By juxtaposing these matching tetrachords, separated by a

⁴ Manolo Sanlucar and Corey Whitehead, “The Speculative Theories of Manolo Sanlucar: The Greek Origins of Flamenco Music,” *International Journal of the Humanities* 7 (2011): 7.

⁵ “Performing al-Andalus” 317.

⁶ “Greek Origins of Flamenco Music” 7.

⁷ “Greek Origins of Flamenco Music” 9.

⁸ “Greek Origins of Flamenco Music” 10-11.

tone, the pattern becomes, “T, T, S, T, T, T, S.”⁹ This unique pattern of tones and semitones creates the distinct sound of flamenco music. Greek modes and music theory played a huge part in the development of Flamenco music in Spain—a genre still popular today. The Muslim people, who had close ties with Greek culture, brought these musical ideas when they immigrated to Spain, diversifying the musical culture of Spain.

Two other musical practices with Spanish Muslim roots are the *muwashshah* and the Mozarabic rite. The *muwashshah* is a body of poetic texts set to modal music that were developed in Spain during the tenth century in Cordoba and Granada.¹⁰ Its poetry refers to the Moorish history in Spain, indicating that the Moors considered their time in Spain their golden era. The Mozarabic rite was a Muslim-influenced Catholic rite, developed in the 7th and 9th centuries. It was allowed to coexist with the Roman rite, but it ultimately ceased when the Muslims were expelled from Spain.¹¹ The Mozarabic rite, similar to flamenco music, differed from the Roman rite in its use of overtones and tone inflections that are different than the tones and melodies used in traditional Gregorian chant. These unique tones point to this rite’s Arabic roots. From sacred music to more secular genres, Muslims definitely had a profound and lasting influence on Spanish music and culture.

The Christian influence on Spanish music, especially sacred music, is perhaps most recognizable, since Catholicism became the official religion when Ferdinand and Isabella united the Spanish throne in 1464. Given the melting-pot nature of Spain during

⁹ “Greek Origins of Flamenco Music” 10-11.

¹⁰ “Performing al-Andalus” 316.

¹¹ Sandra Yang, “Strengthening the ‘History’ in ‘Music History’: An Argument for Broadening the Cross-disciplinary Base in Musicological Studies,” *College Music Symposium* 49 (2009): 241.

the Renaissance and the ongoing conflict between the Moors and Christians throughout Spanish history, Christians were very cautious about which aspects of Muslim life and thought they could adopt into their own lives.¹² As mentioned before, they easily adopted the Muslim zeal for religion, seen in the Inquisition, but their church music was primarily influenced by Rome and the Catholic Church. Although Spanish sacred music had much in common with other Western sacred music, composers such as Cristóbal de Morales wrote music that was distinct in several ways from other sacred music during the Renaissance.

Cristóbal de Morales is an excellent example of Spanish sacred music during the Renaissance. He was one of the most well known Renaissance musicians, both during his lifetime and for two centuries after his death. Isabel Pope explains that Spanish music at this time was uniquely simple and straightforward, compared to other traditions that included many complex, contrapuntal writings. Morales composed within the goal of Spanish composers at the time, which was to support the text, rather than hinder it, by writing simple music.¹³ An example of this in Morales' own compositions is his *Offices for Four Voices*. Much of this composition is set homo-rhythmically between the voices, making the text even more clear. The *presto* sections set the voices more independently, yet Morales still makes the text come through clearly.¹⁴ During the Renaissance, Morales was often categorized with Josquin des Prez, one of the most studied and honored sacred music composers in history. Morales was a contemporary of Palestrina, who is heralded

¹² *The Structure of Spanish History*, 83.

¹³ Isabel Pope, "Spanish Secular Vocal Music of the Sixteenth Century," *Renaissance News* 2 (1949): 3.

¹⁴ Cristóbal De Morales, ed. Felipe Pedrell, "Officium Defunctorum," *Hispanica Schola Musica Sacra, Vol. 1* (1894).

as the savior of polyphony. Robert Stevenson argues that it was Morales's compositions and handling of counterpoint in a text setting that influenced Palestrina as he composed his *Pope Marcellus Mass*. Morales' influence can be seen in Palestrina's text setting. In the *Gloria*, Palestrina writes the voices singing the same text at the same time, so as not to confuse the words that are being said, accentuating their meaning. In the less verbose *Kyrie*, Palestrina pushes the limits of clear text expression, but even when he sets the voices very independently, he tends to write entrances of a voice during a melisma of other voices, allowing the text to still come across clearly.¹⁵ The *Pope Marcellus Mass* is the composition that convinced Pope Marcellus to allow polyphony to remain a part of Catholic sacred music.¹⁶ Morales was very accomplished in his sacred music, writing twenty-one motets, many more than those of his contemporaries. Some of his masses became quite popular in the New World, specifically Mexico and Peru. His book of masses was very much admired in the Incan capital in 1544.

During his career, Morales spent ten years in Rome, composing and performing in the service of the pope. While there, he composed *Jubilate Deo omnis terra* for a conference in 1538. A distinctive feature of this six-voice motet is a six-note melodic ostinato that repeats throughout the composition. While Morales did not invent this idea, it was very prevalent in Spanish music at the time.¹⁷ Another distinctive aspect of Morales' music is his experimentation with different rhythmic meters. This practice is widely known today, but during the Renaissance this was quite rare. Again, Morales did not originate this practice, but his works show significantly more interest and

¹⁵ Palestrina, ed. Otto Goldschmidt, "Missa Papae Marcelli," *Novellos Original* 8th edition (n.d.).

¹⁶ Robert Stevenson, *Spanish Cathedral Music in the Golden Age* (1961), 6.

¹⁷ *Spanish Cathedral Music in the Golden Age* 19.

development of this practice than his contemporaries.¹⁸ Overall, Morales shows a great deal of thoughtfulness towards the use of dissonance and voice leading, as well as his creation of harmonic progressions and text setting. Through the work of Morales and the Catholic Church, Christian sacred music was able to have an influence on the development of Spanish music both within and outside its borders.

The Jewish people historically have been somewhat of a nomadic group. Beginning with Abraham leaving his home country to go to the land of Canaan, the Jews have moved from place to place, sometimes following after God and sometimes rebelling against him. Although the Jews eventually reached their promised land and established a home for themselves, they were exiled in AD 70 when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and nearly annihilated the entire Jewish population. As a result, Jews spread throughout the world, seeking a new home for themselves and their families, taking with them their various musical traditions and culture. A large population of Jews ended up in Spain around AD 400. They coexisted with Christians and Muslims for several centuries, contributing to the unique melting pot of Spanish musical culture. The Jews were ultimately driven from Spain, beginning in 1492, along with the Muslims, relegated to another season of wandering.

Because of their nomadic history, the Jewish people have absorbed many features of other cultures. This is definitely seen in their musical practices. While in Spain, they were exposed to Christian and Muslim poetry and adopted many of their musical and poetic practices. In recognition of the destruction of their temple in AD 70, the leaders of the Jewish community restricted Jewish participation in music outside of liturgical

¹⁸ *Spanish Cathedral Music in the Golden Age* 50.

worship. As a result, there are no secular Jewish genres that can be traced back to Spanish origins.¹⁹ However, Jewish participation in musical activities proved to be invaluable. Their knowledge of Arabic proved helpful in translating various musical treatises, which were then studied by Christian and Muslim musicians.²⁰ Jews also participated in musical performances, and were an important element in the spread of other Spanish musical traditions. One Muslim musical tradition that became popular in Jewish culture was the *zajal*, which was very similar to the *muwashshah*. Both were originally written in Arabic, although the Jews composed theirs in Hebrew, and were considered “love lyrics.”²¹ These “love lyrics” usually contained five strophes; however the structure of this repertoire was not very strict. They were expressions of desire for the beloved, from the point of view of both men and women. Although this secular genre originated in Islamic culture, it was used and adapted into Jewish musical tradition due to the mixing of cultures.

Regarding their sacred musical traditions, the Jews brought their psalms and prayers of Babylonian origin with them when they settled in Spain. Because they did not have a single, unified liturgy, each individual community created its own liturgy for worship. Eventually, Jewish leaders compiled the *Siddur amram*, which was a collection of prayers for the liturgical year. This became quite popular throughout Spain and eventually in other countries as well.²² While there were some restrictions placed on Jewish musical practice, the Jews were still able to make a lasting impact on Spanish musical practice, as well as adopt new musical concepts into their own practices.

¹⁹ Carol E. Robertson, ed., *Musical Repercussions of 1492: Encounters in Text and Performance* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992) 103.

²⁰ *Musical Repercussions of 1492* 104.

²¹ Jean Dangler, “Subject Crossings in Andalusí Lyric,” *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos* 38 (2004) 303.

²² *Musical Repercussions of 1492* 103.

In addition to containing three coexisting religions, Spain was also distinct from other western nations during the Renaissance because it had a unified government. When Ferdinand and Isabella were married, their respective kingdoms of Aragon and Castile became one as well. This gave them an advantage over the other, less organized nations of Europe and motivated them to assert their authority and expand their kingdom even further. Besides sponsoring the voyage that discovered the New World, the most significant event that marked the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella was their expulsion of all Jews and Muslims from Spain. This was in striking contrast to the centuries of coexistence between Jews, Muslims, and Christians. Certainly there had been conflicts between the three groups during their shared history in the Iberian Peninsula, but the methodical removal of the Jews and Muslims from Spain was a drastic measure. Removing two major people groups from Spain certainly affected the culture of Spain at the turn of the century, including its musical practices.

This systematic elimination of Muslims and Jews from the Iberian Peninsula became widely known as the Spanish Inquisition. The idea of an inquisition originated in the first century in Roman law, but was eventually adopted by Christians as they gained public and political recognition.²³ Inquisitions had been occurring for centuries throughout Spain in an attempt to purify the culture from heretics and those who did not agree with the Catholic Church, but they came to a head under the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella. This zeal for religion was partly in response to the previous reign of Henry IV of Castile, who, in their opinion, had failed to promote the Catholic Church in his kingdom,

²³ Edward Peters, *Inquisition* (New York: Free Press, 1988): 11.

becoming lax in his policies against the Jews and other “heretics.”²⁴ Thus, Ferdinand and Isabella enacted an aggressive program against those they saw as opposing the Catholic Church—Jews especially, but also Muslims. In 1478, they requested a papal bull to institute an inquisition of all those they saw as threats to Catholicism. Pope Sixtus IV granted this request, and by 1480 the Spanish inquisition had begun.²⁵ For the next 12 years, Jews and Muslims were persecuted and driven from Spain, culminating in the complete expulsion of both groups in 1492.

These events earned Ferdinand and Isabella the nickname “The Catholic Monarchs.” Henceforth, it was not uncommon to refer to Ferdinand as “Ferdinand the Catholic” and Isabella as “Isabella the Catholic.” This moniker is indicative of the monarchs’ desire to be associated with the Catholic Church. This increased association with the church was partly achieved by simply building more Catholic places of worship in Spain. The wealth that Spain was gleaned from the New World made this possible, giving the monarchs more money to invest in the development of churches within their kingdom.²⁶ As seen in the career of Morales, the Catholic Church considered music an integral part of their worship services, so naturally, the increase in the number of cathedrals would coincide with an increase in the number of people involved in musical practices. Perhaps even more obviously, the unification of Spain and the expulsion of the Jews and Muslims meant a significant decrease in those musical practices associated with those respective people groups. While their traces can still be seen in Spanish music, practices such as Jewish liturgy and Muslim-influenced Mozarabic rites mostly ceased

²⁴ *Inquisition* 84.

²⁵ *Inquisition* 85.

²⁶ *Spanish Cathedral Music in the Golden Age* 11

when the cultures likewise ceased to exist within Spain. Clearly, the unification of Spain under King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella drastically changed Spanish culture, including its musical culture.

Besides having a musical culture developed by the interaction of three different religions and the advantage of a unified government, Spain had the unusual opportunity of spreading its culture through its colonization of the New World, beginning with Christopher Columbus in 1492. When Columbus first discovered a landmass previously unknown to the Western world, nations rushed to claim their share of the riches and land of this New World. While some nations achieved this goal, particularly Spain and England, they ended up claiming different aspects of the native cultures, as well as inserting their own culture into the existing native culture.

One important way that culture was exchanged was through the establishment of missions throughout the New World. This allowed Spaniards to project their own culture and beliefs upon the native tribes that they encountered. These missions not only spread the Catholic faith to the native peoples, but also shared their sacred music tradition. The Catholic group that was most involved in spreading the musical culture was the Franciscans.²⁷ The first Franciscan bishop of Mexico City, Juan de Zumárraga, commented that music was an excellent way to convert the natives to the Catholic faith, because the natives already possessed a rich, musical culture, so they were open to hearing new musical ideas.²⁸

Spaniards also brought their Western instruments to the New World, including stringed instruments, which were originally introduced into Spanish culture by the

²⁷ *Musical Repercussions of 1492*: 172.

²⁸ *Musical Repercussions of 1492*: 173.

Arabs.²⁹ Stringed instruments, in particular the guitar, remain important instruments in Hispanic and other American cultures today. Not only did the conquistadors bring instruments to the New World, they also discovered musical genres alive and active prior to their discovery of the foreign cultures. Native Americas had developed a complicated flute system that they believed enabled them to communicate with their ancestors and the deities that they worshipped.³⁰ This was done through the performance of certain tonal and rhythmic patterns that were highly connected to their religious beliefs. The minor third provided the basis for much of this music.³¹ This discovery of a thriving musical practice outside of the Western nations served to broaden the Spanish repertory of musical practices, by exposing them to different instruments and tonal practices.

A curious interaction between Western and Native American culture was dance. Both cultures possessed a highly developed form of dance that was an important part of their society, and both used dance in different religious rituals and festivals throughout the year. However, the Catholic priests, especially those belonging to the Franciscan order, were very concerned by the sensuality they saw in the Native American dances.³² This partly stemmed from what John Haines calls the “European superiority complex,” which caused Europeans to view different Native American traditions as heathen and savage-like.³³ Despite the concern of the Franciscan priests, Europeans, Spaniards included, were also fascinated with the dancing of Native Americans. They would often

²⁹ Anne Rasmussen, “The Arab World.” In *Worlds of Music: An Introduction to the Music of the World’s Peoples*, ed. Jeff Todd Titon (2009): 503.

³⁰ *Musical Repercussions of 1492* 35.

³¹ *Musical Repercussions of 1492* 69.

³² John Haines, “The Earliest Responses to Dancing in the Americas,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 30 (2012) 1-20.

³³ “The Earliest Responses to Dancing in the Americas” 5.

import American performers, much like they imported slaves, and force them to perform in their courts as entertainment, advertizing of the wealth they were gaining in their conquest of the New World. While this interaction with Native American dance was not altogether positive, it was nonetheless an element of the development of Spanish music at this time. It can certainly be argued that colonizing nations, Spain in particular, entered the New World with the goal of converting native tribes to their own culture, but the outcome would not as simple as that. Spanish explorers and Native Americans interacted in a complex exchange of culture, in which both groups adopted musical practices that were learned from the opposite group.

It is clear that the development and dissemination of Spanish music was very different than that of other Western nations. This was due in part to the interaction of Christian, Jewish and Muslim peoples in Spain prior to the Spanish Inquisition. This collaboration allowed for the exchange of musical ideas and practices, creating new genres such as flamenco and *muwashshah*, as well as the works of Cristóbal de Morales. In addition, Spain possessed a unified government, contrasting the loose associations and dukedoms of other nations at the time. The unified government influenced the music that was developed in Spain especially after the Catholic monarchs expelled the Jews and Muslims from the country. Lastly, Spain was able to have a unique way of spreading its musical culture through its discovery of the New World. As a result, Spanish music can be seen in the Americas, and elements of Native American music can be seen in Spanish music. Ultimately, the study of Spanish music reveals that its development was a series of idea exchanges from one people group to another. This fascinating exchange allowed

Spain to develop a uniquely “Spanish” musical culture, distinguishing it from other nations during the Renaissance.

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