

Listening to Early Modern Catholicism: Perspectives from Musicology

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Daniele V. Filippi and Michael Noone, eds.
*Listening to Early Modern Catholicism:
Perspectives from Musicology.*
Leiden: Brill, 2017.

The title of this collection is an homage to the historian John O'Malley, who proposed the term "early modern Catholicism" in 1991 as an alternative to the older historiographical categories of "Counter-Reformation" or "Catholic Reform."¹ The advantage of the term is its breadth and flexibility; it suggests fairly loose chronological boundaries, and is able to incorporate themes such as Catholic opposition to Protestantism and the implementation of Tridentine reforms without suggesting that they are exhaustive of Catholic identity in the period. O'Malley's own study of St. Ignatius Loyola demonstrated that the systematic reform of ecclesiastical institutions was far from the minds of Ignatius and his first followers; the *reformatio* that they sought was aimed at "the help of souls," inspired by their study of early Christianity rather than by conciliar documents. The new label of "early modern Catholicism" has helped to encourage a growth of scholarly interest in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Catholic history and culture, which has proven far more vibrant and diverse than earlier scholarship often imagined.

This carefully organized collection examines the role of music and sound in early modern Catholic culture. With relatively little use of music-theoretical language, it can be read with profit by scholars from other disciplines seeking a fuller understanding of the period. It is also an ideal entry point to the field for advanced undergraduates or graduate students, with chapters that introduce them to the

major historiographical issues, themes, and institutions of the period. A generous bibliography in each chapter refers the student to additional literature for further study. This collection, however, is certainly not merely a textbook; indeed, the "early modern" category is perhaps especially productive for scholars already invested in the musicological discipline because it cuts across normal musicological boundaries. As the editors point out in their introduction, the most obvious music-historical category challenged by "early modern Catholicism" is the chronological boundary between Renaissance and Baroque music, still widely influential because of its pedagogical convenience. The approach taken by this book, however, crosses other traditional boundaries as well, not restricting itself only to composed polyphony but also considering monophonic liturgical chant, popular song, improvised polyphony, and sounds associated with processions such as bells and cannon fire. Scholars from numerous specializations within musicology will find this collection to contain a mixture of familiar and unfamiliar material, encouraging them to make new connections among the different sorts of music cultivated in this period.

The first two chapters of the collection assess the state of research in the field, beginning with a chapter by O'Malley himself. Beginning his narrative with the First Vatican Council and with Leo XIII's opening of the Vatican archives to historians in 1884, he describes the maturation of a historical discipline,

characterized by increasing sophistication and refinement in telling the story of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Catholicism. O'Malley's final appraisal is optimistic, pointing to the high quantity and quality of recent work in the discipline as evidence that Catholicism has finally cast off its status as the "dull stepsister of the Reformation." Robert L. Kendrick's overview is concerned specifically with musical scholarship, asking how the concerns of musicologists might be broadened to encourage fruitful collaborations with scholars in other disciplines. He suggests a short list of themes that musicologists share with other early modern specialists: "decorum, reception, daily practice (not least among the orders), and oral tradition," all of which are informed by "currents of devotion, Biblical exegesis, and changing ritual life." All of these issues figure prominently in the remaining papers, which constitute Part 2 of the collection.

The 13 individual essays in this section of the book are based around case studies from specific geographical areas, but aim to ask broader questions about the contexts for music making among early modern Catholics. Three papers concern themselves primarily with institutions: Colleen Reardon's chapter on music in nunneries, Noel O'Regan's on confraternities, and Anne Piéjus's on the Congregation of the Oratory. In all three cases, music played an important role not only in establishing the identity of the institution itself, but also in determining its relationship to the outside world. In the Sieneese convents studied by Reardon, nuns had a great deal of freedom to pursue musical education, not only singing liturgical chant—the "internal soundscape" of the community—but also presenting musico-theatrical performances

that were a source of civic pride for the Sieneese. A similar contrast between interior and exterior emerges in O'Regan's article, which shows that the music sponsored by confraternities ranged from complex polyphony sung by professionals to the chanting of the Office by the confraternity's own members. The Roman Oratory had the loosest barriers to entry of any of these institutions, as in many cases the gatherings of the Oratory were open to the general public. Its attendees likely did not have a repertory of songs in common that would allow for mass participation, and Piéjus argues that the characteristically Oratorian genre of the polyphonic *lauda* was designed to capture the emotional response of the community despite the fact that the music was sung by professionals.

Two especially valuable articles focus on matters of performance practice: Marco Gozzi's article on the performance of chant, and Ignazio Macchiarella's on improvised multipart singing. Gozzi's article shows that early modern chant singing differed markedly from our present-day ideal of ethereal purity, but was typically performed in a rhythmicized form, often with polyphonic embellishments. This clear overview summarizes much research that is otherwise not readily available in English. Macchiarella describes the present-day practice of improvised four-part singing among confraternities in the villages of Sardinia, and suggests that the interplay between standardized practice and individual creative license may help us understand the sixteenth-century practice of semi-improvised *falsobordone* singing. Both papers include sound examples on an accompanying website.

The role of music in education is treated in the papers by Xavier Bisaro (on *petites*

écoles) and Daniele Filippi (on catechism teaching). Both chapters reveal that music was considered to be an integral part of spiritual formation for children learning the rudiments of the faith; indeed, as Bisaro shows, the high-pitched voices of children signified innocence and purity, and thus had special value in inspiring the broader community to holy thoughts. Filippi demonstrates that the teaching of catechism was far from a dry academic exercise, but resulted in the creation of plays, tableaux, and processions that brought the entire community together at the local parish church. His descriptions of processions of catechumens can profitably be read in conjunction with Alexander Fisher's article on urban processional culture, which gives special attention to the role of processions in laying claim to space in mixed Catholic/Protestant neighborhoods.

The remaining articles in the collection include treatments of music and print culture (Jane A. Bernstein), the penitential cantata

(Margaret Murata), music for rituals of dying (Tess Knighton), the specific case of the English College in Valladolid (Andrew Cichy), and music in the North American missions (Egberto Bermúdez). The high quality of contributions throughout and the well-planned organization of the collection ensure that it will be useful to specialists as well as newcomers to the field, helping to ensure a prominent place for music in future accounts of early modern Catholic life.

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NOTES

1 John O'Malley, "Was Ignatius Loyola a Church Reformer? How to Look at Early Modern Catholicism," *Catholic Historical Review* 77 (1991): 177–93; his proposal is defended more fully in idem, *Trent and All That: Renaming Catholicism in the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).