2015

More than Simple Psalm-Singing in English: Sacred Music in Early Colonial America

Robin A. Leaver
Yale University

Follow this and additional works at: http://elischolar.library.yale.edu/yjmr

Recommended Citation
DOI: https://doi.org/10.17132/2377-231X.1012

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by EliScholar – A Digital Platform for Scholarly Publishing at Yale. It has been accepted for inclusion in Yale Journal of Music & Religion by an authorized editor of EliScholar – A Digital Platform for Scholarly Publishing at Yale. For more information, please contact elischolar@yale.edu.
More than Simple Psalm Singing in English

Sacred Music in Early Colonial America

Robin A. Leaver

Histories of American sacred music frequently begin with the pilgrims’ arrival in Plymouth, bringing with them their Henry Ainsworth’s psalter, published in Amsterdam in 1612. Over the following decades they were joined by other English-speaking colonists in Massachusetts, who brought with them copies of the Sternhold and Hopkins psalter, first published in London in 1562. But both these psalters were increasingly deemed to be unsatisfactory—for textual and musical reasons—for English-speaking colonial life, so the attempt was made to create a new American psalter, the so-called Bay Psalm Book published in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1640, which in later editions morphed into what was called the New England Psalm Book. Wherever these psalm versions were sung they were sung to simple melodies, mostly found in such collections as Thomas Ravenscroft’s psalter of 1621 (reprinted in 1633); this was true even after the publication of the meager edition of tunes—the first music to be issued in colonial North America—included in the ninth edition of the Bay (or New England) Psalm Book of 1698. The clear impression of more than a few historical accounts is that the only religious music heard in American colonies, before the early eighteenth century, was simple, call-and-response, lined-out, unaccompanied psalmody. If only English colonialism is the focus of attention, then perhaps it is permissible to stay within the parameters of New England psalmody. But in terms of the wider history of colonialism in North and Central America it is but a small part of a larger picture of sacred music that was generally earlier, more diverse, and involving greater complexity than ever was the case in the English colonies.

The English were not the only European colonists to emigrate to the Americas. The concern for economic advancement, both national and personal, persuaded many from different European countries to make the perilous journey, while others were impelled by the spirit of adventure and exploration. The quest for gold, and the trade in fish, furs, wood, and other raw materials, was strong motivation, but religious goals were also fundamental to such enterprises. The British were intent on building a Protestant commonwealth, while the Spanish and many French were committed to the conversion of the indigenous peoples1 to Catholicism. But whether the colonists came specifically to share their faith or simply to live out their religious commitment, music was an essential component of their mission and worship. This article charts the main

---

1 These peoples were misnamed by the generic term “Indian,” as if they were one integrated group, whereas they included such peoples as Inuits in the North, the Native Americans of the central plains, the Aztecs, Tarascans, and Mayas of Mexico, the Incas of Peru, and the Arawaks and others in the Caribbean.
contours of the religious music of non-English-speaking colonies in the Americas, up until the early eighteenth century, music that was far richer and more developed, both vocally and instrumentally, than the music of the churches in New England.

**Catholic Colonial Missions**

**New Spain**

What was to become known as New Spain in Central America and the southern coastal areas of North America has its origins in the Spanish domination of the Caribbean (ca. 1493–1518): the area known as “Española” comprised present-day Haiti and the Dominican Republic (often together referred to as “Hispaniola”), Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the coastal areas of Venezuela and Panama. At first Española came under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the archdiocese of Seville. In 1504 Pope Julius II created an archdiocese of Yaguata, near the port of Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, but it remained ineffective in practice until the diocese of Santo Domingo was established in 1511. It became an archdiocese in 1545, with suffragan bishops in modern Cuba, Puerto Rica, Columbia, Venezuela, and Honduras.

The first Hispanic settlements of the mainland began around 1510. Evidence suggests that Franciscans began their mission the following year in Panama, though they did not become established there until about a decade later. Ponce de León, after his expedition of 1513, returned to the country he named Florida in 1521 with a larger company that included Franciscan friars and secular priests. Hostile Natives cost him his life and the attempt to settle failed again, as did others in succeeding years. Dominicans, under the leadership of Luis Cancér in 1549, were hardly more successful. It was not until 1563, in opposition to the Protestant inroads of French Huguenots (see below), that a Catholic outpost was created at St. Augustine, Florida, on August 25—the Feast of St. Augustine—by the celebration of Mass, the earliest on record celebrated within today’s continental United States. In the following years Jesuit priests arrived in Florida and extended their mission to present-day South Carolina and Virginia. In the early 1570s the Jesuits were replaced by Franciscans.

The Spanish conquest of Mexico began as early as 1516, but it was not until 1523 that three Flemish Franciscans arrived in what was to be called New Spain. The following year twelve more Franciscans arrived in Mexico City, having walked from Veracruz, a distance of more than two hundred miles. The local indigenous people were surprised when the conquistador Hernando Cortés and his men greeted these Franciscans by genuflecting before them and kissing their hands and the hems of their travel-worn robes. They witnessed the beginnings of what has been described as “the spiritual conquest of Mexico.”

---

2 For the background, see Stafford Poole, “Iberian Catholicism Comes to the Americas,” Part 1 of Charles H. Lippy, Robert Choquette, and Stafford Poole, *Christianity Comes to the Americas, 1492–1776* (New York: Paragon, 1992), 1–129.

Cortés was a devout Catholic whose first act on the first Sunday after his arrival in 1519, at what was to become Veracruz, was to erect an altar so that his chaplain, “who was a fine singer,” could chant Mass for the four hundred or so settlers.\textsuperscript{4} That the Mass was sung rather than said is significant, since in later years Native Mexicans assimilated and excelled in European church music, both plainsong and polyphony, with astonishing rapidity. Among Cortés’s men were some accomplished musicians, who passed on their skills to Aztec musicians who were already skilled in the music of their own traditions.\textsuperscript{5} Similarly, the mission clergy, like Cortés’ chaplain, sang their services and were concerned to use music as a fundamental part of their mission.

During the first few years the Franciscans spent much of their time learning Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs. In 1527 Father Juan Caro was teaching the Indians in the mission school of Texuco the skill of singing in parts. Some years later, in November 1532, Father Martin de Valencia wrote to Charles V of Spain concerning the pedagogy employed with Indian children in such schools:

\begin{quote}
We devote much time to them, teaching them not only how to read and write, but also how to sing both plainchant and polyphonic music. We teach them how to sing the canonical hours and how to assist at mass . . . .\textsuperscript{6}
\end{quote}

Around 1530 Father Pedro de Gante (Peter of Ghent), who was familiar with Franco-Flemish polyphony, founded an Indian school in Mexico City that supplied a modest choir for the newly founded cathedral. This choir sang every Sunday and feast day, with the assistance of an organ that had recently been imported from Seville. In a letter written in October 1532, Pedro de Gante wrote to Charles V reporting his astonishing success:

\begin{quote}
I can tell Your Majesty without exaggeration that there are already Indians here who are fully capable of preaching, teaching, and writing. And with the utmost sincerity I can affirm that there are now trained singers among them who if they were to sing in Your Majesty’s Chapel at this moment would do so well that perhaps you would have to see them actually singing in order to believe it possible.\textsuperscript{7}
\end{quote}

The choir of Mexico City Cathedral sang both monody and polyphony from manuscript copies made from European sources by Indian copyists whose faithful work was highly commended by Father Juan de Zumárraga, the first bishop of Mexico (appointed in 1528).

---

\textsuperscript{4} The eyewitness account of the conquest was recorded by Bernal Díaz del Castillo (1496–1584), published posthumously as \textit{Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva-España} (Madrid: En la Imprenta del reyno, 1632); see the English translation \textit{The True History of the Conquest of Mexico}, 2 vols. (New York: McBride, 1927), 1:138, cited by Robert M. Stevenson, \textit{Music in Mexico: A Historical Survey} (New York: Crowell, 1952), 52. Stevenson’s pioneering study remains the most accessible work on the subject and, as succeeding notes make clear, the following paragraphs are indebted both to this important piece of research and to Stevenson’s later published studies.


\textsuperscript{6} Translation by Stevenson, \textit{Music in Mexico}, 52.

\textsuperscript{7} Translation by Stevenson, \textit{Music in Mexico}, 54.
In his *Historia de los Indios de la Nueva España*, completed in early 1541, Toribio Motolinía reported on the impressive musical skills of these Indian choirs:

At the time when the Indians began to learn the Ave Maria and the Pater noster the friars in order to make the learning easier and more pleasurable gave them these and other prayers, along with the Commandments, in their own tongue and set to a pleasing plainsong melody. They were so eager to learn, and there were so many of them, that they fairly piled up in the courtyards of the churches and shrines and in their own sections of the town, singing and learning prayers for three or four hours on end; and their haste was so great that wherever they went, by day or by night, one could hear them on all sides singing and reciting the whole catechism. The Spaniards were amazed. . . . The third year we started to teach them singing some people laughed and made fun of it, both because the Indians seemed to be singing off pitch, and because they seemed to have weak voices. . . . But since there are so many of them to choose from, the Indian choirs are all reasonably good.

It was quite a sight to see the first man who began to teach them part-singing. He was an old Friar who knew scarcely anything of the Indian language, only Castilian, and he talked with the boys correctly and sensibly as if he were talking with intelligent Spaniards. . . . It was marvelous that, although at first they did not understand a thing and the old man had no interpreter, in a short time they understood him and learned to sing so that now there are many of them so skillful that they direct choirs. As they are quick-witted and have an excellent memory, most of what they sing they know by heart, so that if the pages get mixed up or the book falls while they are singing this does not prevent them from singing on without the slightest error. Also, if they lay the book on a table, the ones who see it upside down or from the side sing just as well as those who are in front of it. One of these Indian singers, an inhabitant of this city of Tlaxcala, has composed unaided a whole mass which has been approved by good Castilian singers who have seen it.

Instead of organs they use flutes playing in harmony, and the sound resembles that of a pipe organ because of the large number of flutes playing together. Instrumentalists from Spain taught them how to play; so many instrumentalists arrived together that we asked them to divide themselves up among Indian towns where they might receive pay for their lessons, instead of becoming a burden on one community.8

One reason why there were so many professional church musicians, especially instrumentalists, who served for little recompense was that in the pre-Columbian culture of Mexican Indians such people were accorded special honor and exempted from taxation. Thus, for around a quarter of a century, the music of Mexican churches was a rich amalgam of vocal and instrumental resources, an expansion of European Renaissance practice. Bishop Zumárraga, who fully supported the rich music of worship of the choirs and instrumentalists of his diocese, both for its effectiveness in evangelizing the Indian population and also for celebrating the Mass with “befitting solemnity,” was nevertheless concerned that these church musicians should receive a living wage. He therefore petitioned Charles V, in April 1540, for suitable funds to pay these musicians.9 But the problem continued. At a church council called by Archbishop Alonso de Montúfar in 1555 it was decreed, in anticipation of the Council of Trent, that the use of instruments other than the organ should be drastically curtailed and the number of singers should be reduced; six years later Philip II of Spain issued a similar directive (1561).10 Although this did eventually lead to the dominance of the organ in Catholic worship in Mexico, it was some time before there was a reduction in the

---

9 See Stevenson, *Music in Mexico*, 59. Father Alonso de Paraleja made a similar request from Guadalajara in 1569; ibid., 60.
instrumentalists and singers; indeed, orchestras continued to be widespread, even in Montúfar’s own cathedral in Mexico. Choral singers similarly remained extensive. According to documentary evidence, most Indian church choirs consisted of a minimum of twelve singers. Robert Stevenson has computed that the print run of about one thousand copies of the large folio 1572 Graduale published in Mexico City implies a distribution of one to a church and means that there must have been ten thousand or more Indian choristers by the third quarter of the sixteenth century.\textsuperscript{11} By any standards this was an astonishing phenomenon.

There are several eyewitness descriptions of the music of liturgical worship in New Spain. Motolinía described the celebration of Corpus Christi in Tlaxcala:

On the holy day of Corpus Christi in the year 1538, the Tlaxcaltecas held a solemn festival. . . . In the procession there marched a large choir trained to sing polyphonic music of considerable complexity; their singing was accompanied by music of flutes which duplicated the parts, and also by trumpets and drums, sounding together with bells, large and small. Since all these instruments sounded together at the moment of entering and at the moment of their leaving the church, it seemed just then that the very heavens were falling.\textsuperscript{12}

Motolinía also gave an account of the Easter celebrations of 1539:

These Tlaxcaltecas have greatly enlivened the divine service with polyphonic music written for voices and groups of instruments. They have two choirs which alternate with each other in singing the divine office. Each choir has more than twenty singers; they also have two groups of flutists who accompany these choirs, and they also use in their performances the rebec and a certain type of flute (copied from the Moors) which aptly imitates the sound of the organ. Besides these they also have skillful drummers who when they sound their drums conjointly with the bright jingling bells they carry, create a delightful effect.\textsuperscript{13}

In 1568 the Council of the Indies, the governing body in Spain responsible for New Spain, sent an inspector to gather information regarding the success or otherwise of the missionary endeavors of the religious orders. The report that was carried back to Spain included the following:

\textbf{Singers and Instrumentalists}

The Indian singers and instrumentalists who play in church gather together every day in order to rehearse their singing and playing, using our schools for a place to practice. We recommend the continuation of this custom. . . . It is customary in towns large enough to warrant the stationing of clergy for singers to divide themselves into two choirs, and the players to form two bands; choirs and bands alike alternate weekly so those in the groups who are married and have families may see them regularly. . . . In each of the two choirs there are ordinarily fifteen or sixteen Indians. While a lesser number might suffice, still the thinness of their voices prevents them from sounding well unless there are at least that many. . . . Finally, it is the custom to sing mass and the divine office in all the churches attached to monasteries. They sing plainchant and polyphony with agreeable skill. In some of the more favored towns where time and circumstance propitiously unite, they perform the offices of the church with as great a solemnity and with as impressive music as can be encountered in many of the cathedral churches of Spain itself.

\textsuperscript{11} Stevenson, \textit{Music in Mexico}, 80.
\textsuperscript{12} Stevenson, \textit{Music in Mexico}, 56–57.
\textsuperscript{13} Stevenson, \textit{Music in Mexico}, 57. Motolinía also records that on the Wednesday after Easter Day 1539, they performed a play on the biblical story of Adam and Eve “in their own tongue” and with polyphonic music; ibid.
Polyphonic music is the vogue everywhere, and accompaniment of flutes and chirimías is common. In a number of places lutes [dulcianas] and reeds [orlos] along with viols [vihuelas de arco] and other types of instruments are used. Organs are also found in a number of places.

The Indians themselves play all these instruments, and their harmonious sounding together is truly a wonderful allurement towards Christianity as far as the generality of the natives is concerned. The music is most necessary. The adornment of the church itself and all the beauty of the music lifts their spirits to God and centers their minds on spiritual things.14

The foundation of liturgical music in New Spain was Gregorian chant. Between 1556 and 1604 many chant books were printed and published in Mexico City, including the significant Graduale of 1576. The production of liturgical chant in New Spain, which was more extensive than that of Spain and other Catholic countries of Europe, is a measure of the almost universal use of Indian choirs in the churches throughout the colony.15 But the monody was not confined to plainchant. Sometime between 1558 and 1561, as part of his catechizing efforts among the indigenous Mexicans, the Franciscan father Bernardino de Sahagún began to write homiletic songs in the Nahuatl language, to be sung on the major saints’ days throughout the church year. They circulated in manuscript copies before they were published in Mexico City as Psalmodia Christiana, y Sermonario . . . en lengua Mexicana . . . Ordenada en cantares ó Psalmos: para que canten los indios en los areytos, que hazen en las Iglesias (Christian Psalmody and Sermons . . . in the Mexican Language . . . Arranged in Canticles of Psalms for the Indians to Sing in the Song-and-Dance Ceremonies [hazen] They Perform in the Churches) (Mexico: Pedro de Ocharte, 1583).16

The Psalmodia Christiana represents a remarkable fusion of Old World liturgical expansions with New World music. Bernardino adapted the tradition of the medieval sequence, an extended trope that expounded the meaning of the feast or celebration,17 to produce these sermonic songs in the vernacular that the Mexicans could sing to their traditional melodies. These songs were not only issued “con licencia,” and with the archbishop of Mexico’s imprimatur, but were also commended by the Third Provincial Council of 1585:

In order for the Indians to forget completely the [texts of the] old canticles that they made use of in the time of their heathenism, a book of hymns and canticles that Fr. Bernardino de Sahagún, O.F.M., has now composed in the Mexican language, containing the lives of Christ our Redeemer and of his saints, should be put to use.18

---

14 Stevenson, Music in Mexico, 60–61.
15 A copy of the Antiphonarium issued in Mexico City in 1589, now in the library of the University of Texas, has marginal manuscript notation of organ accompaniments, probably dating from the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century; see Stevenson, Music in Mexico, 81.
17 See William T. Flynn, Medieval Music as Medieval Exegesis (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow, 1999).
The orally transmitted melodies were not included in Bernardino’s “psalms” of 1583 and are therefore no longer known, but they bear witness to positive inculturation in the church music of New Spain.

The traditional plainsong of the church was augmented with polyphony that was enthusiastically performed by the church choirs of New Spain, as indicated above; indeed, it was noted that in 1540 there was a marked preference for polyphony over monody in the daily worship of Mexico City Cathedral. At first the repertory was largely imported from Europe, frequently brought to New Spain by clergy on their return from visits to Spain; Bishop Zumárraga, for example, brought back part-books of Masses and motets in 1534, and in 1536 a cathedral canon returned with choir books from Seville Cathedral for use by the choir of the cathedral in Mexico City. A manuscript copy of the first book of Masses by Cristóbal de Morales, published in Rome in 1544—the oldest extant manuscript of polyphonic music from New Spain—was made for Puebla Cathedral. A volume of Francisco Guerrero’s motets, published in Venice in 1570, was used in the cathedral of Mexico City; an inventory of the holdings of the cathedral library, dated 1589, reveals that the polyphonic Masses and motets of Guerrero, Morales, Orlando di Lasso, and Palestrina were part of the regular repertory. Philippe Rogier’s Masses were imported soon after their publication (Madrid, 1598) and were being sung in Puebla; Tomás de Victoria’s Missae, Magnificat, motecta, psalmi . . . (Madrid, 1600) was widely available in New Spain soon after its publication. Alfonso Lobo’s first book of Masses (Madrid, 1602) was similarly imported soon after its appearance in Spain, and copies are still preserved in Mexico City, Puebla, Oaxaca, Guadalajara, and Morelia. Unfortunately, many church libraries have been dispersed and much of the music has either been lost or destroyed, which means that the full extent of the repertory is unknown. Even so, what evidence remains is sufficient to show that the church choirs of New Spain sang a rich variety of polyphony that included music composed within the colony itself.

Although our knowledge is still imperfect, a listing of Neo-Hispanic composers active in New Spain during its golden age, from around 1575 until it began to decline around 1650, would have to include Hernando Franco (fl. 1580), Juan de Lienas (16th cent.), Pedro Hernández (fl. 1600?), Fructos del Castillo (fl. 1600?), Pedro Bermúdez (fl. 1605), Bernardo de Peralta (fl. 1640?), Francisco López y Capilla (fl. 1645), Juan de Padilla (fl. 1650), Antonio de Salazar (fl.

---

19 See Stevenson, Music in Mexico, 84.
21 Morales’ Circumdederunt me (Psalm 116.3 [Vulgate 114.3]) was almost certainly sung in New Spain by 1539, and it was one of the pieces chosen to be sung at the memorial service for Charles V in Mexico City Cathedral in 1559; see Stevenson, Music in Mexico, 96, n. 13.
22 Spell, “Music in the Cathedral of Mexico,” 317.
23 Stevenson, Music in Mexico, 102.
1690), and Manuel Zumaya (fl. 1720), among others.\textsuperscript{25} These composers wrote different kinds of polyphonic settings of both Ordinary and Propers for the Mass, as well as motets and antiphons for the daily Office, in a style that approximated to that of the high Spanish Renaissance as exemplified in the compositions of Morales and Victoria. That some of these Neo-Hispanic compositions incorporated indigenous Mexican melodies, and the sole surviving two Marian hymns in the vernacular (Nahuatl) with polyphonic settings by Hernando Franco in a somewhat different style,\textsuperscript{26} together with the existence of Bernardino’s \textit{Psalmodia Christiana}, suggests that the influence of indigenous Mexican music was significant in this church music. Further, much of the surviving music has strong African connections,\textsuperscript{27} understandable since Cortéz numbered Africans among his conquistadores, and around 1580 the fifteen thousand Spaniards of New Spain were outnumbered by Africans and mulattoes by a ratio of 1.34 to 1. The implication is that the church music of New Spain exhibited a sophisticated level of multicultural content that neither abandoned high artistic ideals nor ignored the familiar music of the populace.

The cathedrals in Mexico City and Puebla had particularly rich repertories of liturgical music,\textsuperscript{28} but for most of the churches of New Spain, and other areas of Hispanic influence in this part of the Americas, music was a primary concern in worship. To the south the cathedral of Guatemala City was equal in influence to that of Mexico City; indeed, the composer Hernando Franco was active in the former before serving the latter.\textsuperscript{29} To the east in Cuba the church music of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was somewhat limited, but by the eighteenth century the cathedrals of Santiago and Havana flourished under Esteban Salas y Castro, who composed Masses and other liturgical music for voices and instruments.\textsuperscript{30}

Missions from New Spain also moved northward. The Franciscans created settlements in what is now New Mexico and Texas, and the Jesuits in present-day Arizona. In these missions music with various types of instrumental accompaniment was normative for worship.\textsuperscript{31} In 1769 the Franciscans founded their first mission in California, and in the ensuing half-century at least another twenty missions were created, mostly in coastal areas. As elsewhere in New Spain, the music of worship was Gregorian chant and choral polyphony (and homophony), with the use of

\textsuperscript{25} For a discussion of their music, see Stevenson, \textit{Music in Mexico}, 100–171.
\textsuperscript{26} See Stevenson, \textit{Music in Mexico}, 119–22.
instruments in some missions and the occasional incorporation of indigenous melodies.\textsuperscript{32} Although these missions survived for two decades after the Mexican Revolution of 1810, they were finally secularized in 1833. In consequence, this extensive and accomplished Californian mission music was unknown to the rest of America until it was rediscovered in the later twentieth century.\textsuperscript{33}

**New France**

Following the expedition to the east coast by the Italian Giovanni da Verrazano on behalf of France in 1524, French exploration of North America was concentrated in the north, mostly in and around the St. Lawrence River and Great Lakes, by such explorers as Jacques Cartier (1534–35) and Samuel de Champlain (1608); and in the south, predominantly in the Mississippi Valley, by Louis Jolliet and Jacques Marquette (1673), and Robert Cavelier de La Salle (1684–87). In the same way that New Spain came into being, Catholic priests accompanied the explorers and Catholic missions were established in the early permanent settlements.\textsuperscript{34}

On his first visit to what was eventually to become Canada, Cartier recorded that on June 14, 1534, “we had mass sung” at Brest, that is, Bonne Espérance harbor on the south coast of Labrador.\textsuperscript{35} On his second voyage the following year Cartier sailed up the St. Lawrence River to the Iroquois settlement of around three thousand people, then called Hochelaga but later named Montréal. On October 3, 1535, Cartier formally met representatives of the settlement, gifts were exchanged, and words from St. John’s Gospel were read. “The Captain [Cartier] next ordered the trumpets and other musical instruments to be sounded, whereat the Indians were much delighted. We then took leave of them and proceeded to set out on our return.”\textsuperscript{36} But these were transient contacts and it was not until the early seventeenth century that permanent French settlements were founded, the first being in 1610 at Port Royal, now Annapolis Royal, in Nova Scotia. One of the first settlers at Port Royal was the priest Jesse Fléché, whose missionary methods included the teaching of chants to the indigenous people. Thus later in 1610, when he baptized chief


\textsuperscript{34} For the background, see Robert Choquette, “French Catholicism Comes to the Americas,” Part 2 of Lippy, Choquette, and Poole, *Christianity Comes to the Americas 1492–1776*, 131–242.


\textsuperscript{36} Biggar, *Voyages of Jacques Cartier*, 166; see also Kallmann, *Music in Canada*, 8–9.
Memertou and his tribe, the new converts were able to join together in singing the Te Deum.37 As the missionaries in New Spain had done, the missionaries in New France discovered that there was a strong interest in music among the Indians. Father Gabriel Sagard-Théodat navigated the Ottowa River by canoe in 1623–24, made contact with the Hurons, and recorded the following observation:

One must also train oneself to good-humor and present a cheerful appearance of modest satisfaction, and sing hymns sometimes and spiritual songs, both for one’s own comfort and relief from toil and for the edification of the savages, who take particular delight in hearing sung the praises of God rather than profaneditties.38

Although Port Royal was the first French colony in what is now Canada, it was in Québec, the largest French settlement and the focus of missionary activity, where the music of the church was particularly developed. Father Jean le Jeune was the pioneer, who soon after his arrival in 1632 set up a school for Native children at which the daily classes concluded with the singing of the Pater noster. After a permanent schoolhouse was built in 1635, the elements of Gregorian chant and musical notation were taught to Indian and French boys alike. Over the next twenty years or so the principal church in Québec was supplied with singers, men and boys, and instrumentalists, some more proficient than others. At Christmas 1645 a violin was played, presumably in procession, and “also a German [transverse] flute, which proved to be out of tune when they came to the church.”39 On St. Thomas’s Day, November 27, 1646, four-part singing was begun; two years later psalms sung in fauxbourdon were reported; music with viols was heard during the Elevation and Communion; and in 1650 there were eight choir boys in addition to men.40 Other choirs were formed in the area, such as at the Huron seminary near Québec, where it was reported in 1676:

One is charmed to hear the various choirs, which men and women form in order to sing [antiphonally] during mass and vespers. The nuns of France do not sing more agreeably than some savage women here; and as a class, all the savages have much aptitude and inclination for singing the hymns of the church, which have been rendered into their language.41

The earliest record of an organ being used liturgically in the parish church in Québec dates from 1661: “The organ played while the Blessed Sacrament was being taken down, and during

---

39 Thwaites, Jesuit Relations, 27:113. Kallmann comments: “The beginning of musical criticism in North America!”; Kallman, Music in Canada, 17. Kallmann adds: “We should note that in the seventeenth century the violin—if indeed a violin is referred to—and the transverse flute were new instruments and that in France, lutes and recorders still surpassed them in popularity”; ibid.
41 Thwaites, Jesuit Relations, 2:137.
benediction.” This is the earliest reference to an organ in a church in North America. But this organ must have been somewhat inadequate since it was replaced by another in 1663, purchased in France by Bishop Laval. The following year the bishop wrote to the pope:

There is a cathedral here made of stone; it is large and splendid. The divine service is celebrated according to the ceremony of bishops; our priests, seminarists, as well as ten or twelve choir boys, are regularly present there. On the greater feasts, the Mass, Vespers, and the late Salve are sung in the music of various hexachords and modes [numero], and organ sweetly mixed with voices wonderfully adorn this musical harmony.

An organ was installed in Notre Dame Church, Montréal, probably before 1700, though the earliest record of an organist dates from 1705. The repertory of this church and the performance practice in the early eighteenth century are known from a manuscript organ book that belonged to Jean Girard, organist after 1724. It contains 398 compositions (mostly anonymous) of Masses, Magnificats, Te Deums, and so on. The short French-style pieces indicate that the many of them were played in alternation to the singing of the choir.

Protestant Colonial Settlements

Huguenots in Florida, 1564–65

Long before the English-speaking colonies were established, a small French Huguenot settlement was founded on the St. Johns River, a few miles from what is now Jacksonville, Florida, early in 1564. Their singing of psalms from the French psalter of Marot and Beza, for recreation as well as worship, intrigued the Native American population, who came from some distance to hear such singing. In time these Florida Indians learned to sing, orally transmitted, many of the psalm tunes, which were used as Shibboleth tests when encountering people from Europe. If these foreigners recognized the tunes they sang, then they were the friendly French; if they did not, they must be the hostile Spanish. An account of this Huguenot expedition was written by Nicholas le Challeux, published after their return to France as Discours de l'histoire de la Floride (Dieppe, 1566), in which the author names two of the tunes that were used in such encounters: these Florida inhabitants

yet retain such happy memories that when someone lands on their shore, the most endearing greeting that they know to offer is Du fons de ma pensée [Psalm 130] or Bienheureux est quiconques [Psalm 128], which they

---

42 Thwaites, Jesuit Relations, 46:163.
45 It also appeared in Latin (Antwerp, 1568) and English (London, [1566–67]), as well as being appended to composite accounts of explorations of the New World in Latin (Geneva, 1578) and German (Basel, 1583).
say as if to ask the watchword, are you French or not? . . . [because] the French while there taught them how to pray and how to sing certain psalms, which they had heard sung so frequently that they still retain two or three of those psalms.46

In the colonies on the eastern seacoast established in the seventeenth century, these two tunes would be sung by Dutch, French, and later German Reformed settlers, as well as by the English, who sang *Du fons de ma pensée* as the proper tune for Psalm 130, if they used the Sternhold and Hopkins psalter, first issued as *The Whole Booke of Psalmes* in London in 1562; or with nine different psalm texts if they used Ainsworth’s psalter of 1612.

**New Netherland**

New Netherland, comprising the largely coastal area from present-day Delaware to Connecticut, was nominally founded in 1614. In 1626 Manhattan Island was purchased by the Dutch West India Company and the settlement at the southern tip was named New Amsterdam (later New York). The spiritual lives of the Dutch settlers on the island were first served by a ziekenroster (comforter of the sick) in 1624, with another appointed in 1626. Two years later a Dutch Reformed church was founded, later known as the Collegiate Church, with a newly appointed domine (pastor), Jonas Michaelius, who arrived on August 11, 1628. He reported that “at the first administration of the Lord’s Supper we had fully fifty communicants—Walloons and Dutch,” and that “provisionally, we administer the Holy Sacrament once in four months.”47 The population of Dutch colonists in New Amsterdam numbered around 270 people, which implies that barely 20 percent were regular communicants.

The first Dutch church in New Amsterdam was a converted barn, which was replaced by a stone-built church in 1642. Although families of other confessional affiliations moved into the town, an edict from the governor in 1656 prohibited conventicles being formed that were not in accord with the Calvinist tenets of the Synod of Dort.

The worship of Dutch Reformed churches of New Netherland, mostly in the Hudson Valley and what is now New Jersey, had a more distinct liturgical form than was customary in English Calvinist churches. This was a lightly revised form of Petrus Dathenus’s liturgy (1566).48 The metrical psalms that were regularly sung before and after sermons, during the Lord’s Supper, and especially in connection with teaching the Heidelberg Catechism were similarly the work of Dathenus; they were set to the same tunes as the French Genevan psalter. The Dathenus psalters used by the members of the Dutch Reformed congregations also included the complete Heidelberg Catechism in Dutch, as well as abbreviated forms of the customary liturgies. In private homes the day began and ended with psalm singing, and every occasion of public worship had its complement of psalms that were sung. In 1679–80 Jasper Danckaerts visited

New Netherland with the view of finding a home for Dutch Labadists who wanted to emigrate to North America. The Labadists were an offshoot of the Dutch Reformed Church. In his journal, under the date of October 5, 1679, Danckaerts gives the following account of the catechization he observed in the New York Dutch Reformed congregation:

I . . . found a company of about twenty-five persons, male and female, but mostly young people. It looked like a school, as indeed it was, more than an assembly of persons who were seeking after true godliness. . . . They sang some verses from the Psalms, made a prayer, and questions from the catechism, at the conclusion of which they prayed and sang some verses from the Psalms again. 49

Almost twenty years later the situation was somewhat different in that there were sixty-five young people of the New York congregation, aged between seven and fourteen, who, according to the report of the pastor to the Amsterdam Classis (the Dutch Reformed governing body of pastors and elders), dated September 14, 1698, “had learned and repeated . . . publicly, freely and without missing [not only the catechism, but also] all the [metrical] Psalms, hymns, and prayers in rhyme, in the presence of my Consistory and of many church members.” 50

New Sweden

New Sweden was first established as Fort Christina—present-day Wilmington—on the west bank of the Delaware River in 1638. The colonists negotiated with local Native Americans for an enlarged territory that extended almost to present-day Trenton, New Jersey. But boundaries were somewhat fluid and there were many disputes with both the Native Americans and the Dutch of New Netherland as to where they were actually drawn. The Swedish colony was a somewhat small-scale commercial enterprise for tobacco and fur that was an economic disaster; it was taken over first by the Dutch in 1655 and then by the English, who occupied New Netherland in 1664. Although these Swedish Lutherans lost their colony, they remained and prospered in the area, expanding from around six hundred people in the mid-seventeenth century to one thousand or more in 1700. They preserved their identity partly through their language and partly by their Lutheran faith, which contrasted with that of the surrounding Dutch Calvinists and English Anglicans. 51

Reorus Torkillus was the first Lutheran pastor to minister in the simple block-house church at Fort Christina in 1640, making him the first resident Lutheran pastor in America. He was followed by other pastors, including Johan Campanius, who translated Luther’s small catechism

51 To celebrate the 350th anniversary of the founding of New Sweden, the spring issue of the Lutheran Quarterly in 1988 was a special number titled The Church in New Sweden. For the background of this Lutheran colony, see Richard Hulan, “New Sweden and Its Churches,” Lutheran Quarterly 2 (1988): 3–33.
into the language of the local Algonquin Native Americans. The Swedish community was built in settlements on both shores of the Delaware River, including Raccoon Creek, New Jersey, and Wicaco, Pennsylvania, the forerunner of the present Gloria Dei Church in Philadelphia.

During the next forty years or so, church life declined, the churches were without clergy and lacked hymnals and other church books, and services were few. An appeal was made to King Charles XI of Sweden, who eventually requested his chaplain, Jesper Svedberg, to attend to the matter. Svedberg, the editor of the Den svenska psalmboken (Stockholm, 1695) and its companion Koralbok (Stockholm, 1697), dispatched three pastors who arrived in Delaware in June 1697 with a considerable quantity of Swedish Bibles, catechisms, and hymnals. The three pastors were Erik Björk, who took charge of the “lower parish” in Christina; Jonas Aurén, Björk’s assistant; and Anders Rudman, who became the pastor of the “upper parish” of Wicaco. In 1698 the foundation was laid for a new church building in Christina, which was completed the following year. Björk left a fairly detailed account of the consecration of what became known as the “Old Swedes Church,” which took place on Trinity Sunday—the church’s dedication was to the Holy Trinity—on July 4, 1699.

Worship following Swedish Lutheran practice could be quite lengthy, lasting as much as four hours or more on Sundays. Organs, though widely used in Sweden, were as yet very rare or nonexistent on this side of the Atlantic. Singing was almost certainly led by a cantor, though it is possible that a small group of singers, a “choir,” may have led congregational singing. It is also likely, following contemporary Swedish custom, that men and women sang alternate stanzas antiphonally, a practice especially connected with such liturgical hymns as Alleneste Gudh i Himmelrijk (Gloria hymn), and Wij troo uppå en alsmächtigh Gudh (Creedal hymn) (on these hymns see further below).

Björk’s account of the consecration service and the Lutheran High Mass that followed it are given in detail here because they are representative of the worship of non-English congregations that remained self-contained within their own languages, exerting no influence on the mainstream English-language traditions until much later. These services also exhibit a combination of congregational song and liturgical chant that is significantly different from the worship found in most of the churches in the other east-coast colonies at this time.

Björk first describes the service of consecration that began the observances that Trinity Sunday 1699.


54 The account is found in The Records of Holy Trinity (Old Swedes) Church, Wilmington, Del., from 1697 to 1773, trans. Horace Burr (Wilmington: Historical Society of Delaware, 1890), 40–42. It is given here with some minor revisions and annotation. Other sources include the facsimile of Den svenska psalmboken Koralbok 1697 (Hedemora: Gidlands, 1985), Göransson, Koralpsalmboken 1697, and Holy Trinity Dedication Mass 1699: Agenda Reconstructed from Old Sources with Historical Background (Stockholm: Royal Swedish Academy of Music, 1988).
God graciously favored us with a bright and beautiful day for our first entrance into our new church at Christina, after so much labor and expense. The consecration took place in the presence of many hundred persons of various religions besides our own, and it proceeded as follows:

After the assembly had been called together by the ringing of a bell, my colleague from the other congregation, Magister Anders Rudman and myself clad each in his surplice (but not with a chasuble as they could not be obtained here), went in before the altar as also our colleague Mr. Jonas Aurén, though he had only a long cloak with a cape. Then Magister Rudman and myself stood in front next to the altar, and Mr. Aurén before us, and we began thus:

Magister Rudman: 1. Come, and let us praise the Lord God.
2. A prayer of his own composition that God will be graciously pleased with this house.

Mr. Aurén: 3. Read Kings 1st, the whole chapter [probably 1 Kings 8].

Pastor Loci [i.e. Björk]: 4. The 24th King David’s Psalm, the whole.

Mr. Aurén: 5. Read of the New Testament, John 10th, the whole chapter.

[Congregation] 6. Sang, Our Father which art in Heaven, &c. [Fader wår som i Himlom äst, the Swedish version of Luther’s Vater unser im Himmelreich, sung to its associated melody, Zahn 2561].

Magister Rudman: 7. Read with a loud and slow voice the Helig as it is set forth in the church directory for such an occasion.

[Congregation] 8. [Sang,] Come Holy Spirit Lord God [Kom Helge Ande Herre Gudh, the Swedish version of Luther’s Komm heiliger Geist, Herre Gott, a German version of Veni sancte Spiritus, sung to its associated melody, based on plainsong, Zahn 7445].

[Björk] 9. Then the proper consecration sermon from the pulpit whose beginning was Tobit 12–7th: The counsels and secrets of Kings and Rulers shall be concealed, &c., but the proper text was Psalm CXXVI, verse 3rd. The Lord hath done great things for us whereof we are glad, and the church was named Holy Trinity Church.

[Congregation] 10. From the pulpit [following the sermon] began: We praise thee, O God [O Gudh wij lofwe tigh, the Swedish translation of Luther’s German Te deum laudamus, Herr Gott dich loben wir, Zahn 8652, although another Swedish version was also available in the Psalmboken].

11. Then I and Magister Rudman only went before the altar again, and Magister Rudman sang a prayer and then the blessing.

12. With an exhortation to keep and reverence this house as the house of the Lord, and thereupon [Rudman (sang?)] Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. Pastor Loci [Björk] answered, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end, Amen.
Björk then explains that the consecration service was followed by another:

At High Mass I baptized children and then gave out the Lord’s Supper. Then again, I with my Fellow Brother Magister Rudman went in front of the altar, but my other Fellow Brother Honorworthy Mr. Aurén, preached the Sunday text according to the direction of the Handbook.

Then Björk listed the “psalms” (= hymns) that were sung at the eucharistic service. Using the order of the Mass that is set out in detail in the Psalmboken of 1695 and 1697, it is possible to determine the musical content of this worship:55

Exhortation to confession
Absolution
Kyrie (chanted)
Gloria hymn: Alleneste Gudh i Himmelrijk (Thou only God), the Swedish version of Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr (Zahn 4457), probably sung antiphonally, men and women alternating.
Collect (intoned)
Epistle: Romans 11: 33–36
Gradual hymn: O Fader wår barmhertig och godh (Our merciful Father and God), the Swedish version of Luther’s version of Psalm 67, Es woll uns God genädig sein (Zahn 7247).
Gospel: John 3: 1–15
Credal hymn: Wij troo uppå en alsmächtig Gudh, the Swedish version of Luther’s Wir glauben all an einen Gott (Zahn 7971), probably sung antiphonally, men and women alternating, or Wij troo uppå en Gudh, the prose translation sung to a through-composed Swedish melody dating from 1586.
Hymn before the sermon (“For the preacher We now invoke the Holy Spirit”): Nu bedie wij then Helga And, the Swedish version of Luther’s Nun bitten wir den Heiligen Geist (Zahn 2029).
Sermon introduction (pastor Aurén)
Hymn (“From the pulpit, Holy Trinity stand by us”): Herre Gudh Fader stat oss bij, the Swedish version of Luther’s Gott der Vater, wohn uns bei (Zahn 8507), but instead of the three stanzas, each addressed to a person of the Trinity, just one stanza was sung, beginning “Helga Trefallighet stat oss bij.”
Sursum corda, Preface, Words of Institution, chanted in Swedish
Sanctus (chanted)
Lord’s Prayer (spoken prose)
Communion distribution, during which was sung the hymn Jesus Christus är wår hälsa (“During Communion, Jesus is my life and health”), the Swedish version of Luther’s Jesus Christus unser Heiland (Zahn 1433).
Thanksgiving collect (intoned)
Benediction (intoned)
Hymn (“After the benediction, My soul shall praise the Lord”): Min siäl skal lofwa Herran, the Swedish version of Johann Gramann’s Nun lob mein Seel, den Herren (Zahn 8244).

That music was important to Swedish faith and culture in America can be seen in that fact that around 1700 Pastor Anders Rudman published two small pamphlets of Swedish religious song

---

55 Note that most of the Swedish hymns were translations from German.
texts, to be sung to preexisting tunes, songs that express the experience of emigration in terms of Christian pilgrimage.\textsuperscript{56} These songs have the distinction of being the first collections of nonliturgical religious songs in any language to be published in North America. But singing the substance of religion and life was a common experience in all the American pioneer colonies, whether it was expressed in Latin, Spanish, French, Dutch, Swedish, or English. Music was the vehicle of faith, personal and public, that was far more diverse and rich than the simple English psalm singing that is often portrayed as the essence and substance of early American colonial religious music.

Robin A. Leaver, the General Editor of the Yale Journal of Music & Religion, is visiting honorary professor at Queen’s University, Belfast, visiting professor at Yale University, and emeritus professor of sacred music at Westminster Choir College of Rider University. He has also taught liturgical studies at Drew University, Madison, New Jersey, and music history at The Juilliard School, New York City. He studied theology at Trinity College, Bristol, England, and holds a doctorate from the Rijksuniversiteit, Groningen, the Netherlands. Dr. Leaver is a past president of both the Internationale Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Hymnologie and the American Bach Society. He is the author of numerous books, articles, and entries in reference works in the cross-disciplinary areas of liturgy, church music, theology, and hymnology, published on four continents, with significant contributions to Luther, Schütz and Bach studies. His latest publications include such works as Luther’s Liturgical Music: Principles and Implications (Eerdmans, 2007); Exploring Bach’s B-Minor Mass (Cambridge, 2013), coedited with Yo Tomita and Jan Smaczny; articles in the Bach- Jahrbuch (2013); and is currently editing the forthcoming Ashgate Research Companion to Johann Sebastian Bach. He is also engaged in various projects concerning the connections between music and theology.

\textsuperscript{56} [Anders Rudman], \textit{Naogra Andeliga Wisor} ([Philadelphia: Jansen, ca. 1700]), and [Anders Rudman], \textit{Tvenne Andeliga Wisor} ([Philadelphia: Jansen, ca. 1700]); see Richard Hulan, “Four Songs from the Delaware,” \textit{Lutheran Quarterly} 2 (1988): 35–45.