



Introduction: Listening to Confraternities

Tess Knighton

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Introduction: Listening to Confraternities

Tess Knighton

The field of confraternity studies has burgeoned in the Iberian Peninsula in recent years, but little in-depth research has as yet been done on their musical activities and the ways in which they added to the density and variety of the urban musical experience in the period from the Middle Ages to the eighteenth century. These activities shaped the urban soundscape to a far greater extent than has as yet been recognised among Spanish and Portuguese music historians. The situation in Italian—as well as, to a lesser extent, perhaps, north European—scholarship is very different, with a substantial degree of detailed analysis of a wide range of confraternities in the major cities: notably Florence, Rome and Venice. These studies touch on the question of the sounds brotherhoods added to the city soundscape, though they tend to be more indebted to urban musicology than historical sound studies in their approach. This themed issue of *Confraternitas* aims to present the most recent research on Iberian confraternities, the sounds they fostered as part of urban ceremonial, and the acoustic spaces in which they were heard. Based on research to date, there was generally much in common with the musical practices and activities of Italian confraternities, and some aspects would seem to have originated there or been influential, particularly in the post-Tridentine period. Both Spain and Portugal looked primarily to Rome for direction in religious matters and their emissaries constantly travelled to and from the Vatican and the Castilian and Aragonese churches during this time. However, questions of adaptation to established local custom and markedly different traditions remain; hopefully, in the near future comparative studies will be undertaken between the extended Iberian world and Italy in order to gain greater insight into the role of music and sound in devotional practice in the wider Catholic Counter-Reformation.

The five essays included in this issue were originally presented as papers in a themed session entitled “Confraternities and the Urban Soundscape” at the Medieval and Renaissance Music Conference held in Lisbon in July 2021 by members of the working group of the research project “The Contribution of Confraternities and Guilds to the Urban Soundscape in the Iberian Peninsula, c. 1400–c. 1700.”¹ The idea for this research grew out of a previous project under my direction, entitled “Urban

¹ Three-year Spanish government grant, 2020–2023; MINECO. Confrason (PID2019-109422GB-I00. I+D+i – PGC Tipo B. The essays have been revised and translated, where necessary, by me.

Musics and Musical Practices in Sixteenth-Century Europe”² that was based on investigation and analysis of notarial and other documentation in the city of Barcelona. In my attempt to understand the everyday musical life of the city, I came across documentation relating to different aspects of confraternal life in the urban complex: individual brotherhoods were frequently mentioned in wills in which many of those who were members specified their wish that the confraternity attend their vigil and funeral and give them a decent burial in its tomb. The choice of confraternity might relate to their trade and/or their parish, but it was often also an indication of their personal devotions and, in almost all cases, the calling of members to the bedside of the moribund, the funeral procession, and burial contributed to the soundscape of the city with bells, chanting, reciting, whispering of prayers, lamenting, the sound of the organ, the metallic clink of the censer, and concerted footfall. This soundscape would have been experienced on a daily basis in different parts of the city and the particular combination of sounds communicated the essence of the event to its inhabitants; for example, the bells that tolled indicated the gender and status of the deceased, the type of ceremony, as well as the parish in which they lived.³ Statutes, accounts, and inventories of confraternities confirmed active devotional practice in terms of participation in general urban festivities, such as major processions for royal entries, Corpus Christi, and other liturgical feasts, beatifications and canonizations, as well as in ceremonial devised around the feast day or days of their patronal saint or saints. The sound of bells, musics of different kinds, liturgy, sermons, dances, singing, and fireworks was integrated into the festivities held on these occasions, throughout the year and throughout the city.

It was clear that the contribution of confraternities to the urban soundscape was considerable, but, as already mentioned, this aspect has been little studied in the Iberian Peninsula, in sharp contrast to the situation in Italy, for example. I had long been impressed by the studies of my onetime fellow doctoral student in Oxford, Noel O’Regan, on the musical activity of confraternities in Rome and found much of interest in further studies relating to Italian cities by musicologists such as Robert Kendrick, Jonathan Glixon, and others, notably a chapter in a study of a youth confraternity by Konrad Eisenbichler.⁴ Italian archives appeared to offer a

² Marie Curie Skłodowska-Curie Integration Grant, 2012–2016, project no. 321876: *Urbanmusics*. One of the results of this project was a collection of essays entitled *Hearing the City in Early Modern Europe*, edited by the author with Ascensión Mazuela-Angueta, published by Brépols in 2018.

³ Pérez Samper, “El patrimoni sonor de Barcelona.”

⁴ For example: O’Regan, *Institutional Patronage in Post-Tridentine Rome*; Kendrick, *The Sounds of Milan*; Glixon, *Honoring God and the City*; and Eisenbichler, *The Boys of the Archangel Raphael*, Chapter 18: “Music in the Confraternity,” 235–256.

treasure-trove of information on the confraternities' contribution to the urban soundscape, while neither this wide typology of sources, nor this urban musicological approach have been widely developed in the Iberian Peninsula, with a few notable exceptions in recent years, detailed below. In the general Spanish and Portuguese literature on confraternities, which has expanded greatly in the last twenty-five years or so, the emphasis has been placed on their charitable activities and their contribution to popular religiosity,⁵ as well as their projection of pious devotions.⁶ There is also a notable chronological gap between the Middle Ages and the eighteenth century in Iberian confraternity studies: source material relating to the Middle Ages has been studied in some depth,⁷ whereas the accessibility of information from the eighteenth century onwards has allowed research into Baroque spectacle as it relates to confraternities to proliferate.⁸ However, studies of confraternities' involvement in sacred drama, from medieval floats to the eighteenth-century oratorio,⁹ tend to have little or no exploration of their contribution to the urban soundscape as such.

Material in Iberian archives relating to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—widely dispersed, fragmentary, quite often in poor condition, and not necessarily easily accessible or legible—means that it has been comparatively little studied. Artworks commissioned by confraternities, including retables, altar frontals, and other decorative items belonging at one time to their chapels, as well the architectonic aspect of those chapels—some of which still survive—, has long attracted the attention of historians of medieval art and architecture. In contrast, musical sources with known connections to early modern Iberian confraternities are few and far between. This has not encouraged Spanish and Portuguese musicologists—traditionally much more inclined to work in cathedral archives—¹⁰

⁵ For example: Rumeu de Armas, *Historia de la prevision social*; Flynn, *Sacred Charity*; Christian, *Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain*; Kamen, *Cambio Cultural*.

⁶ Navarro Espinach, "Las Cofradías de la Vera Cruz y de la Sangre de Cristo"; Flynn, "Baroque Piety and Spanish Confraternities"; Poska, "From Parties to Pieties"; Tello Hernández, *Aportación al estudio de las cofradías medievales*.

⁷ See the in-depth study of medieval Valencian confraternities: Benítez Bolorinos, "Las cofradías medievales"; and, on the Crown of Aragon, Navarro Espinach, "Las cofradías religiosas medievales"; and Tello Hernández, *Aportación al estudio de las cofradías medievales*.

⁸ A useful historiographical summary of 2017, with a focus on literature relating to Andalusia, demonstrates the wealth of publications in this area: see Arias de Saavedra Alias and López-Guadalupe Muñoz, "Las cofradías españolas."

⁹ Massip Bonet, *El teatro medieval*; Torres, "Les confraries devocionals." Torres's research into the Baroque oratorio in Catalonia is exceptional; this particular article forms part of a useful issue dedicated to Catalan confraternities, published following the April 2016 conference "Els gremis de Barcelona" held at the Arxiu Històric de la Ciutat de Barcelona.

¹⁰ Ros-Fàbregas, "Historiografía de la música."

to explore beyond those great institutions, where the archival pickings are relatively rich, even though it was in cathedrals that many confraternities built, maintained, and decorated their chapels. The increased interest in urban musicology in Spain and Portugal over the last twenty or so years has begun to highlight musical activities of confraternities, although a huge amount remains to be done. A conference on urban musicology, the first dedicated to the field in Spain, was held in Valencia in 2000 and included two papers in particular that brought the contribution of confraternities to urban musical life to the attention of scholars, especially following publication in 2005.¹¹ However, apart from an article by a noted historian of religion reproducing the 1506 statutes of the Confraternity of the Guardian Angel in Saragossa—which ordain that the singers and musicians employed for its feast days had to be members of the brotherhood—, it still took a further five years before a musicologist dedicated an extended study to the question of confraternities and music.

Luis Robledo Estaire has published two seminal articles relating to confraternities based in Madrid: one about the slave confraternities of the city in the seventeenth century (2006); and the other about the *Cofradía del ‘Ave Maria’* based at the discalced Trinitarian convent (2013).¹² He has described the seventeenth century as the apogee for confraternal activities in Madrid, where, he calculates, there were some one hundred and eighty-five confraternities in about 1600.¹³ His research has highlighted the key importance of post-Tridentine policy for the development of confraternities and their devotional practice, including music that, in some cases, was a fundamental element rather than one aspect more, with major ramifications for musical life in the city through the development of a network of musicians, including those of the royal chapel and related convents. Cristina Diego Pacheco, as part of a wider research project focussed on the city of Valladolid, draws on both archival research and contemporary accounts to evoke the contribution of penitential confraternities to the soundscape of Holy Week and how it affected those present: for example, the procession of the Confraternity of Christ’s Passion on Maundy Thursday included two trumpeters processing in front of the image of the Virgin at the foot of the Cross who played “out-of-tune, dressed in mourning, and with their faces covered, who moved [those present] to great sadness and compassion.”¹⁴

¹¹ Baker, “Parroquia, cofradía, gremio, *ayllu*”; Río Barredo, “Cofradías y vecinos.”

¹² Robledo Estaire, “Música y cofradías madrileñas”; Robledo Estaire, “El patronazgo de la cofradía del ‘Ave Maria.’”

¹³ Robledo Estaire, “El patronazgo de la cofradía del ‘Ave Maria,’” 106.

¹⁴ Diego Pacheco, “Música y religiosidad laica,” 449: “delante dos trompetas destemplados con los rostros cubiertos y enlutados, que mueven mucha tristeza y compasión.”

Clara Bejarano Pellicer has studied many aspects of the soundscape of Seville and dedicated an article to the subject of confraternities and guilds that, as she points out, “found spaces, resources and opportunities in the liturgical calendar for self-representation in society.”¹⁵ Many of the musical practices she describes are common to other large cities and, like Diego Pacheco, reveal details of great interest that call for further study with regard to the history of emotions, such as the ensembles of “sorrowful recorders” (“copia de ministriles de flautas dolorosas”), and singers singing the psalm *In exitu Israel* [Ps. 113] in the intrinsically sad (*triste*) seventh tone (“una copia de cantores, cantando en septimo tono, que de suyo es triste”).¹⁶ The emotional impact of music as part of confraternal devotions and processions warrants exploration and contextualized analysis; it is also touched on in Antonio Martín Márquez’s study of early-modern Zamora, one of the few studies to have considered the variety of sounds that characterized urban spaces as part of ceremonial involving confraternities.¹⁷ Jordi Raventós Freixas’s unpublished doctoral thesis on royal entries into Barcelona from an ethnomusicological viewpoint looks at various aspects of these more festive occasions, notably representational contributions of confraternities through Biblical dramatizations on floats and dancing,¹⁸ while that by Sergi González González analyses the dances—with their corresponding music—that, over centuries, identified individual confraternities in the annual procession of St Thecla in Tarragona.¹⁹ Finally, a third doctoral thesis devotes two sections to some of the activities of two major devotional confraternities in early-seventeenth-century Barcelona: the Confraternity of the Most Pure Conception, based at the cathedral; and the rosary confraternity founded in the sixteenth century in the Dominican friary of St Catherine.²⁰ This study is clearly relevant to the current issue, although the approach is again linked more closely to urban musicology than historical soundscape studies.

A brief outline of the concept of historical soundscape studies as it relates to the study of confraternities is perhaps in order here. Since R. Murray Schafer published his *Tuning of the World* in 1977, the notion of

¹⁵ Bejarano Pellicer, “La música de los gremios y las cofradías,” 223.

¹⁶ Bejarano Pellicer, “La música de los gremios y las cofradías,” 242.

¹⁷ Martín Márquez, “*Alguaciles del silencio*.”

¹⁸ Raventós Freixa, “Manifestacions musicals a Barcelona.” The participation of confraternities with dancing and plays in royal entries in the Middle Ages is also discussed in Raufast Chico, “E vingueren los officis e confraries.”

¹⁹ González González, “*Evolució del paisatge sonor*”; see his contribution to this issue.

²⁰ Puentes-Blanco, “Música y devoción en Barcelona.” A rosary confraternity was founded in the female convent of Montesión in Barcelona, as early as 1488; see Ascensión Mazuela’s contribution in this issue.

soundscape has given rise to research in a number of different directions, both conceptually and creatively.²¹ Although originally concerned with the living soundscape—or at least recorded sound from the late nineteenth century onwards—and its environment, it has proved an attractive concept for historians of sound and music; as Schafer himself foresaw, “for the foundation of historical perspectives, we will have to turn to earwitness accounts from literature and mythology, as well as to anthropological and historical records.”²² Some of the tools devised by Schafer have passed into theoretical approaches adopted and developed in historical fields of inquiry, notably urban musicology. These include the notion of a lo-fi and hi-fi sonic environment, in which, respectively, individual sounds are impossible to distinguish from intense and pervasive background noise, or in which a greater balance is achieved, that is, “a favorable signal-to-noise ratio.”²³ Soundscape methodology includes features such as “keynote sounds” (those that, through their constant background presence, identify a sonic environment), “sound signals” (foreground sounds that are listened to consciously and are used to communicate), and “soundmarks” (which “make the acoustic life of the community unique”).²⁴ The highlighting of the importance of listening to sounds that signalled meaning to communities and identified them was further developed by Barry Truax, a member of Schafer’s research group, in his *Acoustic Communication*, originally published in 1994; he introduced the concepts of the acoustic community and soundscape competence, this being the ability to identify and interpret a shared acoustic ecology that might seem strange, even unfathomable, to those outside the community.²⁵

In this context, confraternities can be seen as a potentially illuminating example of an acoustic community with a shared system of sonic communication and identity recognition, an idea that will surely be developed in future research (see my essay in this issue). The emphasis of sound studies on listening—on source of production, reception, and meaning of sound—has helped in the shift from a silent history, in which sound and music were at best incidental to great political events and generally not analysed in any detail, to the importance of the presence of sound and listening practice in a historical context. This has coincided with a steep rise in interest in sensorial history and the need to develop intersensorial approaches in which the visual, traditionally dominant in historical

²¹ Schafer, *The Tuning of the World*. The notion of soundscape forms part, for example, of a recent summary of urban musicology; see Fenlon, “Urban Soundscapes.”

²² Schafer, *The Soundscape*, 8.

²³ Schafer, *The Soundscape*, 43.

²⁴ Schafer, *The Soundscape*, 9–10.

²⁵ Truax, *Acoustic Communication*, 65–92.

discourse, is nuanced, for example, through corresponding understanding of the sonic and haptic.²⁶ The devotional and festive activities of confraternities were deeply embedded in an intersensorial experience that directly involved members and contributed to their impact on urban daily life.

The five essays in this issue introduce various aspects of this aspect of the urban soundscape. They consider a variety of confraternities, both devotional and trade-based, active in the cities of Barcelona, Tarragona, and Valencia in Spain, and Braga in Portugal. In the context of the early-modern Iberian Peninsula, as elsewhere, terminology—both of the time and in historical study—can be inconsistent and confusing.²⁷ In this issue, the term devotional confraternity is used to denote those lay brotherhoods whose activities were dedicated to the veneration of Christ, the Virgin Mary, a particular saint or tenet of Christian faith. As elsewhere in Italy or northern Europe, devotional confraternities, whether penitential, rogatory, or festive in character, were founded from at least the twelfth century onwards, but grew exponentially following the Council of Trent, with a notable emphasis on Eucharistic and Name of Jesus brotherhoods. Guild confraternities brought together those working in a specific trade or office under similar types of advocacy and devotional practices, usually outlined in their statutes, and so functioned in a very similar fashion to the devotional confraternities.²⁸ Statutes also referred to aspects of the trade in question (and increasingly so from the fifteenth century onwards), such as the purchase of fleeces, sale and quality of meat, weights and measures, controls on importation and distribution, and so on. These aspects involved city officials, were debated in council chambers, and communicated to the general public by town criers, and were all characteristic of the guild or *gremi*. It was often (but not always) obligatory for officials and workers to join the relevant guild in order to practice their trade, but others could usually join the guild confraternities as devotional members (*de devocio*) if they wished to participate in and contribute to the veneration of a particular advocacy. Many city inhabitants joined more than one confraternity; many were open to women, although they rarely participated in official and administrative matters, except in all-female confraternities.

²⁶ Smith, *Sensing History*.

²⁷ The terms used in earlier documentation vary according to regional language and practice and include: confraternity (*cofradía, confraria*); brotherhood (*hermandad, germandat*); guild or trade (*gremio, gremi, ofici, art, corporació*); charity (*almoína, hospital, montepío*), etc. The word *gremi* or guild was—and is still—often used on its own to refer to a guild confraternity, hence the potential for confusion.

²⁸ In his study of working practices in fifteenth-century Barcelona, Pierre Bonnassie offers a useful summary of guild or trade confraternities in the city; see Bonnassie, *La organización del trabajo*, 30–64. It should be noted, however, that there were significant differences in the organization of confraternities in the different regions of the Iberian Peninsula.

Both guild and devotional confraternities were founded in cathedrals and different churches—parish, conventual, collegiate—of a city, had their chapel or altar there, and established some kind of mutual agreement with their host institution. Ascensión Mazuela-Anguita studies the confraternities that were founded in the female convents of Barcelona over the course of the sixteenth century and explores not only the practical and ceremonial arrangements, but also the discourses surrounding the nuns' cloistered situation represented in the "purity" of their "angelic" voices. In his study of the redemptive confraternities in Valencia, Ferran Escrivà-Llorca highlights the impact of the processions of redeemed captives, usually organized by the Mercedarian and Trinitarian orders, as they moved through the city, or from that city—one of the disembarkation points for captives held in North Africa—to Madrid or other towns in the peninsula. This type of confraternal procession had particular resonance in Mediterranean cities that lived under the threat not only of physical capture and harm, but also the possibility of the apostasy of redeemed captives. In Tarragona, both guild and devotional confraternities added in conspicuous ways to the soundscape of the city through their distinctive dances and accompanying music, as Sergi González demonstrates through the close analysis of contemporary accounts of archiepiscopal entries. Features of the protocol, social status, and participation of confraternities in processions clearly changed relatively little over time and can still be evidenced today in the context of the annual patronal feast of St Thecla, even though the accompanying music is substantially different. Dancing was a characteristic feature of confraternal processions, especially, in Portugal where we find the dances of "moros" (in Moorish dress, musical instruments, and, presumably, style) that were seen as an integral part of festive celebrations in cities such as Braga. Alongside these ludic activities, Elisa Lessa contextualizes liturgical expression and reform of confraternal identity in Braga through, for example, the singing of Morales's Requiem Mass at funerary services held, according to its statutes, for members of the brotherhood of the Misericórdia. Finally, my own article looks at the patronage of sonic activity among guild and devotional confraternities in Barcelona; payments to bell-ringers, singers, organists, trumpeters, drummers, minstrels, and viol-players represented a considerable outlay for most brotherhoods, especially when they celebrated more than one patronal feast day each year. The sheer density of confraternally financed music-making throughout the year, and in a great variety of urban performative spaces and contexts, made a considerable impact on the everyday musical experience of the city's inhabitants and their soundscape competence.

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