Alexander J. Fisher

Music, Piety, & Propaganda. The Soundscapes of Counter-Reformation Bavaria.

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After his redoubtable monograph on music and confessional identity in early modern Augsburg, several publications on Orlando di Lasso, and editions of the music of the Munich-based composers Rudolfo di Lasso and Anton Holzer, Alexander Fisher has devoted a book-length study to the sounds and soundscapes of Bavaria from the mid-sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth centuries. In line with the spirit of the series *The New Cultural History of Music*, published by the American branch of Oxford University Press, he makes a decisive turn away from traditional musicology and considers “music within a wider panoply of sounds, both artificial and natural” (4). Appealing to an interdisciplinary audience, he uses Bavaria as a case study of “how musical and non-musical sounds shaped religious cultures in early modern Europe, and how they were transformed in turn by religious forces” (2). Yet, he declines to cut bonds with his original constituency, but instead seeks to unite “purely ‘musicological’ concerns” with broader issues of religious space and identity.

Arranging a marriage between such uneasy bedfellows requires an incredibly shrewd broker who understands how to please both musicologists and cultural anthropologists, without compromising the standards and desires of either. Fisher deserves admiration for accepting this Herculean task, even if his matchmaking efforts are not (and perhaps cannot be expected to be) an unqualified success. This is still somewhat disappointing given the promising introductory chapter, which strings together a host of interdisciplinary inspirations, including the seminal studies by Reinhard Strohm, *Music in Late Medieval Bruges* (Oxford, 1985) and Bruce Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England* (Chicago, 1999). Just as a truly integrative perspective is dawning on the horizon, however, the paths of musicology and cultural studies part ways once more.

In the first half of the book, Fisher systematically explores the full range of environments in which sacred music was sung, from places of worship (chapter 2) to those ‘spaces of devotion’ (chapter 3) not delineated by physical walls, but rather created by human agents (such as confraternities and sodalities) in a variety of locales. This section places a strong emphasis on conservative musicological values. Fisher seeks to identify the types of polyphonic and monophonic music sung in different religious environments along the lines of repertoire and style. References to the non-musical sounds and noises that arose in liturgy and devotion are restricted to the occasional comment or to

the framing paragraphs. Regrettably, Fisher decided against an in-depth investigation of the acoustical properties of the buildings in which music (and noise) were created—an element that would have given his study infinitely more weight and depth.

A strikingly different keynote rings through the second part of the book, which is primarily concerned with sounds beyond 'art music': the nexus of sound and religion, consisting of and inscribed in church bells (chapter 4), as well as the characteristic sound worlds of processions (chapter 5) and pilgrimages (chapter 6). Although Fisher also includes detailed discussions of musical sources, the focus here is on the sonic aspects of ritual, religious propaganda, confessionalizing altercations and social disciplining. In these chapters, Fisher's case studies are not so much examined in their own right, but treated as backdrop to general cultural considerations that rise above the concrete evidence.

While the promised convergence of musicology and cultural studies remains unfulfilled, Fisher's book has much else to commend it. With painstaking industry, the author has collated myriads of facts from a systematic mining of older German studies (to the most part not presented heretofore to the Anglophone reader), English secondary literature, and his own archival studies. Inevitably, the sheer wealth of material proves resistant to the formulation of a strong narrative or thesis. The devil is always in the details. But here the details constitute the impressive value of a book that embodies the current state of scholarship, examines received wisdom in a new light, and will inspire further studies.

The last point is almost guaranteed, since the author has generously made full transcriptions of primary sources and extended references available through the Oxford University Press webpage (contrary to the publisher's note, these are not password protected, and the url is listed inside the book). This lavish supply of virtual 'bonus' material contrasts unfavourably with the miserly production of the physical book: since characteristic soundscapes are often tied to specific places, readers would have benefitted from more images and architectural plans of the locations in which devotional music and noise resounded. In the interest of an interdisciplinary readership, musical examples are kept to the bare minimum. This is no excuse, however, for poor formatting and such puzzling editorial choices as the use of double-bars in ex. 2.1 and the oppressing of implied accidental inflections in ex. 6.9.

The title of the book is infelicitous in three ways: first, the prominent and unchallenged positioning of 'music' as the opening word sends the wrong signal for a study that emphatically moves beyond the traditional focus on art music. Second, the term 'Counter-Reformation' places singular emphasis

on the militant aspect of post-Tridentine Catholicism, when Fisher's ears are attuned also to articulations of Protestant soundscapes. And, finally, Bavaria turns out to be a woefully generic, catch-all category for a book that, after all, places Munich at its center, complemented by references to a range of other places, not all of which are Bavarian. Those readers who are not as familiar with the complex political and religious topography of early modern Germany as the author would have benefited from a definition of what is generically labeled as 'Bavaria.' This is especially relevant for the many cities and locales from which Fisher draws his case studies. Some of these formed part of Wittelsbach territories outside current-day Bavaria that were incorporated into the Bavarian state in later centuries, but in the early modern period were either autonomous (such as free imperial cities, including Regensburg) or under different rulership (including the ecclesiastical territories of the prince-bishops of Augsburg and Würzburg, and the Benedictine monastery of Weingarten). The only map of early modern Bavaria (consisting of Upper and Lower Bavaria and the Upper Palatinate) is presented towards the end of the book (281), without even being listed in the table of contents.

Since the Society of Jesus was instrumental in Catholic renewal and propaganda, Jesuit themes pervade the book. Fisher discusses a wide range of issues, including the musical provisions at the Jesuit church of St. Michael's (together with its affiliated school and Duke Wilhelm's private chapel), the Jesuit involvement in implementing ecclesiastical reforms and fighting back Protestantism, their promotion of sodalities (especially Marian Congregations) their use of song as a propagandistic and devotional device, music in Jesuit plays, processions (theorized by the Jesuit Jakob Gretser) and public spectacle (culminating with consecration of the *Mariensäule*, a column crowned by Mary as patroness of Bavaria, in 1638). As such, this publication offers countless nuggets of gold of immense value for anyone interested in the early modern Jesuits and their use of music and sound.

Christian Thomas Leitmeir

Prifysgol Bangor University

c.leitmeir@bangor.ac.uk

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