

Jesuit Music and Drama



Music

The Jesuits' decision to operate schools opened them up to an engagement with music and theatre that no religious order had ever had before and in general led to their cultivating these "arts" in remarkably intense and fruitful ways.

—The Jesuits II: Culture, Science, and the Arts, 1540-1773, edited by John O'Malley, et al. (University of Toronto Press, 2006)

With the vast expansion of the Jesuit colleges in Europe during the late sixteenth century, music became a normal part of the curriculum, especially as a result of its place in the dramatic arts that came to be so identified with Jesuit education. The drama became an important vehicle for the apostolic work of the Jesuits, with the works performed often serving as a living catechism of Christian doctrine.

Music was used more freely, or at least with less caution, in the mission lands in similar support of the apostolic enterprise. The most studied mission territory has been that of the Jesuit mission to Paraguay, which lasted from its foundation in 1607 until the expulsion of the Jesuits from Spanish lands in 1767. In what has been referred to as the Jesuit Republic of Paraguay, the Jesuits established separate townships for the Guaraní Indians, and several other indigenous peoples as well. Virtually every town of about two thousand members boasted its own orchestra, and several of the larger towns were set up as conservatories or as factory towns for making musical instruments and training the best student musicians from the other townships. As a result, the Jesuits were constantly asking their European colleagues to send the most recently composed music to the townships.

A musical trade route developed between Europe and the La Plata basin of Argentina that funneled musical scores and Jesuit musicians and artists to the jungles of South America.

Scholars who study Jesuit history refer to a Jesuit "way of proceeding" that is inclusive and broad rather than narrow or sectarian. There is a rhetoric characterizing Jesuit artistic endeavors that points beyond the identity of these works as simply didactic instruments. They certainly did teach the students poetry, music, painting (set design), dance, and elements of Christian doctrine, but there is also another level of meaning here, presenting a deeper insight. These works are attempting to reveal a truth about who human beings are—not just a confessional truth having to do with Christian doctrine, but a truth about the fundamental unity of human beings; what is true and good about humans is not something limited to Christianity but something at the heart of a human person's identity, that has always existed, and is common to all people of all times. This is the rhetorical burden, the meaning of Jesuit humanism, a building of culture that so characterizes the Jesuit enterprise throughout the history of pre-suppression Society of Jesus, to say nothing of the history of the spirituality of the Jesuits.

—T. Frank Kennedy, S.J. in *The Jesuits in the Arts, 1540-1773* (Saint Joseph's University Press, 2005)

Figure 1. Andrea Pozzo, S.J., *Musical Angel* (detail), 17th Century. The Andrea Pozzo Gallery in the residence of the Gesù, Rome.



Figure 2. Music Score and Wind Instrument in South American Jesuit Mission. Photo: www.museo.com

Domenico Zipoli, S.J. (1688-1726)



Figure 3. Anonymous Guaraní artist, *Musical Angel*. Polychrome wood. São Miguel, Brazil. Museu das Missões.

The Jesuits made a lasting impression on the music of the Guaraní people of Paraguay by introducing instruments such as the harp and violin, and through opera and chamber music written in the Guaraní language.

Ironically, the best trained musician destined to work in the Reductions never actually arrived in present-day Paraguay. Domenico Zipoli, whose music is not well known to musicologists in Europe and America, was a contemporary of Bach and Handel, and of the great Italian baroque master Domenico Scarlatti. As a professional organist and composer, Zipoli served in what was then the important post of music master at the Church of the Gesù in Rome.

But Domenico Zipoli would not be diverted from his missionary goal. He sailed for South America and in Córdoba, where in that provincial seat he wrote music not only for the musical program of the large Jesuit Church, but especially for use in the more far flung Indian townships or Reductions as they were called; he also did some commissioned work for the Viceroy in Lima. Zipoli's compositions quickly became the most popular in the Reductions. His compositions have been found in Bolivia in choir lofts or stored away in trunks, or in manuscripts passed down from generation to generation among indigenous families. As the years go by scholars of the colonial baroque continue to find and piece together examples of his music. We are now fortunate to have a significant amount of Zipoli's choral music, much of it easily accessible on professional recordings.

Many of these recordings, especially those that have been recorded in a series published by the Chemin du Baroque (K617) label, attest to the enduring charm and beauty of the music of Domenico Zipoli. Given the pervasive place of music in the Reductions, it is no wonder that René Fülöp-Miller, in his book *The Power and Secret of the Jesuits*, titles a section on Paraguay "The Musical State of the Jesuits."

—C.J. McNarry S.J., *Last City of Paraguay* (Loreto University Press, 1987)

Boston College Production of *Laudate Dominum*



Domenico Zipoli (1688–1726), and Martin Schmid (1694–1772), *Laudate Dominum*, reconstruction of the opera in 1997 at Boston College on the basis of manuscripts in the Archivo Episcopal in Concepción de Chiquitos, Bolivia. *Laudate Dominum* is the only opera from the famous Jesuit missions of the province of Paraguay that has come down to us.

—T. Frank Kennedy, S.J. in *The Jesuits in the Arts, 1540-1773* (Saint Joseph's University Press, 2005)

Drama

The relationship between Jesuits and theatre is usually reckoned in positive terms. The "Jesuit school drama" and its related entertainments (e.g., opera, music drama, ballet, etc.) attest to the very significant investment made by the pre-suppression Society in performance.

The third edition of the *Oxford Companion to the Theatre*, for example, included an entry on Jesuit drama by Edna Purdie that ran seven pages, longer than almost any other single entry except those treating the history of theatre in particular countries. In the last several years, scholars of the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries have extended our appreciation of the "Jesuit style" of theatre in the early modern world and have underscored the critical role played by Jesuit performance in the construction not only of Catholic but also of local cultures within the ambit of Jesuit colleges.

As the self-understanding of the Society of Jesus was increasingly shaped by its commitment to education, anti theatrical writers were quick to recognize the transformative potential of all kinds of performance. Convinced of the theater's power to educate for particular ends, Jesuits incorporated theatrical production into their own pedagogical enterprises. Taking note of the similarities and the differences between the Jesuit theatre and its professional counterpart aids us, then, in appreciating their distinctive roles in early modern culture. In the foreword to William McCabe's *An Introduction to the Jesuit Theater*, Louis Oldani reminds us:

Jesuit theater distinguished itself from other kinds of school theater by its practice of uniting well-nigh all the arts in the service of drama. It evolved from simple student exercises in delivering dialogue and presenting single scenes to the mounting of elaborate, often ostentatious, stage productions that rivaled contemporary court and public theaters in style, complex scenery, special effects, and technical skill. Characteristically Jesuit plays conveyed their message to the audience by means of potent appeals to the eye and ear, enhancing dialogue and action with music, orchestras, dance, ballet, incidental songs, and spectacle (riding scenes, for instance, and magnificent processions); with interludes, intermezcos, and other forms of entr'acte; with elegant décor and costumes; and with use of the magic lantern and such various contraptions of staging as ghost apparitions, vanishing acts, cloud apparatus, and even flying machines. Thus, following art's way, Jesuit plays helped the audience to grasp abstractions through the senses.

Arguably, the Jesuit theatre appears even more sensual than the professional theatre, which did not boast the financial or personnel resources that made such sumptuousness possible. The Jesuits understood the difference between these battling "sensualities," however, in terms of their final causes. In the Jesuit theatre, the end of such an assault on the senses is to teach the actors eloquence in word and in deed and to educate them and their audience in religious and civic virtue.

The educational program of the Society prepared Jesuits to assert that theatre changes people, forming in them particular habits of being in the world. Not only key to the Jesuit practice of prayer but also critical in the formation of conscience, the early modern imagination proved to be territory for which Jesuits were prepared to do battle—even with the public, professional theatre.

—Michael Zampelli, S.J. in *The Jesuits II: Culture, Science, and the Arts, 1540-1773* (University of Toronto Press, 2006)

The Jesuits produced plays that were more pleasing to the eye than to the ear. The German Jesuits distinguished themselves through their inventiveness in stage properties to support all the glamour of a spectacle. They introduced stage effects and machinery that presented flying animals, lightning, thunder, riding scenes, processions and elaborate tableaux. Crowd scenes were particularly popular in the 17th century and the audiences expected the Jesuits to offer them, and so they did. Jesuit drama in the 17th century was monopolized by high tragedy of the baroque style. All the elements of Jesuit drama came together during the baroque period to form a uniquely recognizable Jesuit theater style. Jesuit drama was still robed in a spiritual atmosphere but added to that were lavish sets, full orchestras, ornate costumes, choral groups, ballet and the vernacular.

—Richard J. Cary, S.J.

The Forty Hours Devotion had its origins in Italy in the 1520s. During this devotion the Eucharist was exposed for a period of forty hours (the time Christ spent in the tomb) in increasingly elaborate, stage-like settings known as apparati.

Figure 4. Andrea Pozzo, *Quarant'ore* apparatus for the church of the Gesù in Rome in 1685.



Figure 5. Apparatus. Allegory of Good Death, stage set. Ink and colors on paper, c. 1684. Budapest, Museum and National Institute of Theatre History.

In this scene the dying man is assisted by his Guardian Angel on the Christian ship which is steered by a skeleton personifying death.

The Triumph of the Baroque in the Theatrical Works of the Jesuits

From very early on in the history of the Society of Jesus, music and drama played important roles within the apostolic activity of the young order. Often the two forms overlapped, especially with the flowering of the school dramas in the second half of the sixteenth and into the seventeenth century.

—T. Frank Kennedy, S.J. in *Ratio Studiorum, Jesuit Education, 1540-1773* (John J. Burns Library, Boston College, 1997)

This public performance has again convinced me of the cleverness of the Jesuits. They despised nothing which could in any way be effective. . . . There are some also who devote themselves with knowledge and inclination to the theater and in the same manner in which they distinguish their churches by a pleasing magnificence, these intelligent men here have made themselves masters of the worldly senses by means of a theater worthy of respect.

—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Italian Journey* (Princeton University Press, 1989)



Figure 6. Apparatus. Allegory of the Sacrifice of Christ, stage set. Ink and colors on paper, c. 1684. Budapest, Museum and National Institute of Theatre History.

The Jesuits and the Empire: The Sopron-Oedenburg Collection of Jesuit Stage Designs

Until quite recently our information about Jesuit scenography was limited to a few sources, but with the publication in 1999 of *The Sopron Collection of Jesuit Stage Designs*, an exceptional album containing about a hundred designs, this area of study has been given new impetus.

These designs constitute the Jesuit counterpart to the theatrical tradition at the imperial court in Vienna, which at that time was entirely under the influence of Italian culture. The greatest number of stage designs in the Sopron album are related to two Jesuit dramas that were orchestrated by Ferdinand Tobias Richter, the organist at the Viennese court and the music teacher of the children of Emperor Leopold I (1658–1705). The first, staged at the Jesuit college in Linz in 1684, focused on the triumph of the instruments of the Passion of Christ [the *Arma Christi*].

There is continuity between this "Theater of the Passion" and the concern with dying a good Christian death, which was widespread in Europe during the period. The *ars moriendi* (the art of dying well) had for several centuries been a popular theme. The dying persons in these works are able to be saved by taking the death of Christ as their model and by invoking the intercession of Mary.

The Jesuits enthusiastically took up the theme in the seventeenth century. The idea that life is a dangerous navigation, during the course of which one risks spiritual death, is made more explicit in Figure 7: a faithful Christian in his little boat seems in grave danger of being shipwrecked between the rocks of Scylla and the whirlpool of Charybdis. As a last resort he turns to Christ, who is pictured hovering above him nailed to the cross, which in this instance is shaped in the form of an anchor. This symbol of hope is reinforced by the presence in the foreground of the shore of salvation. The whole design reminds its viewers of the theme of the good death and thus of the Last Rites, in which divine grace and mercy are constantly invoked so as to revive in the dying person the virtue of hope as a shield against the fear of damnation.

Even more graphic and complex is the allegory presented in Figure 6: the dying man is assisted by his guardian angel on the Christian ship, which is steered by a skeleton personifying death. This is a synthesis of two motifs—the Church as the bark of salvation, and the Crucified, here painted on the sail, as the model for the dying person.

—Marcello Fagnoli, S.J. in *The Jesuits and the Arts, 1540-1773* (Saint Joseph's University Press, 2006)