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Sep. 27, 2019

Honors Thesis Proposal

Working Title:

Musical Conquest: The Use of Music in the Spiritual Conquest of the Nahua People

Project Purpose:

To bridge a gap between history and musicology on analyzing the use of music in the conversion of the Nahua people, a topic only lightly touched by both disciplines.

Project Importance and Overview:

In the last century historians have shown a growing interest in conquest history. The events surrounding the Spanish conquistadors have been examined and reexamined from a variety of angles. A growing area of interest within this conquest trend is the spiritual conquest, which has its beginnings with Ricard's work "The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico" (1966). Since then a number of prominent scholars have taken to this idea of the spiritual conquest, in analyzing how the Spaniards attempted to Christianize the indigenous peoples of America. Some, like Burkhart (1989), disagree that the Spanish spiritually conquered the natives. Whether or not the spiritual conquest succeeded, Ricard's work still gives an excellent overview of methods used by missionaries, and now historians have been growing more specific in their focus of the methods used by the Spanish missionaries. Burkhart (2011) speaks of the Spaniard's use of religious plays as an aid to conversion. Truitt (2018) adds to the conversation with his analysis of daily religious life in the colonial period.

Throughout this literature, music is frequently mentioned as a means employed by Spaniards for converting the native people. The sources agree that the Nahuas had a love for

music that made it one of the key elements that the Spaniards employed, and yet Ricard, Burkhart, Truitt and others have given it no more than a passing glance. Although historians have paused to note it's significance, none have made significant strides to look at music as an aid to spiritual conversion in great depth.

In fact, historians outside the realm of Spanish conquest have failed to see the potential value of music as a significant aid to spiritual conversion. Although always mentioned, music has not been given much attention by conquest and conversion historians alike. In fact, ethnomusicologists like Chase (1945) and Stevenson (1968) have said more about music's aid in conversion than historians have, although their primary focus remains on the music itself and not so much its historical significance. My thesis hopes to begin bridging this gap, where music plays a central role in conversion, as opposed to being part of a list. This thesis will not try to prove that music is the only tool of conversion or more important than the others. Like Burkhart's "Aztecs on Stage", this will simply shed more light on a topic that has previously been mostly overlooked and only briefly mentioned by previous scholars.

Specifically, I will focus on the use of music by the Spaniards to convert the Nahua people of the conquered Aztec Empire. I will describe the preconquest music of both the Aztecs and the Spaniards, and then analyze the way the Spaniards used music, at times mixing the cultures, and at times suppressing the Nahua forms. I will also analyze the manner in which the Nahua embraced and accepted Spanish music, and how this aided in their further conversion to Catholicism.

Thesis Committee:

Dr. Mark Christiansen
Dr. Craig Harline
Dr. Shawn Miller

Qualifications of Thesis Committee:

All three of the professors in my thesis committee are conducting research in the same area as my thesis. My advisor, Dr. Christiansen focuses specifically on Nahua texts, and studies the relationship of the Nahua people with Catholicism. He has published several books on the topic. Dr. Harline is the De Lamar Jesnson professor of history, and specializes in religious history. He has done studies specifically on conversion throughout history and its different meanings. Dr. Shawn Miller is the Honors Coordinator, and conducts his research on Latin American subjects, and therefore is well versed in the issues that my thesis raises.

Project Timeline:

My thesis will be complete by the end of the Fall 2019 semester. I will defend my thesis January 12. My thesis poster will also be completed by this date. The thesis submission form will be submitted before this date.

Culminating Experience:

I hope to submit this thesis to be presented at the Phi Alpha Theta (American History Honor Society) winter conference and use this work as my sample writing for graduate applications.