

The Digital Humanities and Teaching Iberian and Latin American Music History

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Instructors of music history often wish to include Spanish, Portuguese, and Latin American topics in their undergraduate or graduate teaching. Their reasons for doing so typically range from a genuine desire to recognize the contributions of people from these regions within existing historiographic narratives to enthusiasm about sharing their own knowledge of Iberian, Latin American, or United States Latina/o musical cultures and musical works with others. Nonetheless, a constellation of factors continues to inhibit the inclusion of Iberian and Latin American content in musicology courses: the suitability of the existing secondary literature, limited language competency in Spanish, Portuguese, or other regional languages, and the reality that relatively few music history instructors specialize or have sufficient backgrounds in Iberian or Latin American topics to feel empowered enough to teach them.

Indeed, despite significant inroads, the field as a whole tends to position Iberian and Latin American content as supplemental to mainstream narratives rather than as participatory agents in those narratives. The topic area is sometimes excluded entirely from general music histories—relegated instead to separate monographs defined by geography. Even when the topic area is included in textbooks, discussion of Iberian, Latin American, or Latina/o music is generally placed towards the ends of chapters, and is rarely supplemented by extensive illustrations and musical examples.¹ Apart from the modernism of Villa Lobos, Portuguese or Brazilian musics still rarely figure at all, despite their diversity and great aesthetic appeal. Of course, instructors can reconfigure this sense of apartness to the topic's advantage by presenting, for example, Latin American music as a space in which to interrogate the assumptions of

1. Among the textbooks with minimal Iberian or Latin American content is Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, 5 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). The classic textbook, J. Peter Burkholder, Donald Jay Grout, and Claude V. Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 9th edition (New York: W. W. Norton, 2014) illustrates the tendency to place discussion of this topic area at the ends of chapters. It should be noted, however, that Burkholder's revisions of this classic textbook show tremendous sensitivity toward inclusiveness, especially, but not exclusively, with regard to Latin American topics.

mainstream approaches to musicology and to build alternative perspectives. At the same time, attention to new resources and current research in musicology can help present Iberian and Latin American content as an area of greater substance than supplemental treatment would imply. In this brief essay, I consider how ongoing projects in the digital humanities can facilitate the serious teaching of Iberian and Latin American topics in music studies in a way central to the curriculum, rather than as a symbolic act of outreach. Given that my experience as a scholar and teacher is primarily in historical musicology with a focus on the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries in New Spain (Mexico), I will consider projects that concern primarily historical materials.

Projects in the digital humanities, especially those that result from international collaborations among individual scholars and institutions, offer new possibilities for accessing materials, analyzing data, and realizing creative projects. While some of the most compelling aspects of the digital humanities lie in their potential to facilitate innovative projects such as recreating past sonic environments or gleaning answers to complex research questions using metadata, their relevance to the study and teaching of Iberian and Latin American musics has more to do with their potential to provide online (often open) access to digitized primary sources such as archival documents, music scores, and audiovisual materials. Such virtual, specialized libraries give people the opportunity to engage directly with items that would otherwise be restricted to the few scholars with the means and permission to enter archives, and allow primary sources to reach multiple publics and to serve multiple purposes.

The digital humanities have been rightly criticized for reinforcing the dominance of a few select institutions that have the resources to undertake ambitious humanities projects, and for their propensity to reinforce existing canons and to marginalize living cultures.² Indeed, an initial survey in October 2015 of the recently-created Digital Resources for Musicology website hosted by the Center for Computer Assisted Research in the Humanities at Stanford University revealed a directory of digital humanities projects focused primarily on composers of the central European canon, with links to institutions such as the Beethoven-Haus Bonn and the Arnold Schönberg Center.³ Given that I regularly use resources from the Beethoven-Haus in my teaching, I immediately recognized the potential of Digital Resources for Musicology as a portal to materials that enhance music history instruction, yet at the same time I saw the limitations of the field as a whole reflected by the relative paucity of materials relating to Spanish, Portuguese, and Latin American music. Lack of

2. Matthew K. Gold, *Debates in the Digital Humanities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

3. *Digital Resources in the Humanities*, <drm.ccarh.org>, accessed October 25, 2015 and February 12, 2017.

access to materials—not to mention the only recent acceptance of Spanish or Portuguese as appropriate languages for musicology language exams in some prominent graduate programs—has traditionally been one of the challenges of studying and teaching Iberian and Latin American music. Despite these shortcomings, the digital humanities offer more access than ever to those of us who use historical primary sources as the basis for research, and to their credit, the curators of Digital Resources for Musicology quickly added the specifically Latin American content that I submitted to them for the directory, thus incrementally increasing its visibility.

In an unscientific survey of digital humanities projects and other online environments with content about Iberian and Latin American music, I found that websites and projects in this area tend to cater either to K-12 educators or to high-level researchers such as scholars and graduate students. While some promotional websites intended for the general public—such as the Latin American music jukebox on the site of the Smithsonian’s exhibition *American Sabor*—are appropriate for undergraduates to explore and learn from independently, finding appropriate online environments for undergraduate projects remains a challenge.⁴ Commercial websites promoting Latin American music tend to target sales rather than academic study, and formal digital humanities projects may require advanced research skills and specialized knowledge to be utilized fully. Thus, I focus my consideration of other digital humanities projects on their potential to engage the undergraduate student.

As a scholar of colonial Latin America and of early modern religious culture, one of the digital humanities initiatives I find most rewarding is the “Primeros Libros de las Américas” (The First Books of the Americas) project of the Benson Library at the University of Texas and partner libraries in Mexico and the United States.⁵ This ongoing project has digitized nearly sixty of the earliest books printed in the Americas, mostly from the 1550s-1580s, including two books with music. Most of these items are liturgical books and manuals for religious instruction, and some of them are printed in Náhuatl or other indigenous languages. The two books with music currently accessible on the project’s open access website are Latin-language antiphoners printed in Mexico City in the 1580s that contain Tridentine plainchant for the offices. They are the eleventh and twelfth books mentioned by Robert Stevenson in his survey of early printed music books in Mexico.⁶

4. Smithsonian Institution, *American Sabor. Latinos in U. S. Popular Music*, <americansabor.org>, accessed February 12, 2017.

5. *Primeros libros de las Américas. Impresos americanos del siglo XVI en las bibliotecas del mundo* <primeroslibros.org>, accessed February 12, 2017. I thank Dr. Silvia Salgado Ruelas for introducing me to this website.

6. Robert Stevenson, *Music in Mexico. A Historical Survey* (New York, Crowell, 1952), 81.

Undergraduates in a music history course may see few if any antique liturgical books during their studies, and one of these digitized antiphoners can be used as if it were a *Liber usualis* to illustrate Catholic plainchant, the basics of the liturgy, and even to attempt performance from original notation. Even with no Latin language skills, students can find feast days in the table of contents, locate and compare the chants that concord with those in their course anthologies, and marvel at a 400-year-old book from the Americas, something they may not have known existed. Those activities can easily lead toward frank discussions about colonialism and religion, a topic inseparable from Counter-Reformation Catholicism. In my own teaching of a sophomore-level survey class titled “Western Music Cultures before 1650,” I use the page from the 1584 Ocharte antiphoner downloaded from “Primeros libros” that contains the invitatory *Regem cui omnia vivunt* from the Office of the Dead,⁷ together with a recording of Hernando Franco’s New World homophonic four-voice motet from around 1580 based upon that chant,⁸ to illustrate the concept of the *cantus firmus*. Given that the late Renaissance Spanish polyphonic tradition tends to locate the source material in the soprano, rather than in the lower voices, students can easily hear the chant melody and explore the relationships between monophonic and polyphonic liturgical music. That the sources are from Mexico fosters a global context for Renaissance music and widens the scope of discussions of the Counter-Reformation, while underscoring a concept applicable to various regions and composers.

Based in Mexico City, the MUSICAT project of the Seminario de Música en la Nueva España y el México Independiente (Seminar on the Music of New Spain and Independent Mexico) is to a certain degree a complementary endeavor to the “Primeros libros” initiative.⁹ As a longterm participant in MUSICAT, I have come to appreciate its complexity, and the patience that building an institutional digital humanities project over time entails. In development since 2002, MUSICAT offers two open-access databases of material of interest to music history, in addition to publications about colonial music and an introduction to the choirbooks of Mexico City Cathedral. The publicly accessible primary sources include a searchable database of references to music and musicians in cathedral documents (“Actas de cabildo”) over a period of over three centuries, and a searchable online catalog of music manuscripts from Mexican cathedral archives (“Catálogos de música”). Additionally, the Seminar has digitized the so-called Estrada Collection, a series of 122 of the oldest pieces of manuscript

7. *Psalterium, antiphonarium sanctorale cum Psalmis et Hymnis...* (Mexico City, Pedro Ocharte, 1584).

8. *Officium defunctorum novohispanicum*, with Melos Glorae directed by Juan Manuel Lara Cárdenas, (Mexico City: Quindecim Recordings QP 187, 2008), compact disc.

9. *Seminario de música en la Nueva España y el México Independiente*, <musicat.unam.mx>, accessed February 12, 2017.

sheet music from Mexico City Cathedral. Almost all of these pieces are villancicos written between the 1690s and 1720s by composers such as Antonio de Salazar and Manuel de Sumaya, and for the first time the public can access villancico sources from New Spain with minimal mediation.¹⁰

In my teaching, I use this source material in a variety of ways: to provide material for exercises in 17th-century music notation, paleography, and poetic analysis, as well as for discussion topics on culture. For example, I might show an image of a manuscript (whether it be 17th-century New Spanish from this web library or 14th-century French one from the National Library of France) and ask students to think about what the scribe ate, wore, and heard the day he copied the music. Graduate students can use the MUSICAT website to practice their paleography, editing, and cataloguing skills, and I have led graduate seminars that have included collective critical editing projects drawn from its material. Based upon individual interests and skills, undergraduates might also be interested in engaging with these primary sources. For example, an undergraduate harp major does not need Spanish or paleography skills to look at a harp continuo part from the Estrada Collection and determine the attributes of the instrument needed to play it.

One observation I find especially intriguing about the digitized Estrada Collection is that it does not contain any *villancicos de negro*, the problematic subgenre that the performance community and a few textbook examples have canonized as representative of Latin American baroque music.¹¹ There are many reasons for both the absence of the subgenre from this collection as well as its over-visibility elsewhere. Noting this discrepancy between primary sources and textbook representations can lead to interesting discussions about canon formation, performance practice, present day imaginaries of Latin America, music marketing, how musics and texts represent race and Africanness, and wider cultural questions. In other words, the source material is interesting in and of itself, but also for its potential to serve as a springboard for discussing larger concepts and developing critical self-awareness.

10. Javier Marín López, “Una desconocida colección de villancicos sacros novohispanos (1689-1812): el Fondo Estrada de la Catedral de México,” in María Gembero Ustároz and Emilio Ros-Fábregas, eds., *La música y el Atlántico: Relaciones musicales entre España y América* (Granada: University of Granada, 2007), 311-357; Drew Edward Davies, Analía Cheriñavsky y Germán Pablo Rossi, “Guía a la Colección Estrada del Archivo del Cabildo Catedral Metropolitano de México,” *Cuadernos del Seminario Nacional de Música en la Nueva España y el México Independiente* 4: 5-70 (2009).

11. See the edition of “Ah, siolo Flasiquiyo” in John Walter Hill, ed., *Anthology of Baroque Music* (New York: Norton, 2005), 260-264; and the edition of “Los coflades de la estleya” in J. Peter Burkholder and Claude V. Palisca, *The Norton Anthology of Western Music*, 7th ed., Vol. 1: *Ancient to Baroque* (New York: Norton, 2014), 656-668. The latter is reproduced from [Robert Stevenson], “Ethnological Impulses in the Baroque Villancico,” *Inter-American Music Review* 14(1): 67-106 (1994).

If students with Spanish language skills are interested in learning more about the *villancico de negro* after studying *Los coflades de la estleya* or *Ah siolo Flasiquiyo* in a textbook, they might consider exploring the digitized prints of villancico texts within the Biblioteca Digital Hispánica of the National Library of Spain.¹² Here, it is possible to place the imaginative recordings of 17th-century villancico subgenres into a broader context, by seeing how they fit into larger cycles of varied villancico texts for Christmas as celebrated on the Iberian peninsula. Attention paid to primary sources decenters the textbook and secondary material whilst empowering students—if they are eager participants—to acquire guided research experience. Although these and other specialized collections require certain skills to understand well, a little creativity on the part of the instructor can inspire intellectual curiosity, and can show students how serious and real these historical repertoires are.

Similarly, the National Library of Portugal offers more than five hundred fully digitized musical scores of Portuguese works composed between 1524 and 1997 via a user interface in Portuguese and English that is easy to navigate.¹³ The works included in this collection range from harpsichord toccatas by Carlos Seixas to sacred music by António Teixeira, and from operatic arias by Marcos Portugal to Portuguese popular songs. Out of the many easily accessible musical items in this collection, I am especially drawn to a late eighteenth-century Marian Mass manuscript from a Portuguese monastery that includes accompaniments for the Mass chants as well as short purely instrumental interludes, providing an example of typical, functional church music that music students can realize from sight in a classroom that has a piano.¹⁴ I remind students shy of singing chant in class that the eighteenth-century Portuguese priests who intoned the chant were mostly “non-majors.”

Finally, as fewer students regularly browse library shelves, these online environments become increasingly fruitful places for students to engage with new material and to develop new interests in a serendipitous manner. For example, students might be interested in early twentieth-century Latin American and Latina/o repertoires and benefit from exploring the Stachwitz Frontera Collection of Mexican and Mexican American recordings of the University of California, Los Angeles.¹⁵ Users of this resource can build song profiles based upon hundreds of recordings—some but not all of them open access—of a diverse song repertoire, and discover artists, genres, and music that could

12. Biblioteca Nacional de España, *Biblioteca Digital Hispánica*, <[a href="http://bne.es/es/Catalogos/BibliotecaDigitalHispanica/Inicio/index.html">bne.es/es/Catalogos/BibliotecaDigitalHispanica/Inicio/index.html>, accessed February 12, 2017.

13. Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, <[a href="http://bnportugal.pt">bnportugal.pt>, accessed February 12, 2017.

14. Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, M.M. 4610, *Missa de N. Snr.a*, <[a href="http://purl.pt/29547/1/index.html#/1/html">purl.pt/29547/1/index.html#/1/html>, accessed February 12, 2017.

15. *The Strachwitz Frontera Collection of Mexican and Mexican American Recordings*, <[a href="http://frontera.library.ucla.edu">frontera.library.ucla.edu>, accessed February 12, 2017.

lead toward term projects in American music. Students with some Portuguese language skills might wish to explore facets of contemporary Brazilian cultural life on the website of the Instituto Itaú Cultural in São Paulo.¹⁶

While the digital humanities of the nature briefly discussed here tend to facilitate research at higher levels, instructors can draw from them as part of an expanding web of options available to present material to undergraduate students. With careful guidance, instructors can use this material to encourage undergraduates in historical musicology classes to work directly with sources, and use websites in foreign languages to awaken them further to the wider world. That said, source study is only one aspect of historical musicology. But with some creativity, instructors might be inspired to draw together materials from reputable online sources, print sources, and their experience to find ways to learn about, value, interrogate, reconceive, and share information about Spanish, Portuguese, and Latin American musics.

16. *Itaú Cultural*, <www.itaucultural.org.br/>, accessed February 12, 2017.