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# Instrumental Gendering: A Case Study of Convent Bajón Tradition in Early Modern Spain

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INSTRUMENTAL GENDERING: A CASE STUDY OF CONVENT BAJÓN  
TRADITION IN EARLY MODERN SPAIN

by:

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Bachelor of Arts in Music  
University of South Carolina, 2016

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## **Abstract**

It is generally accepted by Western music epistemologies that women did not perform on wind instruments during the early modern era. Recent organological and convent research has discovered a female *bajón* tradition in Spanish convents. This tradition lasted from the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century through the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This document discusses the implications of this tradition and explores why similar traditions did not exist throughout early modern Europe. Capitalism, church law, and early modern medical theories are all discussed to give a fuller context of gender and music performance in the early modern era.

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## Introduction

Western music epistemology selectively highlights male composers deemed significant or exceptional. Patriarchs such as Johann Sebastian Bach, Claudio Monteverdi, Antonio Vivaldi, and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart have become common knowledge to even casual listeners of western classical music. While these men are useful for showing general trends and shifts within compositional and theoretical techniques throughout the western history, they leave out an entire gender of composers who were equally talented while enduring strict gender enforcement in their society. The three oldest names of women that come up in Western music tradition are Hildegard of Bingen, Francesca Caccini, and Barbara Strozzi. One of these women, Hildegard, never had her music performed outside of her cloistered convent walls. The other two women, Francesca and Barbara, inhabited an elite circle of musical performance and education that the average woman did not have access to. Although previous work has focused on female composers, a more common avenue for female musicians was through performance and liturgical employment in convents in the early modern era. This paper will explore the rich instrumental tradition that was actively encouraged by Spanish aristocrats and Spanish religious leaders. The secular contemporaries of these nuns were not allowed to pursue some of these instruments due to oppressive court etiquette treatises such as *The Book of the Courtier* by Baldasar Castiglione. This paper will also dissect the implications of gendering instruments within western musical tradition.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this document is twofold: to question the long-held belief that all women were forbidden from playing certain instruments and to expand the female lineage of the western music epistemology of influential composers and musicians. This document will analyze early modern gender roles and performance through an organological lens, expanding the current understanding of women's participation in the development and performance of western music. Feminist theory will be used where appropriate, particularly when analyzing patriarchal structures and their focus on legislating the lives and professions of women. Nuns made up a significant portion of the population in early modern Europe, with nuns accounting for 14% of the general population in some areas.<sup>1</sup>

## **Methodology**

This thesis will predominately look at secondary sources to construct a narrative about oppression and liberation through instrumental performance for Early Modern Spanish nuns. Some primary sources that will be consulted include Baldesar Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier* translated into English and accounts from Nassarre and his experiences teaching young girls music to prepare them for their careers as organ performers. These documents help elaborate on patriarchal structures that dictated the lives of early modern women in addition to giving insight into the preparation nuns had to undergo for monastic life.

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<sup>1</sup> Craig Monson, *Nuns Behaving Badly: Tales of Music, Magic, Art, and Arson in the Convents of Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010). 26.



## **Need for the Study**

Maria Citron outlines the importance of feminist musicological research in her article *Feminist Approaches to Musicology*. In order for any field of study to expand it must continuously undergo critical analysis to search for gaps and new perspectives. This study expands the male dominated western music epistemology by elevating the participation of women as equals in the spheres of musical composition and performance. While men already have their patriarchs to look back on and aspire to, women are still constructing our own histories. Currently there is an absence of the history of women who played wind instruments in feminist western music epistemology. By focusing on the wind instrumental tradition of Early Modern Spanish nuns more women are added to the Western musical canon, which allows for a reconsideration of organological gender rules in the early modern era.

This study focuses on a very narrow class of women in one area of Europe, and so this is only one narrow perspective. Spanish tradition is also left out of mainstream music epistemological discussions when it comes to theory and composition. While parallels between Spanish nuns and Italian orphans – another exception group in historical performance – can be made, such parallels are far too broad for the scope of this thesis.

## **Chapter Overview**

Chapter 1 gives a brief overview of convent evolution and growth from the 13<sup>th</sup> century through the Council of Trent in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. The recognition of Cistercian institutions by the Catholic Church as well as the gradual shift into a capitalist

system are both discussed in the context of diminishing rights for medieval and early modern nuns.

Chapter Two discusses gender in the context of medical theory, social etiquette, and Early Modern Spanish legal rights for women. The primary focus is on medical, religious, and philosophical belief that women, but not men, were inherently flawed and given to dissolution.

Chapter Three looks at Western instrumental gendering practices from Ancient Greece through modern times. In present day Western society, instruments continue to hold gendered implications. Some of these gendering traditions have continued from Castiglione's time into the modern times.

## **Chapter One: An Overview of Convent History after the 13<sup>th</sup> Century**

From the perspective of modern gender studies, medieval female monasticism is best described as a double-edged sword. While nuns were not allowed to hear confession and had to rely on outside clergy to receive sacraments, it was also German Abbess Hildegard von Bingen who first described the female orgasm in her writings. Nunneries were also hubs for homo-romantic relationships.<sup>2</sup> Female self-actualization and oppressive patriarchal structures converged in a unique way that cannot be fully understood from the modern viewpoint. Within this rigid structure certain convents, such as Las Huelgas in Spain, were able to engage in more masculine activities in regards to reciting mass, listening to confessions, and even disciplining male clergy.<sup>3</sup> This chapter will focus on the Late Medieval through early modern periods of female monastic life in regards to shifts in gender roles and convent policing especially in regards to the Council of Trent, in particular, the actions of Las Huelgas and convents in Castile. This background will allow for a socially constructed gender context to be understood in relation to religious women playing the bajón, a masculine instrument. Nuns represent an “outcast” class of unmarried women; it is possible this status contributed to deviance in prescribed gender roles around musical instruments. Finally, I discuss secular

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<sup>2</sup> For further information on this subject see Judith C. Brown, *Immodest Acts, The Life of a Lesbian Nun in Renaissance Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

<sup>3</sup> Jo Ann Kay McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millenia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 267-268.

female composers to offer a comparison of musical experiences for nuns in the early modern era.

### **Monastic Institutions from Informal to Formal Catholic Institutions**

In the infancy of Christianity, it was not uncommon for men and women to decide to be celibate of their own volition. With the Christian communities rarely extending beyond localized structures, there were no rules for these celibate people to follow outside of abstaining from sex.<sup>4</sup> As a formalized church structure began to take hold, rules regarding celibacy became codified, often emphasizing the need for male and female celibates to be separated.<sup>5</sup> However, monastic corporatism would not be a recognized concept until the twelfth century with the establishment of the Cistercian Order. Before this formal establishment, many monastic institutions for men and women existed throughout Europe and continued to exist alongside these Cistercian institutions. While attempts at central regulation had been previously made, most notably at the Imperial Court at Aachen in 802 and the subsequent reform synods under the auspices of Benedict of Aniane in 816 and 818/19, these mostly limited themselves to officially recognizing as such only those monastic institutions following the Rule of Benedict of Nursia, leaving still a fair amount of leeway for individual forms to develop.<sup>6</sup>

Coinciding with these changes in monastic regulation also came a shift in the social understanding of marriage, work, and single life. While obviously, social customs and mores varied in the varying political structures of the following centuries, several broad trends can be discerned. Guilds began forming support networks and formal

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 23.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 55.

<sup>6</sup> Edeltraut Kleuting, *Monasteria semper reformanda: Kloster- und Ordensreformen im Mittelalter* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2005), p. 16.

training procedures for craftsmen of all kinds. With this growth in guild participation and individual wealth creation came a desire from many fathers for higher dowery fees to marry their daughters.<sup>7</sup> While capital was continually moving in male spheres, opportunities for women to participate in these spheres became more and more limited. Cultural prejudices of the perceived shortcomings of women prevented them from attaining education through apprenticeship and guild participation; this ensured that women had to rely on male partners for financial support. Women also generally could not marry under their social status, otherwise they would shame their family name. The only options available for women in this culture were as servants, prostitutes, beggars, or nuns. The latter was the most preferable to middle- and upper-class families as cloistering was cheaper than marriage but better than the other three alternatives. The religious institutions prevalent in the Holy Roman Empire known as *Stifte* (quasi-monastic institutions relying on endowments from the nobility) provided a further alternative: While the women entrusted into such convent-like structures were sworn to certain monastic virtues, they were not required to take permanent monastic vows and could leave the *Stift* at any point, particularly if their family chose for them to marry.<sup>8</sup> Essentially, they provided both a high-standard educational institution and a „storage facility“ for daughters whose ultimate fate had not yet been decided. Particularly *Stifte* under direct Imperial tutelage like Bad Gandersheim and Quedlinburg would rise to great political prominence, rivalling those of secular imperial institutions, and become hubs of

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<sup>7</sup> McNamara, Jo Ann Kay, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millenia*, First Harvard University Press (1996). 260-261.

<sup>8</sup> For a concise development of the so-called „*Damenstifte*“ see Andermann, Kurt: *Geistliches Leben und standesgemäßes Auskommen: Adlige Damenstifte in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart*, Jan Thorbecke Verlag (2018), *passim*.

art and culture<sup>9</sup>. However, while these phenomena provide a parallel to female monastic culture in the strictest sense, they must, their experience and history is beyond the scope of this document, though they certainly merit further research by other scholars.

This need for families to cloister their daughters in combination with the growing middle or *bourgeois* class lead to a massive surge in convent populations. In many instances, the number of convents in an area often dwarfed male monastic institutions. Unmarried women of all kinds were sent to convents, young virgins, widows whose children no longer wished to care for them, orphans, really any woman deemed a social outcast or other. Ironically, a large portion of the population fit into this “other” category. Women who could not afford dowry fees could sometimes gain acceptance into convents as servants, these women would not be educated in the same way, but they would have a stable home with daily means unlike street beggars and lower class prostitutes. One must wonder, why would the church be considered the responsible entity for the “othered” populations? The answer is the *cura monialium* or “the care of the nuns.”<sup>10</sup> The *cura monialium* came about in the 12<sup>th</sup> century with much debate. Some claimed monastic institutions should only provide for religious women’s needs. Others suggested that the care of women should be central to the focus of monastic institutions, citing the significance of nuns as “brides of Christ” and the loyalty of the women as Jesus’s grave.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See Pötschke, Dieter: *Zur Geschichte des Klosters Drübeck und verwandter Institutionen in Ostsachsen*, in: (same, ed.): *Herrschaft, Glaube und Kunst: zur Geschichte des Reichsstiftes und Klosters Drübeck* (= Harz-Forschungen Vol. 24), Lukas Verlag (2008), pp. 23-113, particularly pp. 45-8 & 70-3.

<sup>10</sup> McNamara, Jo Ann Kay, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia*, First Harvard University Press (1996). 262.

<sup>11</sup> Fiona J. Griffiths, “Men’s Duty to Provide for Women’s Needs” in *Medieval Religion: New Approaches* ed. Constance Hoffman Berman, (New York: Routledge, 2005), 270-280.

As Cistercians began to gain more power through the authority of the church, they began to absorb some of the freely created convents and monasteries into their fold. While male monasteries would be integrated into the structure of the order, the status of those occupied by nuns is much less clear: Rather than integration, a pattern of association and control through the Cistercian Order suggests itself; despite this obvious gender bias, applications to become associates to the Order increased so much in volume that in 1228, the Cistercian Order enacted a hiatus on accepting any further female congregations into that status, causing the further development of female Cistercian monasticism to take a more complicated path.<sup>12</sup> This prompted the development of a quasi-corporate structure of funding, where various smaller monasteries would pool together their resources and land holdings to maximize efficiency and profit on their land.<sup>13</sup> While it is often posited in Marxist feminist literature that capitalism began with the ending of feudalism in the Early Modern Era, it seems more likely that the absorbing of monastic institutions to produce more capital may have been one form the earlier form of capitalism with smaller structures. Convents absorbed by these institutions often lost a great deal of their autonomy and ability to produce capital.<sup>14</sup> Convents who were incorporated into these Cistercian orders were typically given the worst plots of land and had much of their funding taken by their brothers under the assumptions that women need

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<sup>12</sup> What and how these development continued is a matter of some contention; the exploration of this matter still shows alarming deficits which cannot properly be addressed here. See Anne E. Lester, *Creating Cistercian Nuns: The Women's Religious Movement and Its Reform in Thirteenth-Century Champagne*, (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 2011), p. 8-12.

<sup>13</sup> McNamara, Jo Ann Kay, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millenia*, First Harvard University Press (1996). 263-264.

<sup>14</sup> McNamara, Jo Ann Kay, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millenia*, First Harvard University Press (1996). 263-365.

less to sustain themselves.<sup>15</sup> The taking of funds was so egregious that during audits Abbesses would often hide money in some of the lower sisters' belongings.<sup>16</sup>

Convents that were taken over by the Cistercian order also had to be financially independent as not to be a drain on their monastic brothers. This demand for financial independence is one of the many areas that nuns deviated from gender norms compared to their secular counterparts. As stated previously, women were not able to participate in commerce, therefore they required a husband to ensure they would have food, clothing, and shelter. Nuns, not having any support outside of a few donations from family members and dowry fees, had to engage in the market to ensure they had enough funds for their food, clothing, and shelter. Some of these convents had received ownership of small villages through donations that produced goods for them. Convents without such production capacities would have to rely on their own abilities to produce wool or other products. The irony is that the purpose of cloistering women is due to social constraints on their participation in the market, yet cloistering forced these women to participate in the market.

The eleventh century saw an increased expansion of political and economic Latin Christian influence into the Mediterranean, prompting a drastic increase in the importance of the Italian Merchant Republics, most notably Venice, Genoa, and Pisa, whereas in Northern Europe, the alliance of free towns known as the Hanse created a merchant empire of similar prominence, extending until Iceland<sup>17</sup>. As seen in the

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<sup>15</sup> McNamara, Jo Ann Kay, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia*, First Harvard University Press (1996). 265, 270.

<sup>16</sup> McNamara, Jo Ann Kay, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia*, First Harvard University Press (1996). 274.

<sup>17</sup> For a concise history, see Sheilagh Ogilvie, *Institutions and European Trade: Merchant Guilds, 1000–1800*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2011).



Medieval Period, a growing merchant class requires an ever-increasing convent population to maintain unmarried women without a place in secular society. The complex reasons behind this forced cloistering will be elaborated in Chapter Two. Convent populations began to soar in the Early Modern Era, particularly in Italy and Spain. For perspective in Early Modern Bologna, no fewer than 75% of upper-class female populations were in convents, and convent populations could make up as much as 14% of a city's populations.<sup>18</sup> With such extreme amounts of educated elite women being forced into the convent the famous question of Joan Kelly emerges, did women have a renaissance under these conditions?<sup>19</sup>

### **Secular Female Composers Compared to a Nun Contemporary**

It is intentional in this document that the early modern era is used instead of renaissance or baroque. Male achievements should not define the history of women. Certainly, some female composers existed in the public sphere during this period such as Barbara Strozzi and Francesca Caccini. While it is important to recognize these women for their achievements and position in society, their achievements should not overshadow nor should they define the most prevalent forms of music production for early modern women. Since most educated women were cloistered, it is important to look at the women's monastic musical participation to fully understand the musical lives of women in the early modern era.

To better understand how patriarchal structures dominated the lives of women musicians in different ways Barbara Strozzi, Francesca Caccini, and Lucrezzia Vizzana

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<sup>18</sup> Craig Monson, *Nuns Behaving Badly: Tales of Music, Magic, Art, and Arson in the Convents of Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 9.

<sup>19</sup> See Joan Kelly's essay "Did Women have a Renaissance?" in her book *Women, History, and Theory* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

will all be compared as they all performed in vastly different settings Strozzi offers the view of an entirely independent woman who potentially engaged in sex work. Caccini gives insight into the lives of court musicians. Finally, Vizzana's life provides a general framework for understanding the different patriarchal structures that dominated the lives of nuns when compared to secular contemporaries.

Barbara Strozzi (1619-1677) was able to access an elite musical education through her adoptive (though potentially biological) father, Giulio Strozzi. Unlike most fathers during his time, Giulio opted to nurture his daughter's gifts through advanced musical education and encouraged her to work with high profile composers in his social sphere. There is no current evidence to suggest Giulio attempted to marry his daughter off; instead, Barbara is known to have had four illegitimate children (leading to the claim that she may have been a courtesan). Barbara Strozzi was able to achieve financial independence from her compositions thanks to her father's educational support. Her male peers respected Strozzi's compositions, the financial support she received from patrons show an explicit encouragement for her to continue working as a composer and performer. By all respects, Strozzi is an outlier. She is an illegitimate child, she had four children out of wedlock, and she supported herself without the need for a husband. She is a significant figure of the late Renaissance/Early Baroque. Certainly Strozzi life should continue to be studied, and she should remain a significant figure when discussing composers of the early modern era; however, her atypical experience does not give a broader perspective into the lives of performing women in the early modern era.

Similarly to Barbara Strozzi, Francesca Caccini (1587-1641) was able to achieve a high level of musical education due to her composer father's massive investment into

her abilities. Not unlike the later Mozart family, the Caccini family consisted of many trained musicians that all performed and worked for the Medici court. Francesca Caccini was the highest paid musician at the Medici court, up until her first marriage. Like Strozzi, Caccini's life as a musician had been encouraged and nurtured by her father. Music allowed Caccini more independence than other women, as after she was widowed for a second time she was able to support herself and her children through musical performance. Caccini was able to publish music that was respected by her male peers, as well as high ranking nobles, from all around Europe, as far as Warsaw. Both of these secular women were encouraged by their families and their society to pursue their musical abilities to the fullest extent. Both were primarily vocalists, as many women musicians were in the early modern era.

In contrast, Lucrezia Vizzana (1590-1662) was one of the few nuns to publish music during the early modern era. She published a collection of 24 motets titled *Componimenti musicali de motetti concertati a I e piu voci* that used the *stile moderno*.<sup>20</sup> A contemporary of Caccini, only being three years her junior, Vizzana offers one of the few glimpses of the first-hand convent life in the early modern era. On the surface, this seems to indicate that like Strozzi and Caccini, Vizzana had access and opportunity due to her socioeconomic status as an upper-middle-class nun. The significant difference is the repression Vizzana faced during and after the Tridentine reforms. During Vizzana's life, male educators were not allowed into convents, so nuns had to teach one another

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<sup>20</sup> Trans. "Modern style." Another term for the *secunda practicca*. This style differentiates itself from the *stile antico*, or "old style" by focusing on text painting over conforming the text to strict compositional rules.

skills such as reading Latin and performing music.<sup>21</sup> Camilla Bombacia, Vizzana's maternal aunt, was likely Vizzana's first music teacher. In addition to restrictions on male teachers, nuns had to contend with Tridentine legislation that forbade modulation and inflection in female monastic music was passed in 1563.<sup>22</sup> Gabrielli Paleotti, the Archbishop of Bologna where Lucrezia was cloistered in the convent of Santa Cristina della Fondazza, drafted these reforms for the Council of Trent. Paleotti had been appointed by the Catholic Church to write on matters pertaining to convent life. Not all of his suggestions were taken, but he did implement many of his ideas on the convents under his control. Restrictions on outside teachers are particularly significant as this method of female-led musical training was likely used in Spanish convents that were forced to into stricter cloistering after the Tridentine Reformation.<sup>23</sup> Because this legislation happened before Vizzana's birth, she had to endure her entire cloistered life under these regulations. By contrast, both Caccini and Strozzi were composing secular polyphonic music to make a living. Vizzana's desire to compose seems to have come from a different place, a desire to compose outside of the capitalist exchange. The Vizzana sisters did not enter Santa Cristina as hired musicians; they joined with their full dowry and upkeep fees paid for by their father. Their musical education occurred after they reconnected with their maternal aunts.

What is important to unpack when comparing Vizzana to her secular counterparts is the extreme restrictions placed upon her music education as well as the backlash she

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<sup>21</sup> Craig Monson, *Nuns Behaving Badly: Tales of Music, Magic, Art, and Arson in the Convents of Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 33.

<sup>22</sup> Kimberly Winona Montford, "Music in the Convents of Counter-Reformation Rome" (PhD Diss., Rutgers University, 1999), 20.

<sup>23</sup> Colleen Ruth Baade, "Music and Music-Making in Female Monasteries in Seventeenth-Century Castile" (PhD Diss., Duke University, 2001), 132.

faced after publishing her compositions. Santa Cristina della Fondazza eventually attempted to rebel against Paleotti's draconian cloistering rules.<sup>24</sup> The convent was under siege until eventually, the sisters submitted to Paleotti. The nuns of Santa Cristina della Fondazza lost many privileges from this act of rebellion; Vizzana was forbidden to compose for the rest of her life, something that may have led to her insanity later on.<sup>25</sup> By the early modern era, many convents had lost their financial independence through forced merging into larger sects of monastic life. Women participating in producing music to maintain patronage to appease the desires of male-dominated courts were encouraged and supported socially and financially. Vizzana, breaking the mold by publishing music she composed without these guidelines and support, faced tremendous backlash and punishment. This implies that music not directly encouraged and supported by male sponsors was a dangerous threat to patriarchal control. Nuns could compose and perform in convents outside of the public eye, but as soon as they attempted to pursue secular autonomy in the form of print, they had to face the consequences of their sex in a misogynistic society.

As research continues to chronicle the lives and actions of these women a more transparent image of women's collective desire for liberation becomes more evident, tracing the origins of feminist thought before the 19th century. Many instances of small rebellions within convents shows the deep roots and desire for female liberation long before the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when most feminist scholars begin to discuss the "first wave" of feminist thought and activism. Perhaps a restructuring of collective European feminist

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<sup>24</sup> Craig Monson, *Disembodied Voices: Music and Culture in an Italian Convent* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2001), 163.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 163.

thought must be reconsidered through the lens of nun rebellion. It is also possible that cloistering women ensured that large collective activism could not be taken, maintaining unquestioned patriarchal control throughout Europe. It is also interesting to note that women most often forced into convents were well educated and came from wealthy families. Educated women are the greatest threat to patriarchy. Could early modern men in power have understood this? Perhaps and perhaps not. These are subjects that require more in-depth feminist inquiry outside of the scope of this document.

### **Effects of Tridentine Reforms on Convent Life**

The Council of Trent (1545-1563), also referred to as the Tridentine Reforms, was a reaction to the Protestant Reformation, an attempt to reassess the Catholic Church as a whole and make substantial structural changes. Within musicological discourse, the primary focus has been attempting to engage musical reforms during this period of church history. What is often overlooked is the strict regulations that affected nuns. As previously stated, Archbishop Paleotti was in charge of drafting many of the convent reforms for the Council of Trent. Paleotti wanted not only to ban outside music instructors from convents, but also polyphony and professional nun musicians through his contributions.<sup>26</sup> Ultimately the Council decided that many of these regulations would not sit well with many female monastic communities and that it would be up to the heads of various local orders and canons to decide what music was and was not appropriate for nuns. As was seen in Vizzana's experience, Paleotti went to the full extreme imposing regulation on convents under his control.<sup>27</sup> This situation is not unlike the mythical story

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<sup>26</sup> Craig A. Monson, "The Council of Trent Revisited" *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 5, no. 1 (2002): 21-2.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* 22.

of Palestrina saving polyphony within sacred music, the difference here is that some women did lose their rights to polyphony. Very few nuns seem to have lost the ability to perform polyphony, only the unfortunate few under Paleotti or other strict canons. It is important to note that these same impositions were not suggested for male monastic communities. Paleotti's contention for convent music came from a place of frustration and concern at secular interest in the musical activities of nuns.<sup>28</sup> Kendrick believes this focus on convent music may have had more to do with keeping outside music teachers out than actually limiting the performance of nuns, something that is slightly contrary to Monson's theory.<sup>29</sup> It is clear with both theories that the root of limiting musical freedom stems from a desire to keep all secular influence out of convents. Further backing up this claim, Baade has translated a list of the issues of allowing polyphony in convents in her dissertation.

“1) persons who are otherwise unsuited to religious life are admitted to it solely on the basis of musical ability; 2) the current fashion of and in particular, the use of villancicos and wind instruments does not induce piety and devotion of either the singer or the listener, but rather leads both to take pleasure only in the music itself; 3) in monasteries where music teachers and secular musicians are brought in from the outside side, clausura is not maintained, and outsiders are a bad influence on the religious; 4) musicians are prone to many vices, including laziness, libidinousness, inconstancy, and conceit, and thus, musician nuns and monks can be disruptive to other religious; 5) many religious orders have recognized the inconveniences associated with allowing polyphonic music to be performed by the religious and have rightfully banned it.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Craig Monson, *Nuns Behaving Badly: Tales of Music, Magic, Art, and Arson in the Convents of Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 31.

<sup>29</sup> Robert L. Kendrick, *Celestial Sirens: Nuns and Their Music in Early Modern Milan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 58-59.

<sup>30</sup> Colleen Ruth Baade, “Music and Music-Making in Female Monasteries in Seventeenth-Century Castile” (PhD Diss., Duke University, 2001), 46-47.

Stereotypes not only of women but also of the character of musicians make up the bulk of these concerns. The concern about admittance purely based of musical ability is perhaps disingenuous, since these institutions largely accepted women based on their ability to either work for the convent or for their family's ability to pay all of the required fees.

### **The Bajón in Early Modern Spain**

With these disparaging remarks from the Council and excessive fears existing around convent music, it is incredible to think that a *bajón* tradition persisted despite this opposition. Despite all of these concerns, a thriving *bajón* tradition existed not only in the early modern era, but up until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in some parts of Spain and Latin America.<sup>31</sup> It is important to distinguish the Spanish *bajón* from the more well-known dulcian. The dulcian is a double reeded instrument that is the precursor to the modern bassoon. The *bajón* looks like the dulcian and functions in much the same way except for its open finger modal system. Instead of a C ionian tuning that was used in the rest of Europe, *bajónes* employed a D dorian tuning. The *bajón* was important to Spanish liturgical music in a variety of contexts.<sup>32</sup> The primary function of the *bajón* in liturgical settings seem to be as support for bass voices when performing Gregorian chant.<sup>33</sup> While not every Spanish convent allowed nuns to perform on *bajón*, enough did – particularly in Castile – to be worth note, given its masculine characterization. The *bajón* was also important to Spanish conquest of the New World. The deep respect for musicians in Aztec culture made the *bajón* a tool for missionaries to gain indigenous converts.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> James Kopp, *The Bassoon* (New Haven, CT: Yale U. Press, 2012), 32.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* 42.



With the rise of the *bajón* in Early Modern Spain, there came a need for teachers. It seems that initially the sisters were taught via outside teachers and later had to teach one another.<sup>35</sup> This is similar to the experience of Lucrezia Vizzana. At this time, there is no evidence that nuns went into convents already knowing how to play the *bajón*. The only instruments nuns went in knowing how to play were the organ and the harp. We know of these traditions because of audition and employment records for nuns. It makes sense that a convent would want to hire a well-trained singer or organist, but the *bajón* is something unique and not considered to have major liturgical significance outside of Spain. The reason for Spain's aggressive adoption of the *bajón* is unknown, as is the function of the *bajón* within convents. Only speculation as to its function within convents can be made. If the *bajón* was used for chant or liturgical music, then that suggests convents using these *bajóns* were engaging in high-level polyphony, possibly utilizing the *bajón* to fill out the missing male voices for a fuller choir. There is a large amount of convent archival material that still needs to be catalogued and researched.

### **Conclusion**

An expansion of capitalism led to a large middle-class population with a need to contain their daughters in convents. This need arose from increasing dowry fees in the early modern era. In addition to these rising convent populations came the Council of Trent which imposed stricter cloistering policies on nuns. These more stringent cloistering policies created a demand in convents for trained women musicians to assist with the musical aspects of Mass. Around the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century Spain began to incorporate *bajones* into their liturgical tradition. This *bajón* tradition expanded musical

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<sup>35</sup> Colleen Ruth Baade, "Music and Music-Making in Female Monasteries in Seventeenth-Century Castile" (PhD Diss., Duke University, 2001), 49-50.

opportunities for nuns in Early Modern Spain. The following chapters will give a fuller context to the gendered social implications of these *bajonistas*.

## Chapter Two: Gender in the Early Modern Era

Gender in the early modern era was no less complicated than it is today. While concepts of transgender and nonbinary identities were not yet understood in Early Modern Europe, areas for gender nonconformance, though limited, did exist. This chapter will give construct a gender framework using a combination of medical, philosophical, legal, and etiquette perspectives. This understanding is essential when discussing the gendered implications of nuns performing on instruments defined as masculine by their society, such as the dulcian and organ. In the current discourse of early modern gender and sex theory understanding, there are two competing theories. The first theory posits a one-sex model, where men and women are the same sex expressed differently with women being the imperfect expression of the one sex.<sup>36</sup> The other theory is that women and men are different sexes entirely, with women still being inherently flawed when compared to men.<sup>37</sup> In addition to these modern theories, the work of Baldesar Castiglione will be discussed to understand role performance in the early modern era. Castiglione serves as a reflection of norms rather than an arbiter of them. Finally, the unique deviance from gender norms in Spain will be compared to the rest of Europe, potentially giving clues to the reason for their *bajón* tradition in convents. It is important to note that modern gender-as-performance perspectives, like Butler for example, is not

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<sup>36</sup> Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: First Harvard University Press, 1990), 4.

<sup>37</sup> Joan Cadden, *The Meanings of Sex Differences in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge: Press Syndicate of University of Cambridge, 1993), 3.

consistent with an ethnographic historical perspective – in other words, using the terms and frameworks of the era to describe their understanding of gender and sex, rather than imposing a modern perspective onto them. While Butler’s theories are essential for a modern understanding of gender, they do not aim to explain gender from an early modern perspective. The focus of this chapter is to explore medical, cultural, and legal perspectives on gender in the early modern era.

### **Gender**

Aristotle is a common starting place for discussing Western gender and sex theories. His is one of the earliest written accounts of women as imperfect men.<sup>38</sup> Medical historians disagree on how long his theory was accepted in the science of the times. Some suggest that this one-sex model lasted into the early modern era, while others suggest that it was no longer in use by the time of Galen. Most theorists agree that no matter the significance of the one-sex model, women were understood to be inherently flawed by the nature of their sex.<sup>39,40</sup> The wide acceptance of the concept of women as inherently flawed was the justification for restricting many professions to men only. This belief and its ramifications also give a fuller context to women’s oppression in the early modern era.

It is easy to assume that women’s oppression occurred purely from a religious perspective; this discussion of Aristotle and Galen shows a broader philosophical and scientific perception that led to women’s oppression. The three main differences between

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<sup>38</sup> Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greek to Freud* (Cambridge: First Harvard University Press, 1990), 28-29.

<sup>39</sup> Joan Cadden, *The Meanings of Sex Differences in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge: Press Syndicate of University of Cambridge, 1993), 22-23.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greek to Freud* (Cambridge: First Harvard University Press, 1990), 28-29.

male and female, according to Medieval scholars, lie in complexion, shape, and disposition.<sup>41</sup> Complexion here does not mean to the appearance of skin; instead, it refers to temperature and moisture.<sup>42</sup> The complexion theory classifies women as cold and moist, and men as hot and dry. The heat of men is the most significant component of this classification; it contributes to the perfection of men.<sup>43</sup> Temperature is understood to be the reason men are physically stronger than women.<sup>44</sup> Shape refers to obvious physical differences such as facial hair and height, both also attributed to heat or lack thereof.<sup>45</sup> Disposition describes the character differences between men and women. “The male passeth the female in perfect complection, in working, in wit, in discretion, in might and lordship. In perfect complection, for in comparison, the male is hotter and dryer, and the female is the contrary.” (Bartholomew, a mid-century friar).<sup>46</sup> Here specific skills and abilities are outlined by Bartholomew as the disposition of men because of their perfect heat. Women cannot be trusted to rule or engage in commerce because they lack heat. Women must then be cloistered if they cannot marry because they have an inability to provide for themselves because of their lack of heat. The theory of hierarchical gender expression is at the root of social restrictions placed on women in from the Medieval through the early modern era. Women were understood to always be seeking new things; they lack consistency and are never loyal to their partners.<sup>47</sup> If women could not be

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<sup>41</sup> Joan Cadden, *The Meanings of Sex Differences in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge: Press Syndicate of University of Cambridge, 1993), 170.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* 171.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* 172.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* 180-181.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* 183

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* 185.

trusted in intimate relationships, then they certainly could not be trusted to deal with commerce in a growing capitalist society.

As stated in Chapter One, a growing merchant class led to a necessity for more convents. Under the feudal system, there was a limited possibility for class mobility. Feudal landholdings were a defining feature of Medieval Europe. These land holdings required a peasant workforce to maintain them and produce capital (Federici). Under a feudal system, all workers are seen as necessary, though for different jobs. In the merchant class, new hierarchies form; those who give wages and those who receive them. While still limited, there were more possibilities for class mobility in the transition from the medieval period to the early modern era. However, commerce was still widely considered a male activity due to these social gender rules. When peasants were working for a feudal household they were not exchanging their labor for monetary currency; they were trading their labor for housing, food, and clothing.

### **Effects of Gender and Capitalism on Nuns**

With increased use of currency and remission of feudal systems, exploitation of women increased. As class mobility increased, dowry prices began to rise. Often it was cheaper to marry off only one daughter and to cloister the rest.<sup>48</sup> With upwards of 75% of gentile women behind convent walls in some areas, the effects of patriarchal marriage customs in the early modern era left many families with no choice but to cloister their daughters.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Craig Monson, *Nuns Behaving Badly: Tales of Music, Magic, Art, and Arson in the Convents of Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 8-9.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* 9.

As the demand for cloistering grew, so did the price for convent entry. To offset this price some parents would begin training their daughters to become convent organists from as young as six years old. Most convent musicians received a musical education prior to entering; however, some received training within the convent. Nassarre's first-hand accounts as a teacher of young nuns give better insight into the cultural context of nun musical training. While there has been extensive research of choir boy education, the training of nuns is a new area of research within musicology.<sup>50</sup> Some important distinctions between choir boys and prospective nuns exist. First, larger religious institutions for the laity needed choir boys. Choir boys allowed large men's choirs to have soprano voices in them. While competitive, positions for choir boys were not nearly as rare as positions for convent organists. Each convent that used an organist would only need for one or two sisters to be knowledgeable, whereas a more massive cathedral with secular worshipers would need more voices. Choir boys also did not need to know how to play instruments before entering their education. For prospective nuns hoping to enter a convent, they would need to have had all of their musical training to prepare them for auditions. Not all convent musicians were forced to endure these requirements for admittance, those whose parents could afford their dowry fee were able to learn after being admitted, like Vizzana.

While young organists certainly had a massive undertaking to ensure their acceptance into convents with a waved dowry fee, it is not clear that *bajonistas*, women who played the *bajón*, were required to know how to play the *bajón* before their

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<sup>50</sup> Sarah Boyton, Eric Rice, and Nicholas Orme are all thorough scholars in this field. Boyton and Rice's book *Young Choristers, 650-1700* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2006) is a great introductory resource on this topic. For a thorough English history see Nicholas Orme's *Medieval Schools: From Roman Britain to Renaissance England* (Yale, Yale University Press, 2006).

acceptance.<sup>51</sup><sup>52</sup> There are receipts in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century for *bajón* lessons in some Castilian convents.<sup>53</sup> *Bajones* were so significant to Spanish liturgical practice that some convents waved dowry fees if a girl's parents provided her a *bajón*.

### **Etiquette**

Baldesar Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier* was disseminated through much of Europe during the early modern era. This popularity shows that the ideas within this book were considered legitimate for court etiquette. It is crucial to recognize Castiglione as an observer of court etiquette rather than as an arbiter of rules. Most of Castiglione's book discusses the etiquette of men, though a small section in his Fourth book discusses behavioral restrictions for young women. Relevant to this topic, Castiglione lists proper and improper instruments for women to perform. According to Castiglione, certain instruments take away from the "gentleness" of women, for this reason only soft sounding plucked and keyboard instruments are appropriate for women.<sup>54</sup> Castiglione address wind instruments and percussion instruments specifically in this section. Castiglione also addresses masculine activities such as wrestling and sports that women should not engage in. It is interesting that he acknowledges that women are not incapable of such actions, but that they are unbecoming of women and take away from their delicateness. This may suggest that Castiglione knew of instances where women from higher classes deviated from gender norms for their pleasure. The full extent of these deviations still needs to be explored. While Castiglione's writings about etiquette are

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<sup>51</sup> Colleen Ruth Baade, "Music and Music-Making in Female Monasteries in Seventeenth-Century Castile" (PhD Diss., Duke University, 2001), 157

<sup>52</sup> James Kopp, *The Bassoon*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 33.

<sup>53</sup> Colleen Ruth Baade, "Music and Music-Making in Female Monasteries in Seventeenth-Century Castile" (PhD Diss., Duke University, 2001), 128.

<sup>54</sup> Baldesar Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier* trans. Leonard Eckstein Opdycke (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), 179.



essential to understanding gendered experiences in court, other writers on the subject should be sought out for a broader perspective. Castiglione's prominence as a figure for etiquette for historians and musicologists likely comes from the wide dissemination of his text throughout Europe and translation into many other languages.

It was not enough for women to stick to certain "feminine" instruments; in order to properly be feminine during performances women had to approach instrumental performance with timidity.<sup>55</sup> Women must also avoid certain ornamentation or complexity in their performances. These restrictions took away the possibility of appearing as a professional musician. The focus should be on the "sweetness of execution" rather than skill.<sup>56</sup> Just as nuns were restricted in their musical education, secular court women were to restrict themselves from appearing better than any men at court. The woman is an object, her musicianship does not matter, only the delicateness with which she can deliver her performance. In this setting the woman performer becomes an automaton appeasing the male ego.

Castiglione's perception of women seems to be as court objects rather than intellectual equals at court.<sup>57</sup> Certain royal women could inhabit masculine roles, though.<sup>58</sup> Castiglione removed any autonomy and power from the court women, depicting them as existing for aesthetic purposes rather than functional ruling purposes.<sup>59</sup> He condemned knowledge of arms use and horseback riding, something medieval women had been encouraged to learn.<sup>60</sup> He encourages women to learn how to read and write

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<sup>55</sup> James Haar, *The Science and Art of Renaissance Music* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 28.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Joan Kelly, *Women, History, and Theory* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 46.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* 33.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* 34-35.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* 85-86.

with their male peers, but anything that could be a threat to patriarchal rule and the aesthetic of the genteel and fragile woman is discouraged.<sup>61</sup> This is the deception of humanist teachings, women can learn with men, but ancient gender rules still restrict them as imperfect and irrational beings. The instruments specifically condemned by Castiglione, brass instruments and drums, are instruments of war and regality. Perhaps that specific condemnation has more to do with maintaining male control and participation in conquest out of the hands of women.

It is clear that the court restrictions on women in Early Modern Europe was rooted in a stronghold of patriarchal control of women's bodies. Capitalism also plays a substantial role in this control. The shame associated with marrying someone from a lower class, as mentioned in Chapter One, led to a culture that desired to put unmarried and widowed women away from the rest of society. Certainly, in their eyes it was for the "care of the women," but this form of "caring" is more of a socially acceptable way of disposing of daughters without strategic functions for family rule. Some of these daughters never heard from their parents after cloistering, as was the case Lucrezia Vizzana and her younger sister at Santa Cristina della Fondazza.<sup>62</sup> It is likely this isolation from general society that allowed these women the freedom to perform masculine instruments and to take on traditionally male leadership roles within their convents as teachers, traders of commerce, and accountants. Spain has a much more colorful and metropolitan history than the rest of Europe. Until the mid to late 15<sup>th</sup> century, there were still small kingdoms of Muslim control. It is possible that Muslim

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 86.

<sup>62</sup> Jo Ann Kay McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 262.

rule may have played a role in Spain's more liberal perception of women in society. The liturgical female dulcian tradition of Spain ultimately spread throughout the colonial Spanish empire; however, this phenomenon is more than just a matter of national boundaries, but a culturally contextual form of when and how women were allowed to engage in masculine roles.

Spain permitted secular women limited freedoms of estate control; specifically, widows were allowed to control their deceased husband's estates until their male heir came of age.<sup>63</sup> Women were given these same rights if their husbands left for the New World or joined a monastery. With these property rights women were allowed to purchase and sell land, represent themselves at court and in legal settings, and also were allowed to arrange marriages for their children. Essentially these women were viewed legally as men to the extent that legal protections intended for women with male guardians were waived, meaning they could be charged with harsher sentences than married women whose husbands acted as guardian responsible for their actions. This is important as in other countries such as England women would have to entrust their husband's estate as well as the custody of her male heir to a close family member such as a brother-in-law or father-in-law. Often the male heir would be taken in and educated by this family member. These laws existed prior to the Spanish crown suggesting that these policies may have come from a time when Spain was under Muslim control.<sup>64</sup> The extent of this history is too far reaching for the context of this paper but is important to feminist epistemology as a whole. More research should be done on this topic to understand

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<sup>63</sup> Grace E. Coolidge, "Neither Dumb, Deaf, nor Destitute of Understanding" Women as Guardians in Early Modern Spain" *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 36, no. 3 (2005): 673.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* 676-678

Medieval Muslim contributions to women's liberation further. It is important to note that while women were allowed to maintain their husbands' estates for a short period, this is not necessarily an example of women's liberation in the early modern era.

This was just a temporary pass that women received while waiting for their male heir to take over. In some cases, women would even join convents once their male heir came of age.<sup>65</sup> Liberation can only truly be defined by the liberated. While the ability to achieve a high level of education in convents may be considered liberating today, if the women themselves who lived in these situations did not feel liberated (by being refused their freedom to marry and have children), then no liberation has occurred. With this limited financial freedom, however, it becomes clear that women could legally be seen as equal to men in the eyes of the state. If women were always seen as inherently irrational and lacking, then there would have been no exception made for these women. Like the rest of Europe, estates would have gone to other male family members until a male heir came of age.

### **The Independence of Las Huelgas de las Reales**

Certain convents were afforded additional rights which were also conceptualized as masculine through wealth and power. Las Huelgas de las Reales, in particular, was known for their rejection of male-specific roles. In the Medieval Period, some of the sisters would listen to confession as well as lead Mass; both considered exclusively male activities in the Catholic church even today.<sup>66</sup> While the Catholic Church attempted to oppose this practice, it was clear both the laypeople and the nuns had no desire to change

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid. 677-678

<sup>66</sup> Jo Ann Kay McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 267-268.

their ways. Ultimately, it took church officials writing down the names of laypeople to halt excommunication for this practice. While Las Huelgas took more power into their hands, they did not participate in traditionally masculine arenas of performance as some Castilian nuns did. Instead, Las Huelgas had the resources to hire male musicians for their services. This practice continued even after the stricter cloistering of post-Tridentine Reforms. Las Huelgas received so much freedom due to their connections to royal families in Spain. Essentially, Las Huelgas was the dumping grounds for daughters from the highest tiers of Spanish society. Considering the tradition of Spanish monarchs to defy church laws for their gain it is not surprising that these daughters felt entitled to similar delinquency. Las Huelgas here stands as an example of privileged defiance to the Catholic Church as an institution.

Examples of liberation in convent life appear in Spanish inheritance rights. In Spain, nuns could take a family member to court if they felt they were not receiving their fair share of an inheritance. While parents were supposed to take care of the financial needs of their cloistered daughters, when parents passed sibling or uncles would have to take over this duty. This shows the complex positions of nuns in society. By rejecting secular society nuns are in a sense “dead to the world.”<sup>67</sup> However, because convents relied on a variety of income streams, including maintenance and dowry fees from family members, it was essential to keep obligate financial ties to parents. Nuns had a right to their dowry; something married secular women did not. Nuns also had the right to decide where their inheritance should go.<sup>68</sup> Nuns could take legal action against family members

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<sup>67</sup> Elizabeth A. Leffeldt, “Convents as Litigants: Dowry and Inheritance Disputes in Early Modern Spain” *Journal of Social History* 33, no. 3 (2000): 646.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

if family members withheld their portion of the familial inheritance. This is yet another instance of women being able to represent themselves in a court of law. The trade-offs of being cloistered but having more financial independence could be seen as a form of liberation if the cloistering were not forced or “heavily encouraged” by family members.

It is evident that a large-scale culture phenomena occurred in Spain after the popularization of the dulcian. Why exactly there was a focus on including their modified *bajones* into all religious services, from services for the laypeople to cloistered convents is an exciting venue for further research.

### **Conclusion**

Women in the early modern era were at an inherent disadvantage from the day of their birth due to archaic gender theories of perfection that snowballed into a rigid gender system as capitalism rose after the Medieval Era. Those growing effects led to a culture that gendered wind instruments to such a degree that was considered unsightly for women to perform wind instruments publicly. The only accounts of women performing these instruments that figure in prominently to West music epistemology have been the women of Vivaldi’s Ospedale. These women are likely only discussed due to their proximity to Vivaldi. Here the effects of gendering and expansion of women breaking this culture norm have been considered. Despite a broad continental rejection of women as wind performers, Spain developed and cultivated a significant convent nun tradition on *bajones*, not only in Spain but also in the New World. Spain granted women the unique ability to petition for inheritance rights as well as take over their family estate in the absence of the original patriarch.

### **Chapter Three: The Gendering of Instruments**

This chapter will expand upon Early Modern understandings of sex and gender from the last chapter, focusing on their cultural effects on instruments. A brief history of instrumental gendering will be given from a strictly Western perspective. After that, the lives and context of nun musicians and orphaned girls will be compared. Finally, there will be a section looking at recent research of instrumental gendering in a modern context. This look at recent research gives legitimacy to the effects of instrumental gendering over the last few centuries.

#### **Before the Early Modern Era**

The assignment of specific instruments to certain genders existed as far back as Ancient Greece. In Ancient Greece, the aulos, with its loud and harsh double reeded timbre, was considered feminine. By contrast stringed instruments were deemed to be masculine and refined.<sup>69</sup> This ancient social norm is the opposite of those outlined in the early modern era by Castiglione, which only permit women to play quiet stringed instruments. This contrast shows the arbitrary nature of gender attribution to musical instruments throughout western history. Women involved with the Cult of Dionysus in Ancient Greece were seen as wild and unrefined performing their skill auloses tuned to phrygian mode. Steblin points out that even Old Testament Biblical allegory has David playing the harp and his sister playing the timbrel.<sup>70</sup> A massive shift occurred somewhere

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<sup>69</sup> Rita Steblin, "The Gender Stereotyping of Musical Instruments in the Western Tradition" *Voices of Women: Essays in Honour of Violet Archer* 6, no. 1 (1995): 130-131.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* 131.

between the Medieval Period and Ancient Greece. The scope of that topic is too broad for this thesis, but further research should be done to understand these extreme cultural shifts. In a sense, women taking up the *bajón* is just a reversion back to older gendered instruments. This diachronic inversion of gender biases and identities is perhaps only orthogonal to the case of the *bajón* and Early Modern Spanish convents, but the connection is indeed poetic; a distant lineage from an all-female cult to cloistered nuns in Early Modern Spain.

### **The Education of Nun Musicians**

Just how vital was the *bajón* to Spanish liturgical practice? The *bajón* was so significant that enslaved indigenous and African people in the New World were sometimes forced to play the instrument.<sup>71</sup> Those forced to play the instrument through slavery were sometimes renamed after the instrument. More research needs to be done to understand the effects of race and *bajón* tradition in the New World. Currently, there is no record explaining why this particular wind instrument developed such prominence with Spanish liturgical practice; there are only employment records and receipts for instrument purchases and repairs from the late 16<sup>th</sup> century through the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>72</sup> What is interesting is the longevity of this practice. *Bajonistas*, and sometimes bassoonists, were employed up until the 1930s in some areas, including parts of Mexico. Outside of historical recreations of instruments, the dulcian fell entirely out of favor in the rest of Europe after the invention of the bassoon which was much more portable due to its separate parts. Considering those in convents generally do not need to travel around this may explain in part why the traditions lasted for some time after the invention of the

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<sup>71</sup> James Kopp, *The Bassoon* (Cambridge: University of Yale Press, 2012), 40.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* 45.



bassoon, but it does not explain its longevity into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, suggesting its persistence is due to its symbolic significance in terms of gender. More research is needed, perhaps in the form of diary accounts of *bajonistas*, to figure out what was so appealing about the *bajón*.

In other convents around Europe, it was common for there to be one nun, like Vizzana's aunt (mentioned in the first chapter), to teach music to all of the younger nuns. Singing lessons and organ lessons, except in orders or areas that prohibited them, were fairly common. In Spain, organs were the only instrument more popular than dulcians in convents. While there are no records on the upbringing of nun *bajonistas*, there are accounts of nun organists. There are records of convents hiring outside teachers for *bajonistas*, suggesting many nun's did not arrive already knowing how to play the instrument.<sup>73</sup> Much of the information about the music training of young nuns comes from Pablo Nassarre, a blind Spanish priest and organist. Nassarre wrote treatises detailing when to start a prospective nuns musical training as well as what skills were essential for a convent organist. Girls would start their musical training for convent life as young as six years old.<sup>74</sup> According to Nassarre, it was important to start girls in what he considered to be the "first stage" of the voice, from about ages six to nine. Choir boys should not start until the "second stage" of their voice, around ages nine to thirteen according to Nassarre. This may explain why Nassarre complained that girls were "scarcely less trouble than teaching the blind music." Without the knowledge of these age

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<sup>73</sup> Colleen Ruth Baade, "Music and Music-Making in Female Monasteries in Seventeenth-Century Castile" (PhD Diss., Duke University, 2001), 128.

<sup>74</sup> Colleen Baade, "Nun Musicians as Teachers and Students in Early Modern Spain" in *Music Education in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* ed. Russell E. Murray Jr. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 269-270.

differences, one could incorrectly assume this is due to deficiencies of women to learn music rather than a significant age difference between when girls and boys begin their musical training.

While improvisation is considered an important skill for nun organists, composition is not. Improvisation was to be taught up to five voices. Nassarre states that it is not that girls lack the ability to learn composition, instead it is that nuns have no need to compose in the convent and that there is also not enough time from when girls begin their lessons to when they need to audition for convent careers. Because this is based off of Spanish traditions, a broad statement that this applied to all convent nuns throughout Europe cannot be made, but considering the focus of this document, it is important to note.

One can only speculate as to when or at what age *bajonistas* typically began their training. theorizes that nun *bajonistas* were likely taught at first by private teachers inside the convent and then by older nuns after stricter cloistering rules were enforced. It could have been the ability of a family to afford a *bajón* that determined the career of a *bajonista* rather than prior training. In some instances, a *bajón* could wave the dowery fees for prospective nuns.<sup>75</sup> More research is needed to fully understand the scope of *bajón* tradition as well as the *bajón* education of these convent *bajonostas*. In addition to *bajonistas*, there are accounts of nun *corneta* and *chirmias* players, though more research is needed to determine the prevalence of such instruments in Spanish liturgical ensembles.<sup>76</sup> If this statement is substantiated, it could open up an entire area of research for the brass participation of Early Modern Spanish nuns. Raising further questions about

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid. 101.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. 104.

the position of women as performers and the gendering of instruments within European society from a historical perspective.

### **Orphaned Girls as Accomplished Musicians**

Looking at the Ospedale tradition in Italy, it is clear that society was generally aware of the musical capacity of women. While Vivaldi's involvement is most often discussed, these musical institutions for orphans and abandoned children existed as far back as the mid 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>77</sup> Originally these institutions were founded as a way to ensure orphaned children had the opportunity to be educated and either find work or be married off one day. Children were initially taught instruments to help fill out choir and instrumental parts for nearby convents, cathedrals, and monasteries. Around the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century it was realized that the musical ability of these children could be capitalized upon for profit to help ensure their institutions had adequate funding for resources and staff. These institutions for orphaned girls were only able to claim a profit from their performances because there was an audience of people with a desire to hear their musical abilities.

What is significant about the young girls ensembles is their popularity. Even though these girls were admired for their musical abilities, they were still scandalous. Screens hid the children so as they performed as to not excite or upset their audiences. This does not mean that audiences were unaware of who the performers were, they simply were not able to see them while performing. This shows that it is the visual aspect of performance that was most scandalous, not the music produced from the girls. In a similar vein, it is possible that Spain's *bajón* tradition was allowed to be encouraged

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<sup>77</sup> Jane L. Baldauf-Berdes, *Women Musicians of Venice: Musical Foundations, 1525-1855*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 47.

because the women were not seen by the general public. Often times the nuns were heard as disembodied voices behind convent walls and screens. Paleotti complained quite a bit about the crowds surrounding Santa Cristina, something that likely encouraged him to crack down on musical expression within the convent.<sup>78</sup>

What is it that was so scandalous about seeing women perform wind instruments? For gamba instruments, the requirement of slightly spread legs created an obvious objection due to the sensual scene it created. There is a case made by Castiglione that wind took away gentleness from women because of the required facial distortions.<sup>79</sup>

### **Modern Perception of Instrumental Gendering Among Children**

Understanding the cultural assignment of gender to instruments allows us to understand our own biases and applications of masculinity and femininity. Recent studies from the late 1990s and early 2000s have consistently shown that children gravitate towards certain instruments depending on their gender.<sup>80</sup> Boys tend to prefer drums, guitar, and trump, while girls prefer flute, piano, and violin. It is interesting that boys prefer the same types of instruments that Castiglione prescribed as unfeminine, percussion and brass. The feminization of flute and violin seems to be a more recent development; however, the piano has been a fairly feminine or gender-neutral instrument for quite some time. Survey data of music majors and non-music majors has shown consistent gender perceptions among adults, with tuba being the most masculine and flute

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<sup>78</sup> Craig Monson, *Nuns Behaving Badly: Tales of Music, Magic, Art, and Arson in the Convents of Italy*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 30.

<sup>79</sup> Rita Steblin, "The Gender Stereotyping of Musical Instruments in Western Tradition," *Voices of Essays in Honor of Violet Archer* Vol. 16, No. 1 (1995): 130.

<sup>80</sup> Elizabeth Andang'o and Caroline Brendel Pachec, *The Children's Home Musical Experience Across the World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 70.

the most feminine.<sup>81</sup> This gives legitimacy to the claim that instruments are still socially gendered in a society where women have more autonomy than previous generations. What is interesting about these perceptions is that studies done on children in the third grade showed that instrument preferences were not guided by social implications of masculine and feminine.<sup>82</sup> For example, boys in the third-grade selected flute, clarinet, cello, and violin as their preferred instruments. In fifth grade, children seem to internalize social instrument gendering, as by that age boys shifted to choosing traditionally masculine instruments as their top choice, while girls still chose a wide range of instruments.<sup>83</sup>

### **Conclusion**

What causes instruments to become socially gendered? Is it an innate product of timbral differences? Clearly not as seen with the aulus. What is more likely is the function of instruments within a society led to their gender classification. Brass instruments are still used in powerful fanfares in movies and continue to have military symbolism due to marching traditions. In the case of Spanish convents, the liturgical use of *bajones* may have given the instrument a gender-neutral context. However, there is also the possibility that women lost aspects of their socially enforced femininity when cloistered. This is not say that nuns were not seen as women, rather that nuns had a different context as women who did not participate with secular society. As seen in Chapter Two, nuns were able to represent themselves legally when securing their inheritance rights.

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<sup>81</sup> Gina M. F. Wych, "Gender and Instrument Associations, Stereotypes, and Stratification: A Literature Review," *National Association for Music Education* Vol. 30, No. 2 (2012): 23.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* 30.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

## **Conclusion**

The musical activities of all women in the early modern era gives a greater understanding of European music culture as a whole. While each country within Europe had their own styles and traditions, the reach of patriarchal control of women's musical performance was largely the same throughout the continent. By studying the lives of convent musicians, a better understanding of both convent life and gender roles emerges. While many compositions from convents have been lost to time, their account recorders and papers of acceptance into their respective sisterhoods gives a glimpse of life behind cloistering walls. From these records, women's preparation for life as a convent musician emerges, offering a counterbalance to the musical education of choir boys. The Tridentine Reformation gains new significance in its effects on nuns, through the microcosm of monastic music law. The vastness of the population of nuns throughout Catholic Europe underscores issues with larger patriarchal structures systemically removing educated women from secular society.

While many convent musicians did not have children (only widows who entered typically did), they still create a lineage of women performers in West musical traditions. The defiant acts of women like Lucrezzia Vizzana show the desire for female liberation hundreds of years before the fight for suffrage in the US and Europe. As the stories of women performers are chronicled and women composers are increasingly added to Western epistemology, a better understanding of society outside of the traditional patriarchal view becomes clearer.

Spain offers a unique perspective of women performers in the early modern era. The general social consensus for women of higher statuses according to Castiglione was that they should only play delicate plucked instruments and sing. This tradition lasted for centuries, in some areas as late as the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>84</sup> Why was the *bajón* so important to Spanish liturgical music after the mid 6<sup>th</sup> century? This question requires more research into Spanish archives and the diaries of music directors. This centuries long tradition allows modern women bassoonists to craft a lineage with other women performers, particularly women in the Iberian Peninsula and in Latin America.

Feminist and historic medical perspectives offer different lenses for understanding the lives and contexts of these nun *bajónistas*. Though encouraged, resources for private teachers was limited after the Council of Trent enforced stricter cloistering laws. The ability for women to rely on their own musical tradition for centuries shows the tenacity and determination of women in these oppressive institutions. At the same time analyzing convents allows for a broader perspective as institutions of liberation, if also of upholding patriarchal norms. While women were often coerced into joining convents by their families, convents gave women the ability to live outside of motherhood, the ability to lead their own communities, and the ability to control their own inheritance and dowries. Such financial independence was only seen in very wealthy aristocratic women, court musicians, and courtesans.

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<sup>84</sup> James Kopp, *The Bassoon* (Cambridge: Yale University Press, 2012). 45.

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