

Chapter 1

Introduction

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Sacred songs in the vernacular—whether referred to as *chançonetas*, *ensaladas*, villancicos, *cantadas* or *pastorelas*—are counted as one of the largest corpus of music cultivated in Spain, and, to some extent, in Portugal as well as the areas of influence of both countries, from the 15th to the 19th century. Form and style, both poetic and musical, changed, sometimes radically, over this period, to the extent that it is not easy to find parallels between a simple two-voice polyphonic song from the *Cancionero Musical de Astudillo* in the early 15th century and a large polychoral and polysectional cantata of the mid-18th century, not to mention the multiform *ensaladas* of the 16th century, the burlesque and sometimes transgressive *jácaras*, or the exalted, contemplative and almost mystical *tonos a lo divino* of the late 17th century.

However, all these compositions have significant traits in common, and it makes it possible to approach them in a single volume with the umbrella title ‘devotional music’. This term relates more clearly to a musical practice whose roots are common to most European countries, yet this practice had a longer—and peculiar—history in Spain, particularly after the Counter-Reformation. For the purposes of this volume, ‘devotional music’ refers to a variety of songs in the vernacular, written by learned poets and composers, and performed by professional musicians, which have their natural space within public sacred celebrations, to the extent that they came to be inserted into the liturgy of major Catholic feast days: notably at the end of Vespers, after the responsories of Matins, during the Offertory and the Elevation of the Mass or in the many processions inside and outside churches. Devotional music could also embrace forms of private, individual worship, though in the case of the diverse genres studied here the focus falls mainly on public forms of devotion, either in small, closed circles, such as convents or private chapels and oratorios, or, more often, in major public spaces such as cathedrals or royal chapels. From this perspective, devotional music is of interest to the 21st-century scholar as a cultural phenomenon that goes well beyond questions of musical or literary value in its role as a major vehicle for communal worship, popular devotion, social representation, political propaganda, religious indoctrination, theological transmission or musical training, with all the fascinating implications raised by such a breadth of purpose and practice.

Indeed, an historical practice that endures for more than four centuries can hardly be designated by a single term: yet for most of their history, these devotional compositions were generically called ‘villancicos’. The word ‘villancico’ emerged in the second half of the 15th century to designate the refrain of a certain type of secular song in the vernacular which, though cultivated by learned poets and musicians, took

its inspiration from popular models usually with a clear dance ancestry. It did not take very long for the word to be used to denominate the whole composition divided into refrain and verses ('cabeza y pies') which was characterized by the asymmetry of text and music between the two sections [Pope and Laird, 2001]. During this early period, devotional songs already existed but were normally referred to as 'coplas' or 'chançonetas'. As some of these began to correspond to what would become the villancio mould, the term 'villancico' began to be used to designate sacred songs in the vernacular, together with other terms such as 'canciones' or 'villanescas', to the extent that, by the early 17th century its use became restricted to designate these kinds of pieces; other terms were then used for their secular counterparts, notably 'letra' or 'tono'. Probably from around the mid-19th century the word 'villancico' began to be used for popular Christmas songs, and this is the current meaning of the term.

The first scholar to identify and dissect the polysemy of the term villancico was José Subirá [1962: 5], who proposed four different species of villancicos on the basis of their chronology and function although his study had little influence in later studies: 1) the secular villancico ('villancico profano' or 'cortesano'), commonly performed at court and in culturally sophisticated circles during the 15th and 16th centuries; 2) the sacred villancico ('villancico religioso'), dedicated to religious services and composed by learned musicians, which lasted from the late 15th to the 19th century; 3) the dramatic villancico ('villancico teatral' or 'escénico'), inserted into theatrical performances, mostly in the late 15th and 16th centuries; 4) the folk villancico ('villancico popular') performed in modern times during the religious festivals of Christmastide.¹ The only significant limitation of this proposal is that it overlooks the—sometimes profound—connections between the different species of villancico: the possible popular background of the court, dramatic and particularly sacred villancico (as explored by Pepe Rey in his contribution to this volume); the connections between the dramatic villancico and both its secular and sacred counterparts (as discussed in the chapters by Alberto del Río and Tess Knighton) or the still unexplored relationship between the modern Christmas villancico—Subirá's 'villancico popular'—with the sacred villancico cultivated by learned musicians in earlier periods.

As regards the chronological scope of this book, the polysemy of the term 'villancico' can be reduced to two main connotations which do not coincide exactly

1 It is interesting to observe the parallel difficulties with regard to the definition of the English carol. The polysemy of the term in medieval England is recognized as deriving from its multiplicity of functions, six of which were proposed by Robbins in the 10th Congress of the IMS in Ljubjana [Stevens, 1970: 285-86]. This was further developed by Stevens in *New Grove 2*, where he emphasizes the problem of definition: 'The strictly formal definition of the carol needs supplementing, partly because a definition by musico-poetical form inadequately describes a social phenomenon such as the medieval carol. From a social point of view there are at least four major types of carol to be considered: (i) a courtly or popular dance-song; (ii) a popular religious song analogous in many respects to the Italian lauda; (iii) a popular litany or processional song; (iv) ecclesiastical polyphony. These four types still leave other manifestations of the carol unclassified, but a familiarity with the main traditions provides the necessary context for study of the 15th-century polyphonic genre as music' [Stevens and Libby, 2001: 802].

with those proposed by Subirá. On the one hand, villancico is used to refer to compositions identified by formal traits—particularly the combination of *estribillo* and *coplas*—disregarding poetic content, musical style and function; this formal meaning of villancico is dominant in the 15th and 16th centuries. On the other hand, villancico is used generically to denote all learned songs in the vernacular performed in a sacred context; this meaning is predominant from the late 16th to around the mid-19th century. The distinction between ‘villancico form’ and ‘villancico genre’ respectively for each of these uses of the term was first made by Torrente [1997a; 2000a]. More recently, Illari has proposed that this distinction should be expanded and has suggested that the concept of ‘metagenre’ should be applied to the Baroque villancico, whose ‘main basis for a characterization ... perhaps, rather than any set of crystallized features, is the peculiar dynamic that shaped it: processes rather than products’. From this perspective, ‘the villancico seems to result from what we can call a metageneric attitude, of writing part songs with references to other kinds of songs (especially, popular references), adapted for different social and aesthetic functions, and through different means and procedures’ [Illari, 2001: I, 140]. Bombi’s chapter in this volume departs from the dialectics of both concepts (genre vs metagenre) to suggest a more precise distinction through the study of literary sources from the late Baroque.

This conceptual debate will no doubt continue, but it is true that during the 17th and 18th centuries a regular generic use of the word ‘villancico’ to designate all sorts of devotional songs can be identified. This co-existed with a more restricted use of the term to refer to a certain type of devotional song characterized by particular formal and structural aspects. The evidence for synchronic use of the same word with two different levels of meaning—one generic, one specific—presents a significant challenge to the modern scholar who is normally expected to employ precise, unambiguous terminology. In the case of the villancico, this terminological ambiguity should not be overlooked or concealed for it doubtless reflects its polysemy in the minds of its cultivators and listeners in a given period. Thus, the term villancico is used by the contributors to this book in both its generic and specific senses.²

The prevalence during the 17th and 18th centuries of ‘villancico’ as a generic word with formal implications led most scholars to assume that the roots of the genre were to be found in those compositions that were originally called ‘villancicos’ and, by extension, in those which shared similar formal traits. This organic approach has dominated musicological studies until very recently [Rubio, 1979a; Querol Gavaldá, 1982; Laird, 1986; 1997; Capdepón, 1993], and can still be observed in recent

2 This terminological problem is emerging as a common challenge in the study of historical musical genres. Colin Timms [1998] has proposed that ‘there might be some merit in using the word “cantata” as an umbrella term for the entire repertory of continuo-accompanied chamber cantatas, arias, madrigals, canzonette, duetti and the rest—as well, as in its accepted, more limited sense’; while Dreyfus has stressed the conceptual problems deriving from the pervasive application of 19th-century concepts of musical genres as manifestations of basic artistic forms (*die Kunstformen*), to propose ‘genre can best be understood as referring to the categories by which people (at any historical moment) slice up kinds of experience and think about them as discrete objects’ [1996: 139]. The duality of generic and specific use of the term ‘villancico’ in Spain is further discussed in Torrente [2000a].

reference works such as *The New Grove* [Pope and Laird, 2001] and the *Diccionario de la música española e hispanoamericana* [Villanueva, 2002]. This model ‘assumes that the villancico was some sort of “living being” which at a certain point in history was born, grew, evolved, declined and died, without losing its essential identity’ [Torrente, 2000a: 63], yet it overlooks the pool of music and poetic genres which, despite having different forms and/or names, share a number of traits, particularly in terms of function, with those works specifically denominated villancico. The approach adopted here is more diverse, taking as its point of departure the assumption that the most significant points in common for the devotional genres studied here are: function in public sacred celebrations, use of vernacular text, inspiration in secular models and a consistent demand for new works.

The historiographical tradition for devotional music in the Spanish-speaking world in general and for the sacred villancico in particular has been at best patchy and generally impoverished. Until recently, both music and literary studies tended to focus on the early period of its development as a musico-literary genre—the late 15th and early 16th centuries. It is noteworthy that the single most important monograph dedicated to the secular villancico from the literary viewpoint [Sánchez Romeralo, 1969] does not discuss its sacred counterpart, nor does it take into account the music; it is another seminal study that provides the first significant analysis of religious poetry used in devotional songs [Wardropper, 1958]. Musical approaches have tended to focus more on editing the works or analysing formal issues, as is the case of Anglés [1947; 1954], Bal y Gay [1944], Pope [1944; 1954; 1980], or Querol Gavaldá [1952; 1955-57; 1963], to mention only a few. The most significant and comprehensive reflections are: the article published in 1962 by José Subirá discussed above; María Esther Grebe’s essay [1969] on the villancico in Latin America which attempts the first global perspective of the genre as it developed on the American continent; and, much more recently, Manuel Carlos de Brito’s essay [1989] which provides one of the best insights into the sacred villancico and its relationship with forms of popular devotion and entertainment.

The story for the Baroque villancico—if the adjective ‘Baroque’ can still be used³—is completely different. In 1935 Viçenc Ripollès published the first edition of

3 The periodization of music history, and particularly the acknowledgement of a period that could be called ‘Baroque’, has been a subject of much controversy in the last few years, as is witnessed by two recent but opposing views. Richard Taruskin rejects the use of ‘Baroque’ for a period in music history but he does not challenge the accepted unity of the period or justify his alternative division in centuries—which is as arbitrary as any other human construction—: “‘Baroque’ is a term that musicians don’t need. Trying to justify it in any terms that actually relate to the music of the period has never led to anything but quibbling, sophistry and tergiversation. All it is now is a commercial logo for a kind of “classical music” that record companies and radio stations market as sonic wallpaper. Let’s try to forget it’ [2005: I, 797]. Hill has recently published a textbook entitled *Baroque music*, where the unity of the music composed in the period covered (1580-1750) ‘is sought in its cultural meaning, rather than in any specific set of technical, stylistic or expressive features’. As regards the transition between Renaissance and Baroque, Tim Carter reminds us that ‘any attempts at period-definition are bound to fail the test of close scrutiny, however crucial such categories may be to our conceptualization of historical processes’ [1992: 20].

18th-century villancicos and cantatas with a substantial introduction. However, the nationalistic thinking that pervaded Spanish culture after the Civil War prevented any further work in that direction until the 1970s,⁴ when Querol Gavaldá published a selection of solo songs which included several devotional pieces [1973]. This was followed by José Climent's complete edition of the villancicos by Juan Bautista Comes [1977-79] and Samuel Rubio's selection of villancicos by Antonio Soler—together with a short but very influential study of the polyphonic villancico [1979]. This eclosion may well have been in part a Spanish reaction towards the editions of Latin American villancicos published that decade by Claro Valdés [1974] and Stevenson [1974], as well as to the rediscovery of the Portuguese villancico in several volumes of the series *Portugaliae Musica* by Stevenson [1976], Brito [1983] and Alegría [1985]. In the 1980s, Miguel Querol Gavaldá undertook the publication of a number of editions of Baroque music, some of which included villancicos and other genres in the series *Monumentos de la Música Española* [1982; 1988].

This big wave of editions of Iberian and Latin American villancicos from the 17th and 18th centuries ran parallel to the publication of music catalogues of most Spanish cathedrals and major ecclesiastical institutions,⁵ as well as studies of musical activity in those institutions, starting with the seminal monograph on Granada Cathedral by José López-Calo [1963b]. The publication in 1990 and 1992 of the catalogues of villancico chapbooks in the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid—by far the largest collection of this kind of imprints in the world—was critical material for the rediscovery and re-appraisal of this kind of source.⁶

This substantial academic production, although uneven in quality, made accessible in a short period of time a large amount of information and source material which, among many other questions, established the central role of the sacred villancico in Spanish musical life, and became the starting-point for further research, including a number of doctoral dissertations in which the sacred villancico was the focus. The theses by Laird [1986], Villanueva [1988], Sánchez Siscart [1991], Capdepón [1991], Rifé [1992], Caballero [1994], Ezquerro [1996], Torrente [1997a], Cabero Pueyo [1997], Lambea [1998] and Bombi [2001], among others, demonstrate the re-appraisal of the villancico as a central genre in Spanish music history, expanding existing knowledge in many ways, yet only a few of these provided new perspectives beyond the traditional approach. Other recent doctoral dissertations, including those of Nery [1990], Ros Fábregas [1992], Marín [2000a], Illari [2001], Vera [2001], Rodríguez [2003] and Hathaway [2005], though not focusing exclusively on the villancico, nevertheless do afford new and refreshing perspectives. The last decade

4 On the pervading nationalistic sensibility in Spanish musicology see Carreras [2000a].

5 The large number of catalogues of Spanish music archives and studies of cathedral music cannot be presented in full here. Information can be found in the relevant entries of the *DMEH* as well as in the entry on the most prolific researcher of cathedral music, José López-Calo [Casares, 2000].

6 The Biblioteca Nacional houses more than 2,600 copies of some 2,000 different imprints which contain the texts of some 12,000 villancicos. See *CVBN* and *CVBN*. The next most important collection in terms of number of imprints is the British Library, with some 200 chapbooks which are catalogued in *CDPV* 1.

or so has witnessed a number of works that emphasize understanding of the sacred villancico as a historical and cultural phenomenon, most of them in the form of introductions to music editions or essays scattered in books and journals. This includes a number of works by Bombi, Caballero, Carreras, Gómez Muntané, Hathaway, Illari, Knighton, Laird, Leza, Luis Iglesias, Marín, Nery, Rey, Rodríguez, Sánchez-Siscart, Torrente and others which are listed in the bibliography. Nevertheless, these contributions would not appear yet to have had sufficiently widespread influence to overcome traditional approaches to the genre in mainstream reference works.

The sacred villancico and other devotional genres have not enjoyed great attention in non-Iberian music scholarship. Despite the existence of interesting contributions in English well before the dawn of the 21st century,⁷ these have hardly found echo beyond specialized Hispanic studies. Recent contributions to music dictionaries are somewhat disappointing. The new edition of *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* renewed the old article 'villancico' by Isabel Pope [1966] with a shorter essay by Robert Stevenson [1998] which certainly dedicates more attention to the eclosion of the genre in the 17th and 18th centuries, yet still adheres to the organic conception of the genre without a clear discrimination between the early villancico, characterized by its form and the later manifestations of the genre, characterized by their function. The same organic view can be identified in *New Grove 2*, which includes a revision by Paul Laird [Pope and Laird, 2001] of Pope and Stanford's original article for the 1980 edition. Laird's contribution is, however, much further developed than the original and devotes most attention to the period of major flourishing of the genre, exploring various developments as regards form, style and function, as well as to the gradual suppression of the genre in the decades after the mid-18th century.

One major advance in *New Grove 2* which must be acknowledged here is the inclusion of a section dedicated to Spain in the article 'Cantata' [Carreras, 2001]. Carreras's article embraces both the secular and sacred dimensions of the cantata as Italianate importations which occupy the functional space of related genres in the Spanish tradition, the *tono humano* and the villancico respectively. Carreras provides the best insight into one of the most significant devotional genres cultivated in Spain as regards not only history and formal development but also function and poetic content, exploring the blurred borderlines with related genres, including the villancico.

Another remarkable step took place with the publication in 1997 of the first comprehensive monograph on the sacred villancico written in any language, *Towards a history of the Spanish villancico* by Paul Laird, which was also the first significant attempt to place the villancico on the map of mainstream musicology. The book offers a number of innovative approaches, particularly the systematic use of text imprints as primary sources and the study of circulation of text and music in the Iberian dominions, and this has established a model for the work of several scholars and is changing dramatically understanding of the genre. The main drawbacks are the limited critical reflection about the early history of the genre—up to the mid-17th century—which results in the adherence to the approach found in earlier literature,

7 See St Amour [1940], Pope [1954], Espinosa [1923], Harrison [1992], Russell [1976], Sánchez [1978; 1988], Brito [1979], Taylor [1984], González-Quiñones [1985].

and the scarce use of documentary information such as descriptions ('relaciones'), ceremonials or censures which have proved in recent years to be crucial to understanding the cultivation of the villancico.⁸

It was a decade ago that Paul Laird claimed 'the villancico is almost certainly one of the least understood Renaissance and Baroque genres. One who has spent time with this striking repertory longs for the day when general histories will place the villancico next to the madrigal, cantata and chanson as part of the musicological canon' [1997: xviii]. Without going so far as to suggest that the villancico should be taken up into the celestial realm of canonical Western musical genres—as if it were a metamorphosed Ovidian character in a 17th-century Venetian opera—it is unfortunate that Laird's hopes have found so little echo in the more general musical historiography of the last ten years. No single reference to this web of devotional genres is found in the 3,500 pages of Taruskin's Titanic contribution to recent music historiography, *The Oxford history of Western music* [2005], which perpetuates its historical oblivion already evident in the volumes edited by Abraham [1968] and Lewis and Fortune [1975] of the *New Oxford History of Music*.⁹ This is not altogether surprising, perhaps, as Taruskin's history, despite its fresh and stimulating approach, rarely steps outside the canonic works, authors and genres of the Western tradition. It is also true that the sacred villancico and related genres have been virtually absent from any major historical synthesis. While this could be explained in the mid-20th century as an inevitable consequence of the scarcity of studies and editions—for example in the works of Lang [1941], Bukofzer [1947], Palisca [1968], Abraham [1968] and Lewis and Fortune [1975], as well as in Chase's *The music of Spain* [1942]—the extent and quality of recent research on the villancico renders this completely unacceptable now.

The progressive investigation of devotional music from the 1970s in Spain, Portugal and Latin America has, however, had some impact in other general histories written outside these countries. Lorenzo Bianconi was probably the forerunner in his *Music in the seventeenth century*,¹⁰ which dedicates a whole section to 'catholic devotional music'. While this study focuses mostly on Italy, it also provides stimulating ideas leading to an understanding of the Spanish sacred villancico within a European context. A re-appraisal of the importance of musical practice in the Iberian Peninsula and the New World during the 15th to 18th centuries allowed for the introduction of chapters dedicated to these regions in several multiauthored volumes on music history. The essays published by Tess Knighton [1989], Louise Stein [1991; 1993b; 1993c] and Rui Vieira Nery [2004] include short passages dedicated to devotional music that show an awareness of its importance in the Iberian world that had until then been neglected in mainstream musicology.

8 Further thought on Laird's monograph can be found in Torrente [2000b].

9 The volume devoted to the Renaissance includes an extended essay about Spain by Anglés [1968] which concentrates almost exclusively on Latin liturgical music. There is no reference whatsoever to Spain and Portugal in the chapters focusing on church music by Lewis & Fortune [1975].

10 [1987: 122-23]; originally published as *Il seicento* [1982].

The sacred villancico has also found a place in more recent publications, such as *The Cambridge history of seventeenth century music* [Carter and Butt, 2005]. The essay by Robert L. Kendrick on devotional music devotes three short but substantial pages to the villancico, which he claims to be, clearly following Laird, ‘one of the largest (if least studied) of any [genre] in Europe. It is also one of the most interesting’ [2005: 353-55]. Its main limitation is that, with the exception of Laird, all his bibliographical references are from before 1990. The same year saw the publication of a major monograph on Baroque music by John Walter Hill for the W. W. Norton History of Music series, which also devotes a chapter to music in the Iberian Peninsula and the Spanish and Portuguese colonies. This does include a section (though only six pages long) dedicated to the sacred villancico which analyses music and poetic examples by the Valencian composer Juan Bautista Comes and the ‘Mexican’ Juan Gutiérrez de Padilla [2005: 262-68]. This should truly be regarded as a turning-point, as for the first time the attention to Hispanic devotional genres in a mainstream historical synthesis goes beyond general description to the study of specific examples of both text and music. Bianconi, Knighton, Stein, Kendrick and Hill seem to have established new milestones along the route pointed by Paul Laird in 1997.

All the contributions to this volume bring new approaches to bear on the analysis of the villancico and its context and open up new avenues for further research. Non-musical and hitherto little-used source materials such as the printed chapbooks of villancico texts or printed descriptions (‘relaciones’) or ceremonials and devotional tracts shed new light on the function, performance spaces and impact of the villancico and related genres. New approaches include quantitative history, literary theory, and social anthropology, all of which open up new perspectives on the importance of devotional music in the early modern period.

The insights afforded by approaching the subject from other view points are clearly illustrated in the chapter by Pepe Rey, which demonstrates that the inherent variety in sacred song, stemming from song-types that had almost certainly existed orally for centuries, emerged into the written tradition during the 15th century as a means of integration and appropriation of forms of popular worship—very often associated with pre-Christian forms of religiosity—on the part of church authorities. The delicate balance between the villancico’s popular origins and its control by ecclesiastical hierarchies is one of the idiosyncrasies of the genre throughout its history. On the one hand, it allowed a permanent osmosis with the complex of secular forms of music, poetry and drama, either low and popular—such as *jácaras* and *mojigangas*—or elevated and élitist—such as ‘conceptist’ poetry or Italian opera; on the other, it attracted regular prosecution from moralistic, ecclesiastical, and even Inquisitorial authorities.¹¹ Yet, it was surely this secular background and these fashionable modes of expression that made the villancico so attractive to church-goers over the centuries.

The early stages of this process seem to have been greatly influenced by the Franciscan order, together with the female counterpart of that order, the Clarissas—

11 See for example Caballero [1992; 1997] and Hathaway [2003], as well as Pepe Rey’s chapter.

which, as elsewhere in Europe, promoted the use of sacred songs in the vernacular for Christian worship. Their influence can be found in the origin of several forms of devotional music in the Middle Ages, including the Italian *lauda*, the French *noël* or the English *carol*.¹² It is not mere coincidence that the earliest surviving example of polyphonic song in Spain, a devotional piece entitled *Nuevas, nuevas de alegría*, has recently been found in a manuscript from the Clarissa convent of Astudillo dating from the first third of the 15th century. The fact that the scholar who located this manuscript, Pedro Cátedra, has devoted almost 700 pages to the presentation and interpretation of a manuscript of just 8 folios and its context clearly reflects the importance of this source as well as a recognition of the major changes taking place in devotional practice. Among other issues, Cátedra explores connections between the Italian *laude* and the earliest examples of devotional song and poetry in Spain [2005: 352-75]. Furthermore, as discussed by Tess Knighton in this volume, two of the most distinguished poets of devotional songs during the late 15th century, Fray Iñigo de Mendoza and Fray Ambrosio de Montesino, were members of the Franciscan order, and it was in a Franciscan convent that, as Pepe Rey shows, carnivalesque forms of Christmas devotion are known to have survived in the 17th century.

For all the importance of this impulse from certain regular orders, however, it was in secular urban institutions such as the cathedrals—whose ‘public’ was the ordinary citizen—where this cultural practice found the ideal medium for its development. Spanish cathedrals underwent a major structural transformation from the mid-15th century to allow for the creation of permanent establishments and resources for the performance—and composition—of polyphonic music. Although liturgical music was undoubtedly the focus for this development, evidence for the cultivation of sacred songs in the vernacular is regularly found there from a very early stage.¹³ It is clear that most cathedrals had already introduced sacred songs into some religious services, and these songs grew in number, spread to variety of liturgical contexts and developed in complexity throughout the following centuries. In the 17th and 18th centuries villancicos progressively pervaded sacred celebrations in most Spanish churches with the economic resources to afford the musicians needed to perform them.

From as early as the 16th century, novelty was an aspiration—often a requirement—for the major liturgical feasts, above all for Christmas Matins. Villancicos were not essentially ephemeral, as has been often claimed; it would have been impossible for any composer to fulfil the high demands of some cathedrals who annually prescribed the performance of more than 50 villancicos, and the re-use of ‘old’ pieces was common practice for lesser liturgical occasions. At the same time, it is also true that changes in taste meant that the ‘shelflife’ of most villancico settings

¹² See Greene [1977] and Stevens [1980; 2001] on the English carol; Block [1978] on the early French *noël*; and Wilson [2001] for the Italian *lauda*.

¹³ The earliest known evidence is a payment on Christmas Eve 1418 to a music scribe called Pero Sánchez for copying the *chançonetas* for Toledo Cathedral; a copy of the document is preserved in the Barbieri documents in E-Mn, Ms. 14.043/181-84, and reproduced in Casares [1986: I, 434-35]. The reference was first published by Stevenson [1960: 120], although he gave an incorrect call-mark and assigns the payment to Seville Cathedral.

was short, and this promoted the importance of the creative task that lay behind the provision of villancicos—at least from the point of view of its time-consuming nature and the sheer quantity of works produced—since Spanish composers were expected to write between ten and 30 new compositions of this kind every year.¹⁴ The extent of this demand meant that hundreds of thousands of villancicos were composed in the Iberian world during the period in question, and tens of thousands of them have survived. In the case of many 17th- and particularly 18th-century Spanish composers, villancicos are likely to represent around 70 per cent of their lifetime production, and these works still amount to more than half of the surviving musical works from this period.

It is difficult to discern contemporary attitudes towards these compositions. The condemnatory appraisals by some moralists and ecclesiastical authorities might well have given rise to an essentially negative perception of the genre.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the pervasive integration of the sacred villancico within liturgical services, sanctioned by church authorities, is the best evidence that the villancico was highly appreciated by those who had the capacity to decide which music was to be performed in church. Attitudes probably varied, even as far as a single composition was concerned, and depended on the social status of the listener. Despite the enduring legend that Felipe II prohibited the performance of villancicos in his chapel,¹⁶ there is evidence of his appreciation of the genre or, at least, of his outward demonstration of profound respect towards it. According to the contemporary account of the celebration of Christmas Matins at the Jeronymite monastery of Guadalupe in 1576, which was attended by King Sebastião of Portugal and Felipe II, the Spanish king interrupted his reading of the hours to concentrate on the performance of the villancicos and rebuked his nephew for his loud comments and lack of respect towards the music, perhaps to show his young nephew how a king should behave in public.¹⁷

14 See Álvaro Torrente's chapter in this volume.

15 Many scholars have accepted and justified contemporary criticism as regards the 'bad quality' or the vulgarity of villancicos without questioning the bias of moralists. See for example López-Calo, who states that 'as for their content, many villancicos not only come close to vulgarity, but they reach and even surpass it' ('Y en cuanto al contenido, son numerosos los villancicos que no sólo rozan la vulgaridad, sono que la tocan, y aun la pasan') [1983: 119]. Perhaps what contemporary critics regarded as vulgar should be considered as a reflection of more popular elements, one of the distinctive features of the villancico.

16 Luis Robledo has shown that the royal decree that has always been cited as evidence for the king's prohibition of performing villancicos in his chapel was not in fact a prohibition as such, but simply a reminder to his head chaplain, shortly after the death of the chapelmaster Philippe Rogier, that villancicos were not customary during Corpus Christi in the royal chapel [2000: 160-62]. This explains why, as has in fact been demonstrated some time ago, villancicos were never suppressed from the royal chapel during Felipe II's reign [Moll, 1970].

17 'Estuvo Su Majestad [Felipe II] rezando en unas horas con tanta quietud y sosiego como si fuera hombre pintado, y cuando se ofrecía algún villancico o representación cerraba sus horas y escuchaba con mucha atención, pero Su Alteza [don Sebastião de Portugal] comenzaba luego a hablar con él tan alto que, aunque cantaban, se oía algo de lo que decía, y de no estar él atento y estorbar que Su Majestad no lo estuviese han estado los frailes tan corridos que se lo dijeron al duque de Avero para que se lo afease'. Quoted in Carreras [2000b: 282-86], who states that 'the villancicos were not regarded by the Spanish monarch nor the

The ecclesiastical authorities' preoccupation with the textual content of villancicos suggests that the probity of the texts, particularly as regards their doctrinal adequacy, was their major area of concern. The openness on the part of at least some of the faithful to greater doctrinal influence is probably what led cathedral authorities to print the poetic texts of the villancicos for some celebrations in small, quarto chapbooks.¹⁸ While the poetry of the villancicos may well have enjoyed a second life after their performance at church celebrations as devotional texts to be read, either privately or publicly, it is likely that only a very small proportion of the church-goers who attended those services had access, whether materially or intellectually, to the printed texts, given the low levels of literacy among the Spanish population throughout the period in question. In addition, given that the acoustic of Spanish cathedrals made it very difficult for anyone not placed a short distance from the performers to hear the text of the villancicos, and that in any case the best locations in the cathedral would have been reserved for a small number of the faithful, usually the literate social élite, it would appear that the vast majority of normal citizens attending religious celebrations in major Spanish churches would hardly have heard and understood more than a few repeated words during the performance of villancicos, just as they were also unable to understand the Latin of liturgical services. The principal sacred dimension of villancicos was the text and the context in which they were performed, as well as some musical features such as the use of large polychoral resources and instruments such as organ or shawms ('chirimías'); beyond this, music was mostly modelled on secular forms and scorings, and it would appear that, for the majority of those attending the liturgical celebrations, these works were perceived as sound with a few audible words rather than words with music. Thus, the authorities' attempts to endow the pieces with doctrinal integrity may have had rather limited consequences beyond the higher echelons of society; for the majority, villancicos would have been perceived as secular musical entertainments in sacred contexts.

Thus, the villancico could be regarded as the melting-pot of two disparate worlds: on the one hand its doctrinal message, the major area of concern of the Church; on the other, vernacular poetry and music, which was what generated the attraction of the genre. The balance between these two elements is one of the key issues for the understanding of the genre. Some contemporary witnesses believed that the villancico should be regarded as a domesticated version of popular forms of devotion-entertainment, while others stressed the survival of popular and pre-Christian forms of devotion-entertainment within the realm of Catholic liturgy. Did the appropriation by ecclesiastical authorities of pre-existent forms of devotion eradicate their pre-Christian values or was the sacred villancico the best evidence of the triumph of pre-Christian forms of worship in post-Tridentine Spain? Both interpretations are probably applicable; it is likely that the first reading was the one accepted by those who justified the use of vernacular genres in church but it was

Jeronymite monks as a distraction or entertainment ... but an occasion when personal prayer represented by the reading of the hours gave place to the attentive audition of the occasional texts performed by the singers'.

18 The earliest known surviving villancico chapbooks are from Christmas Matins 1612 and 1613 at Seville Cathedral [Torrente, 2002b].

also true that villancicos provided a backdoor to the regular penetration in church of secular forms of entertainment which probably had little religious meaning for the church-goers, as was repeatedly denounced by the censures of moralists.

This volume does not aim to provide definitive answers to the many issues surrounding the cultivation of devotional music in the Iberian world, but rather to illustrate its multifaceted features, contexts and meanings within an historical perspective and to explore alternative readings. The reader will find relatively little attention to formal issues, since these have been the almost exclusive concern for most previous studies. However, as a poetico-musical genre, the literary aspect of the genre is critical for an understanding of it and this is explored in several chapters in this volume. Alberto del Río analyses the rich but complex relationship of the early villancico with sacred and secular theatre and popular dance conventions, in the light of the dual traditions of liturgical drama and court spectacle. Alain Bègue's seminal chapter attempts the first taxonomy of the 17th-century villancico based on the text yet taking into consideration the importance granted to music, lyricism, paratheatricality, the structure of the works and the themes explored in them. Other literary issues are taken into account in a number of other chapters, including those by Rey, Knighton, Bombi, Lopes, Ramos and Illari.

Several levels of relationship between Iberian devotional genres and practices in other European countries are also discussed in this volume. Through a comparison of practices of sacred court music in France, England and Spain, Pablo Rodríguez explores the functional parallels between the French motet, the English anthem and the Spanish villancico, to show how a consideration of the villancico as *Staatsmusik* not only helps to understand its function within the context of sacred music at court, but also to explain its morphology and its very particular musical idiom. A study of conventions throughout the major Spanish cathedrals allows Pilar Ramos to explore the flourishing of the villancico *de pastorela* in the 18th century, illustrating the adoption of pan-European conventions of Christmas music associated with the pastoral style, and thus challenging the bipolarity of the villancico afforded by the juxtaposition of 'Spanish' structures and stylistic traits (generally deemed to be more 'popular') with the more theatrical, innovatory and supposedly élitist elements introduced from the Italian cantata. In the neighbouring kingdom of Portugal, sacred and secular villancicos were cultivated in court circles from at least the late 15th century, but it was in the 17th century, particularly after the kingdom became independent from the Crown of Castile, that villancicos were regularly composed and performed in the royal chapel and other religious centres following the Spanish model, as Rui Cabral Lopes's chapter in this volume shows. More startling, perhaps, as this represents a completely new area of research, is Benoît Michel's study of the *nœl à grand choeur*, a certain type of polychoral work in the vernacular regularly cultivated in southern France that affords a number of intriguing parallels—the sectionalized treatment of text, the borrowing of elements from theatre music or the local printing of libretti—with well-established conventions south of the Pyrenees. The coincidence in chronology, function and structure with the Spanish Baroque villancico may reflect a degree of influence from south to north hitherto unexplored.

Villancicos were not only cultivated in the territories which are now understood to make up modern Spain. The extent to which the genre infiltrated the celebratory conventions of neighbouring countries and colonies developed in parallel with the nature of the relationship. Evidence of similar practices can be traced in areas under Spanish influence such as southern Italy, the Netherlands or the Philippines. In Latin and South America, devotional songs are known to have been cultivated from the earliest stages of colonization, both in towns with a high degree of Hispanization, and in more remote country areas controlled by religious orders. All Spanish-American cathedrals cultivated villancicos which, in principle, followed Spanish convention, in contexts similar to those of the Iberian peninsula. However, as discussed in Bernardo Illari's chapter, the meaning for contemporary listeners of this type of music varied according to the diverse social composition of the colonial cities which was radically different from the situation in the metropolis; for example, while the *jácara* was a type of popular dance song which emerged from the urban underworld onto the stages of 17th-century Madrid, and from there to religious festivals, in the colonies it had no significance for the lowest layers of urban society—mostly Indians and black slaves—and should be regarded more as a means of identification of the urban social élites of Spanish ancestry—the *criollos*—with their land of origin, rather than as an emergence of local popular traditions, as has often been claimed. Therefore, the villancico remains an important and productive tool for the construction of identity in the colonial context. Also focusing on colonial villancicos, Baker explores the disjunction between the fictional world portrayed in these pieces and the social reality that formed the background to their performance, and for the political implications of racial stereotyping in a colonial society, showing how the apparently innocent image of negroes in 17th-century villancicos cannot be regarded as a representation of social balance in the colonies where black slaves were largely a marginal group in society. From a different perspective, David Irving's chapter enters the virtually unexplored territory of devotional music in the Philippines—the most important European colony in Asia and the only predominantly Roman Catholic country in the region—illustrating, through the study of documentary evidence and some surviving texts, the ways in which the villancico was transmitted to and cultivated in Manila, as well as something of its reception and assimilation into local culture over the course of the 17th and 18th centuries, thereby assuming a pivotal position in local music traditions.

The widespread integration of the villancico in cathedral festivities, the variety of liturgical contexts and their influence in shaping the compositions is the focus of Álvaro Torrente's chapter. However, the extent of the cultivation of the villancico in major cathedrals and royal chapels has often overshadowed the presence of the genre in other, lesser-known contexts, to which attention is also given in this volume. Through the study of the various performing contexts of several versions of the villancico *Adorámoste, Señor* over half a century—between around 1480 and the 1530s—Tess Knighton explores the chameleon-like multi-functional nature of the genre which could be used for private devotion, as part of the Mass, for communal contemplation in sacred plays or for political purposes in public ceremonies. Janet Hathaway studies the role of the sacred villancico as the most appropriate and effective choice for major devotional events pertaining to urban confraternities, as

illustrated by the case of a parish church in 17th-century Madrid. Andrea Bombi's analysis of four manuscript *cancioneros* of devotional poetry from late Baroque Valencia affords insight into the mechanics of the production of devotional poetry for a diversity of contexts for consumption beyond the major ecclesiastical centres, providing a much broader picture unsuspected until now, as well as into the complexity of the relationship between function, context and generic range. Through the study of the compositions for a convent in 18th-century Ávila, María Gembero examines the regular cultivation of *villancicos* in nunneries, both as regards the production process and the resources and contexts for performance—in which women clearly participated—expanding the focus of traditional scholarship hitherto limited to male production and performance.

While a volume of essays such as this cannot aim to be comprehensive in its treatment of such a vast subject, it will hopefully serve to illustrate how the *villancico*—and related genres—proves to have a multifaceted functionality, an elaborate complex of manifestations, performance contexts and cultural signifiers as well as a position and role as a much broader social and cultural phenomenon than has been acknowledged up till now. It is, without doubt, one of the richest and most varied and complex genres of Western music, and a real challenge to present-day scholarship to represent it in an accurate and insightful way. We hope that the reader will find the chapters presented here eye-opening, enriching and intriguing and that future research will develop further some of the important issues raised here.