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Fisher, Alexander J. Music, Piety, and Propaganda: The Soundscapes of Counter-Reformation Bavaria

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[See table of contents](#)

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Fisher, Alexander J.

Music, Piety, and Propaganda: The Soundscapes of Counter-Reformation Bavaria. The New Cultural History of Music. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. Pp. xvi, 369. ISBN 978-0-19-976464-8 (hardcover) US\$55.

Electricity and the internal combustion engine dominate the soundscapes of our modern cities: sirens, mobile devices, trucks reversing, the constant hum of traffic—on the roads and in the sky. The cities of pre-industrial Europe were not so loud, but it would be a mistake to think them less sonically articulate.

In this book, musicologist Alexander Fisher gives us an ear-opening account of the soundscape of early modern Bavaria. Music is his chief concern and, as well as the prolific and central output of Orlando di Lasso (died Munich, 1594), he looks at the work of lesser-known composers, hymn writers, song collectors, street performers, and pamphlet publishers. But he casts a wide net, taking in bagpipes, hurdy-gurdies, cheering, bells, gunfire, and cannon. Fisher's aim is to bring together musicology and soundscape studies to inquire into the way sound gives shape to space and identity. He draws on the pioneering work of Canadian musician R. Murray Schafer, who explored how sounds come to our ears overlaid with cultural meaning. Fisher also acknowledges the inspiration of Bruce R. Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England* (1999).

In the context of Counter-Reformation Bavaria, sounds shaped public and private spaces—both the interiors of Jesuit churches and courtly chapels and, as shown in a wonderfully evocative chapter on pilgrimage, the whole regional landscape. At the same time, sound is ephemeral; its effects are not easy to guarantee, especially where space is contested. The citizens of Catholic Munich may have recognized the specific bell that called them to pray for deliverance from the Turk, but they did not always take off their hats and sink to their knees on the signal.

The book is clearly organized around a succession of different spaces and activities: worship spaces, including public churches and courtly chapels (chapter 2); devotional spaces, including monasteries, confraternities, and wealthier households (chapter 3); the public sphere, including bells and public religious spectacle (chapter 4); processions, especially the contrast between the daytime festivities of Corpus Christi and the torch-lit devotions of flagellants on Good Friday (chapter 5); and the network of pilgrimages that created a spiritual or sacred geography throughout the region (chapter 6). The latter chapters in

particular demonstrate clearly that devotional space is not fixed in advance; it is produced by human interactions and the use of culturally determined visual and aural cues. The book is supported by generous online materials: musical examples (the book does not stint on these but the website gives more, plus nineteen pages of texts and translations), extended references running to 123 pages (including substantial passages from primary sources), and an extended bibliography of thirty-six pages. Fisher skillfully deploys a wide range of primary sources in a lucid style; significant non-English terms are usually translated *in situ*, and theory is used effectively and with a light touch; his book is by no means accessible to musicians alone. Strangely, he offers no conclusion. The book ends mid-procession, accompanying the pilgrims from Landshut as they head along the Isar valley to the Munich shrine of St. Benno. A moment of synthesis and a consideration of implications would have been helpful.

Two pairs of terms merit further comment: piety and propaganda (of the book's title), but first worship and devotion. In some ways, the scholars' distinction between worship (or liturgy) and devotion—meaningless in the early centuries of Christianity—becomes useful with the Council of Trent (1545–63); at this point, the official worship of mass, sacraments, and canonical hours could be said to inhabit a category one step up from the manifold unofficial and often lay-led activities in honour of Mary and the saints or in remembrance of the dead. By contrast, Fisher shows how the boundaries of worship and devotion are in fact porous, especially in liminal contexts such as weddings and pilgrimages. A “call and response” song used in a procession to the shrine of a popular saint may look like devotion from below, but when the cantors are appointed by the clergy to sing mandated verse texts, it appears as an attempt at regulation from above. Meanwhile at weddings, the sounds of music (and associated merry-making) could push against the discipline (then as now) of officially regulated worship. Fisher shows, rightly in my view, that the worship/devotion binary is a blunt instrument and that the totality of religious activity is better viewed along a fairly fluid continuum.

The issue with piety and propaganda is different. Given the nature of the available sources, Fisher is able to offer a granular analysis of the politics of elites, especially the ruling house of Wittelsbach, and their strategies to maintain Catholic faith and practice across Bavaria (through religious education, surveillance, and sponsored spectacle). Tracking the interests of the powerful, Fisher is able to unmask the familiar features of propaganda. Piety, on the other

hand, is far more elusive, both among the elites and commoners. The world this book describes is an enchanted world, where music has thaumaturgic and apotropaic powers—bells might ring of their own accord, Lasso's motet *Gustate et videte* averted stormy weather, the Litany of Loreto cast out evil spirits, and so on. Through religious songs and rituals, the faithful reached out to another world of saints in heaven and souls in purgatory, seeking protection against demons from hell. On a daily basis, they prayed, sang their songs, and attended church. Here Fisher's narrative sets aside any hermeneutic of suspicion and simply reports the testimonies at their word. While propaganda is familiar, piety is strange. But perhaps agnosticism need not constrain him: given his grasp of the cultural moment, and his demonstrated command of a wide range of sources, both "elite" and "popular," Fisher is well placed to explore that strangeness in future work.

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Fletcher, Catherine.

Diplomacy in Renaissance Rome: The Rise of the Resident Ambassador.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. Pp. ix, 194 + 3 ill. ISBN 978-1-107-10779-3 (hardcover) US\$99.99.

This study of the rise of the resident foreign ambassador at the papal court is a welcome synthesis of current scholarship combined with Catherine Fletcher's original work on the topic to date. Focusing on the period from 1420 to 1530, this volume situates the development of the resident ambassador amid the changing political scene from the return of the papacy to Rome following the Council of Constance through to the aftermath of the sack of Rome when Spanish influence grew in the Italian peninsula. Fletcher seeks to provide "a 'new diplomatic history' that sets out to investigate ambassadorial activity 'from below' by using methods from social and cultural history" (6). These strategies broaden the discussion of the resident ambassador in order to determine his responsibilities, his practices, the challenges of the office, observers' expectations, and the materiality of his work and lifestyle. As often as possible Fletcher places these discussions in the ambassador's own words. This is one of the immediate advantages of the