



2013

# 20th Century Trends in the Rhythmic Interpretation of the Cantigas de Santa Maria (Honors)

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## Recommended Citation

Belt, Chelsey, "20th Century Trends in the Rhythmic Interpretation of the Cantigas de Santa Maria (Honors)" (2013). *Papers*. Paper 5.  
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## 20<sup>th</sup> Century Trends in the Rhythmic Interpretation of the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*

Chelsey Belt

The interpretation of rhythm in medieval music has been a topic of contention almost since the advent of historical music scholarship. The notation of each repertory presents its own idiosyncrasies and challenges. The unique repertory of the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* has provided an excellent canvas for this debate during the majority of the twentieth century. Surviving in four manuscripts, the *Cantigas* originated at the Castilian court of Alfonso X (called *el Sabio* or “the wise”), who ruled Castile and Leon from 1252 until 1284. Between 1257 and 1283, after a miraculous recovery from illness, Alfonso worked with a team of poets, artists, and musicians to compile this collection of songs to the Virgin Mary.

Because the musical notation of the *Cantigas* manuscripts offers neither concrete indications of proportional duration nor meter, scholars have applied a variety of interpretational techniques in attempt to come up with satisfactory performance methods. By examining the evolution of recorded performances put out by various ensembles over the years, we can observe a diversity of interpretational techniques in practice as well as the audible results of the performance choices. This paper covers the historical context of the rhythmic notation and the primary 20<sup>th</sup> century scholars who influenced *Cantigas* interpretation with theoretical writings and performing editions before evaluating the rhythmic interpretations of five recordings of the *Cantigas* from the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

It is important to consider the rhythmic context of the *Cantigas* before delving into analysis of performers’ rhythmic choices. The *CSM* predate Tinctoris’ theoretical writings, the first evidence of a concept of universal rhythmic proportion, by about two centuries, but overlaps the youth of the French rhythmic modes, the *Notre Dame* theoretical system that allowed for the

poetic rhythmicisation of notated music during the transition from the twelfth to the thirteenth century. The composition of the *Cantigas*, though geographically removed, also coincides with the golden years of the French lyric genres. These, such as the troubadour and trouvère repertoires, belong to a separate tradition than the liturgical one that bore *Notre Dame* theory, but were performed with their own version of poetic rhythmicisation.

It is also important to note that though the *Cantigas* were written down in the same century as Franco de Cologne's notational treatise, Franco's concepts were not yet standard. The unique historical placement of the *CSM* requires the performer or editor to interpret rhythm without the aid of most of the theoretical tools that we have become accustomed to while working with later medieval music. When we work with the *Cantigas*, we are working without a standard of rhythmic proportion, without a concept of tactus, and without consistent mensural note shapes.

One historical event mentioned above that has the potential to affect the rhythmic interpretation of the *CSM* is the system of rhythmic modes. We know that they were coming into practice around the time that the *Cantigas* were composed, but it is not clear whether they can or should be applied to them. One of the most significant arguments against the application of the rhythmic modes to the *Cantigas* is location; these modes originated in French music, and evidence that they had bearing on music in Alfonso's Castile and León is lacking. Even so, performers and scholars are fairly evenly divided as to whether it makes sense to use the rhythmic modes in the music of the *Cantigas*, and this issue is among the most controversial when it comes to rhythm in the *CSM*. I cover this argument in more detail later when I discuss the important scholars of 20<sup>th</sup> century *Cantigas* performance practice.

It is helpful to consider the offerings of all four extant manuscripts of the *CSM*. Toledo (To, *Biblioteca Nacional de Espana*, 10069) is the earliest, a sort of first draft, such that there are occasional small differences between some *Cantigas* in To and the same *Cantigas* as they appear in the later manuscripts. The middle two codices, *Rico* (T, *Biblioteca de El Escorial*, T.I.1) and *Los Musicos* (E, *Biblioteca de El Escorial*, B.I.2) are highly ornamented, containing many of the famous illustrations. A fourth manuscript, Florence (F, *Biblioteca Nazionale*, b.r. 20) is incomplete and is thought of as the second volume to T. There are two distinct notational varieties transmitted by the *CSM* manuscripts. Manuel Pedro Ferreira deems the earlier a late Aquitanian style, while describing the other as a version of French square notation.<sup>1</sup> Both are considered pre-Franconian. The earlier style exists in To, and the later style is found in both the T and E manuscripts. This difference in notation style is actually helpful to interpreting rhythm because the scholar can compare multiple versions of the same song, facilitating the elimination of variables such as scribe mistakes and notational inconsistencies.

Research seeking to understand the *CSM* within the context of medieval music has established a number of basic viewpoints regarding potential traditions from which the *Cantigas* draw influence, such as those of liturgical, Arab, and folk music. Research from the liturgical standpoint approaches the *Cantigas* manuscripts through the lens of chant and other sacred music traditions and applies existing concepts from the French liturgical tradition, Franconian notation and rhythmic modes. Research that considers the role of Arab music varies significantly in the amount of influence it credits to that tradition. Some scholars have applied elements of Arab music theory, such as rhythmic formulas, to the music of the *Cantigas*, while others explain only the forms of the *Cantigas* as deriving from the Arab tradition. Many invoke the context of Andalusian music, or the local Iberian Arab tradition, to explain elements of the *Cantigas*.

Research from the broad standpoint of folk music tends to address indigenous musical forms including romance lyric and dance music in the interpretation of the music of the *Cantigas*.

There are two scholars whose work significantly influenced approaches to the interpretation of rhythm in the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* for a great deal of the twentieth century: Julián Ribera and Higinio Anglès. Performance choices made in several of the recordings discussed hereafter display their legacies, and I will summarize each scholar's philosophy and contributions before discussing individual recordings.

Julián Ribera worked primarily in the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and focused on the Spanish Islamic culture of Al-Andalus. His 1929 work, *Music in Ancient Arabia and Spain*, contains a substantial chapter on the performance of the *CSM*, and personal transcriptions of more than forty *Cantigas*, excerpted from his 1922 performing edition. Ribera's contributions formed the basis for the Arab music viewpoint: that the music of the *CSM* derives directly from the Classical Arab tradition due to the Moorish influence in Alfonso's Spain. Thus, Ribera's performing edition contains *Cantigas* transcribed according to elements of Arab music theory, most notably the Arab system of rhythmic modes.<sup>ii</sup>

Ribera's suggestions for performance are heavily based on his own conjecture that without sufficient context, the notation of the *Cantigas* was of little use to the scholar, that no one who had not lived in the thirteenth century stood any chance of interpreting it on its own.<sup>iii</sup>

“Thus the notation forms a stumbling-block, for it was of value only to those who had heard and memorized the music and needed only a slight aid to the memory, and was of no assistance to those who had no previous acquaintance with it.”<sup>iv</sup>

Ribera rejected his contemporaries' efforts to interpret *Cantigas* notation as mensural according to Guidonian theory, the French rhythmic modes, or through poetic meter as was commonly

applied to troubadour song, but he later came to his own understanding of mensurality in the notation through the methods of Arabic music theory.<sup>v</sup>

The route by which Ribera came to his application of Arab music theory to the music of the *CSM* was his study of the *Cancionero de Palacio*, a diverse manuscript of songs compiled about two centuries after the *Cantigas*. Ribera maintained that his exploration of that manuscript allowed him to become familiar with a body of popular melodies originating from the earlier traditions of the Spanish Moors, so that when he studied the music of the *Cantigas*, he was able to pick out significant similarities.<sup>vi</sup>

“That is to say, I was familiar with a kind of music constructed on the same plan as the *Cantigas* and about which I could feel no doubts, for it was written in modern notation; music which had not been taken into consideration in the [previous] attempts at interpreting the *Cantigas* . . . by a happy coincidence, I found the archaic types from which many of these later melodies are derived.”<sup>vii</sup>

Ribera upheld that by comparing the later songs and the Arab theoretical background that they suggested to the *Cantigas* manuscripts, he could determine rhythm, tempi, modality, and even appropriate ornamentation and instrumental participation. He provides his rationale for all of these discoveries, but presently we will focus on his specific method of rhythmic interpretation.

The “Oriental authors of the ninth century”<sup>viii</sup> are often referenced by Ribera in his discussion of the rhythmic system that he applies to the *Cantigas*, but I have not been able to determine the specific theoretical writings upon which he bases his explanation, as he worked in Spain at the turn of the century. He favorably compares several traditional rhythmic patterns (the Arab rhythmic modes) to the French rhythmic modes, shading the Arabic *Henzej* pattern as an alternate interpretation of the fifth French mode, *Ramel* as correspondent to both the first and second French modes, the *Takils* as versions of the third and fourth modes, and *Makhuri* as similar to the sixth mode.<sup>ix</sup> Ribera’s tendency to see this sort of relationship may have

contributed to his ability to see the notation of the *CSM* manuscripts, especially To, in a similar context, and to come up with his method for assigning notes to beats.

Ultimately, Ribera achieved his system of rhythmic interpretation by searching for similarities between the rhythms implied in the *Cantigas* notation rhythmic patterns of the Arab modes, which, as opposed to the *Cantigas* notation, can be definitively translated into modern notation. The rhythmic values used in the notation of the *CSM* are highly relative, with identical symbols used to mean different things from song to song and even from section to section within a song. Ribera used the Arab modes to “solve” these ambiguities; when he deemed that a particular *Cantiga* made sense with one of the modes, he could translate the entire *Cantiga* into a consistent notation by applying the equivalent modern notation rhythmic values to the contour of the *Cantiga*.

To illustrate this, we can look at Ribera’s example using the rhythmic pattern of the second *takil*. Ribera describes the modern notation of this mode as “a sixteenth note, an eighth note, an accented eighth note, and a sixteenth rest – a 3/8 rhythm.”<sup>x</sup> Referencing the *Cancionero de Palacio*, he also describes this mode as “popular among the Spanish Moors.”<sup>xi</sup> Ribera found this mode appropriate for the interpretation of several *Cantigas* in To, which he references by the manuscript’s holding location of Madrid, and lists its original notation patterns which he believes invoke the second *takil* rhythm – square punctum, square punctum, oblique punctum ■■◆, and oblique punctum, square punctum, oblique punctum ◆■◆.<sup>xii</sup> The following is Ribera’s own transcription of the second *takil*.<sup>xiii</sup>



Ribera specifies that in each case, the beat consists of one note, but as per the *takil*, there is a difference in intensity and therefore duration between first two beats, which he believes accounts for the difference in notation within the manuscript.<sup>xiv</sup>

Whether or not one finds Ribera's application of *takil* convincing, this particular situation reminds us of the lack of consistent proportion between the two primary note shapes in the *Cantigas* manuscripts; they vary in duration according to context. For example, in the first of the *Cantigas* notation patterns Ribera provides (■◆), both the short and the long duration of the *takil* are represented by the same note shape, but in the second (◆◆), the initial short note is represented by an oblique punctum and the longer second note by a square punctum. However, the third note, the long note before the rest in the *takil*, is represented by an oblique punctum, which is typically the shorter of the two shapes in the *Cantigas* notation. In my opinion, the best explanation for this discrepancy may be that because the final long note in Ribera's *takil* pattern falls just before a rest, it has a subdued intensity compared to the long note that precedes it. Among the edited *Cantigas* he provides, six are interpreted in the second *takil*, including *Cantiga* 1, *Des oge mais quer' eu trobar*, and *Cantiga* 42, *A Virgen mui groriosa*.

Ribera's legacy is considerably simpler to comprehend than his methods. He was the first to consider the *Cantigas* outside of the Western-liturgical-theoretical context standard of his contemporaries. His incorporation of local and oral traditions into his analysis of medieval repertoire was a strikingly modern concept for his time. The late-Twentieth century scholars and performers who incorporate Arab theory or various other cultural traditions into their interpretation of the *Cantigas*, like his modern disciple Manuel Pedro Ferreira and several of the ensembles discussed hereafter, owe directly to Julián Ribera's pre-war research.

Though the scope of Ribera's influence is wide, not all scholars were satisfied by his ideas, which brings us to Higinio Anglès, the other 20<sup>th</sup> century pioneer of the *Cantigas*. The research of Anglès, three decades Ribera's junior, stands in stark opposition to Ribera's. Anglès found the application of Arab theory completely inappropriate; among his strongest opinions was that *Cantigas* rhythm could be sufficiently explained by the French rhythmic modes. Anglès published a complete edition of the *CSM* in three volumes between 1948 and 1964: *La música de las Cantigas de Santa María del Rey Alfonso El Sabio*, the coincidence of which with the energetic youth of the early music movement had a profound and lasting influence on *Cantigas* performance.

I refer to Anglès' research as being of the Liturgical school, as it relies heavily on the theoretical standards for modality, notation, and rhythm developed by scholars of liturgical music in France and the low countries, though that theory applies to more than just liturgical music, extending influence over several nobility-cultivated genres of art music. As previously mentioned, Anglès' interpretation of rhythm in the *CSM* is heavily based on the French rhythmic modes. This type of interpretation was the "friendliest" to many 20<sup>th</sup> century scholars and performers, as they were already familiar and comfortable with its application by working with other medieval repertoires.

Manuel Pedro Ferreira, although he tends to agree more with Ribera in the rhythm debate, describes Anglès' interpretation as follows:

"Despite some notational ambiguity, typical of the pre-Franconian systems, the collection of songs assembled by Alfonso X can be rhythmically transcribed with a reasonable degree of assurance. Already in Anglès' edition we could easily observe that the rhythm of the *CSM* is generally of the simple modal type, with frequent modal mixture (the combination of two modes is referred to by Anonymous IV and illustrated by the fifth mode of Lambertus). There are nevertheless special modal patterns (sixth mode of Lambertus), and also cases of quadruple meter which recall Andalusian music, rhapsodic rhythm, (as in the

*cantigas de amigo*), and iso-syllabic rhythm (sometimes of a florid nature, as in the *cantigas de amor*).”<sup>xv</sup>

It is more typical of modern scholars like Ferreira to take a conciliatory position, to interpret these repertoires as the combined result of diverse influences and traditions.

There are many instances in which it is difficult to apply French rhythmic modal theory to the *Cantigas* notation, and these Anglès justified as being taken directly from “popular music.”<sup>xvi</sup> This interpretation was not well accepted by later scholars and has served to take away some of the authoritative weight of Anglès’ work. However, the fact that Anglès did not try to force the notation into something resembling a French mode at these points adds credence to his performing edition.<sup>xvii</sup>

Other criticisms to Anglès’ research include his heavy reliance on E, the *Codice Los Musicos*, which is considered by modern scholars to be the least definitive of the surviving manuscripts, the presence of several errors in the reproduction of the manuscript parts above the edited lines, and his liberal assignment of duple meter to *Cantigas* whose original phrase structures strongly disagree with its use.<sup>xviii</sup>

Anglès’ edition is also unique in that he took care to print the original *Cantigas* notation over the corresponding staves of his edited part. This feature, in addition to its inclusion of the entire body of *CSM* melodies, may have contributed to the popularity of Anglès’ edition among later 20<sup>th</sup> century and even 21<sup>st</sup> century performers. In contrast to Ribera’s influence, those late-century scholars and performers who interpret the *Cantigas* along the lines of French liturgical theory often display elements of Anglès’ research.

Ribera’s legacy survives in a more conceptual form (such that performers are more likely to take his general idea of Arab influence and then make their own interpretation than use his), whereas those influenced by Anglès tend to accept his position more completely and use his own

editions. Whether this is because out of the two, Anglès' is the more modern and thus less deterrent, or because his research is more congruent with the ideas and practices of medieval music that performers and scholars are accustomed to from other genres remains to be seen. In any case, these two scholars, Ribera during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and Anglès during the middle decades, left performers two polarized bodies of edited *Cantigas* to consider.

Since Ribera and Anglès, a few editions and publications of facsimiles by other scholars have emerged in time to influence some of the recordings discussed here. These include a highly ornamented facsimile of T, the *Codice Rico* held at the *Real Biblioteca de San Lorenzo de El Escorial* and put out in 1979 by *Edilán-Ars Libras* of Madrid.<sup>xix</sup> Though it was a limited edition and somewhat too extravagant to be directly available to many performers, its availability in libraries served as an important resource for many ensembles looking to synthesize their own performing edition.

Another influential *CSM* edition of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was available beginning in 1986, Walter Mettmann's *Alfonso X. el Sabio: Cantigas de Santa María*. This edition was employed frequently for performances of the following decade. It is based primarily on E, and while Mettmann made many personal decisions in its creation, it was received with less controversy than previous editions. Its widespread popularity is due to the fact that it represented sort of a "happy medium" between the editions of the earlier scholars and creating one's own edition from facsimile. This may be because it does not present radical new ideas; it is generally congruent with Anglès' preceding ideals with less transcription mistakes and a more modern opinion. The most recent edition to have become available is by Chris Elmes, with the first volume published in 2004 and the fourth and final volume published just last year. This edition has been met

favorably by performers thus far but is too recent to have had an effect on the recordings discussed below.

I have chosen five recorded performances by various ensembles that I believe to be representative of the changing attitudes and practices of rhythmic interpretation in the *CSM* over approximately the past half-century. I will also reference additional recordings that belong to or exemplify particular trends or concepts, but these are not discussed in detail. A table of discography is available in the appendix.

The first recording was produced in 1977 and formed the first volume in a collection called *History of Spanish Music* that was put out by The Musical Heritage Society, a New York-based mail order record label popular in the sixties and seventies. The LP is entitled *The Medieval Period: Alfonso X El Sabio Las Cantigas de Santa Maria*. The performers are comprised of a collection of Spanish ensembles and soloists: *Capilla Musical y Escolania de Santa Cruz del Valle de los Caidos*, a children's choir under the direction of Fray Luis Lozano; Gregorio Paniagua's instrumental ensemble *Atrium Musicae*; tenors Jens Uwe Eggers and Laurentino Sáenz de Buraga; and baritone Jose Luis Ochoa de Olza, who was also the project's overall director.

The performance notes on the liner are by Roberto Pla, who would come out with his own edition of the 40 *Cantigas de Loor* (the non-narrative songs of praise contained within the *Cantigas*) almost 25 years later in 2001. This early performance endeavor provided an important vehicle for experimentation for Pla in regards to performance practice and general interpretation of the notation. In his description of this project, he states:

“It is a task divided into several different parts: the selection, from manuscripts, of the repertory; the choice of the best transcriptions or their realization if none were available [my emphasis]. Wherever possible, we have used the original manuscripts . . . We have reconstructed interpretive forms and trained performers,

so as to achieve correct interpretation in respect to style . . . In all these aspects, so varied and difficult to achieve, the hearer can be sure of finding the greatest authenticity that present-day paleography, musicology, and technology allow. All this means that the Collection of Early Spanish Music is not only a more or less coherent and successful artistic program. If it were only this, it would still be very important; but we have actually turned back time, holding to a strict, exacting postulate of reconstruction that I would call ‘resuscitating,’ so as to relive Spain’s distinguished musical past.”

Looking past the general boldness of his claims, Pla provides us with a few significant bits of information regarding the interpretational style of the performers. The portion that I have underlined here regards the group’s manuscript use. The first half of the quote, especially the phrase “if none were available” implies that it was their first choice to use pre-existing performing editions for the *Cantigas* that they decided to perform, creating their own only when others could not be come by, but immediately afterwards, Pla states that they used the original manuscripts whenever possible. This could be taken to mean that they primarily used editions but compared them to the manuscript version for reference. In any case, the final product, the recording, is a better indication of what they actually did.

This recording was done on an especially grand scale compared to most recordings of the cantigas, with its large children’s choir, ten-piece orchestra, and three vocal soloists. It is important to note that all of these musicians were modern-trained; they received early music instruction for the express purpose of making this recording, resulting in what can be referred to as technical tension. This tension has an effect not only on tone production, but also on the rhythmic interpretation. The most tangible way that I can think of to describe the rhythmic effect of technical tension on the part of the performer is that it adds a noticeable sense of “hesitancy” to the sound, such that the patterns do not come across as fluent. Discomfort with the technique affects a performer’s rhythmic accuracy even in modern notation, so its manifestation in performing from an already controversial early notation renders the presentation less convincing.

Aside from performer-dependent details, when compared against Escorial facsimiles, the predominant style of rhythmic interpretation in this recording appears to be a chant-like one. For instance, in the *Prologo, Porque trobar*, each syllable of text is assigned a beat, such that the square punctum with a downward-facing stem is the beat note. Ligated puncta and virga generally merit multiple notes per syllable, but are not assigned a constant value. The overall effect is similar to the performance of Solesmes chant notation. This type of interpretation is maintained for all other tracks performed vocally. When instruments are included in vocal numbers, they match the interpretation of the vocalists. These sung tracks contain no improvisation.

This recording includes a few instrumental tracks, and these contain the few cases in which the performers break away from the strict chant-based interpretation. Percussion is added, note values are kept constant, and triple and dotted patterns are used. Application of the French rhythmic modes appears to be responsible for this contrasting dancelike atmosphere. *Des oge* (*Cantiga* 1) is the first instrumental track, and its predominant rhythmic pattern as transcribed from the recording can be expressed as four groups of eighth-quarter per phrase, ♪♪♪♪♪♪♪♪ which corresponds to the second or iambic mode. The original notation that corresponds to the interpreted eighth-quarter rhythm is a plain square punctum followed by a square punctum with a downward-facing stem (■ ■|). Other instrumental tracks such as *Nas Mentas* (29), *O que en Santa Maria* (216), and *Non sofre Santa Maria* (159), are interpreted similarly, with quick, dancelike use of the rhythmic modes. The overall liturgical influences displayed by Roberto Pla's performance choices on the 1977 Musical Heritage recording, in combination with liberal use of the French rhythmic modes, are most in line with Higinio Anglès' ideals of rhythmic interpretation.

The next recording in my 20<sup>th</sup> century cross-section, Esther Lamandier's *Alfonso el Sabio*, was produced in France just three years later, but contains a world of differences.

Lamandier herself is the only vocalist used in the recording. She accompanies herself variously on harps, portative organ, and vielle, so that the thickest possible texture is one voice and one instrument. One immediate difference is that she does not use the instruments to double herself monophonically; she improvises heterophonically and even polyphonically as she sees fit. Improvisation is also employed freely in the vocal line through ornamentation. The liner notes reveal that she worked directly from facsimiles.

In comparing Lamandier's performance to manuscript notation, this immense sense of interpretational freedom is the most noticeable attribute. She is clearly a consummate early musician and is not hindered by modern technical tendencies. Many of the songs she has chosen are preceded with improvised instrumental preludes. In the case of her *Cantiga 20, Virga de Jesse*, this prelude is followed by a rhapsodic recitation of the refrain and first verse, in which the relationships between the note values are clearly proportional but not constant. Her use of the harp in this track serves both as a drone and as a phrase marker; this in combination with the recitation style is reminiscent of bard-style lyric poetry improvisation. When she reaches the third verse, on "*Miragres fremosas*," she changes style completely. The interpretation becomes dancelike and modal, alternating the second and fifth rhythmic modes

(♪ ♪♪ ♪ ♪. ♪. ♪ ♪♪ ♪ ♪. ♪. ).

Other tracks display similar techniques. *Cantiga 159, Non sofre Santa Maria*, also has a very dancelike character due to Lamandier's choice of a quick duple meter, where the punctum with the downward-facing stem is treated as the beat note and pairs of virga, also with downward-facing stems, are interpreted as even divisions of the beat (such that ■ | ◆◆

corresponds to ♪♪♪). This long-short-short rhythm is the predominant pattern and appears to be a version of the dactyl third mode, because the textual accent falls on the pair of short notes rather than where it would normally fall on the long note.

The ultimate factor behind Lamandier's rhythmic choices seems to be the *Cantiga* texts. She uses rhythm to impart an additional layer of musical expression, opting for light, dancelike interpretations when the poetry is joyous or humorous, as with 159 and the third verse of 20, and slower, more rhapsodic rhythmic phrasing when the poetry has a more serious or reverent character, as with the initial verses of 20. This interpretational style hearkens of the popular lyric genres, as it employs several text-based rhythmic methods often used in the interpretation of troubadour and trouvère repertoires. Because she uses the rhythmic modes but only occasionally and as an expressive tool more than as a rule of interpretation, we can see that Lamandier's methods are rooted much more strongly on secular tradition and improvisation than the stricter, liturgically-based ideals of Anglès that we see in the recording of three years prior.

The third recording that I have chosen moves us to England and ahead to the year 1984. *The Cantigas Of Santa Maria Of Alfonso X* by the Martin Best Medieval Ensemble is a product of a period within the early music movement in which recordings of medieval music became a lot more mainstream, and performances of the *Cantigas* were popping up all over and in a variety of styles. It is presented in the increasingly common format of a small choir with a handful of instrumentalists who double the singers, in a primarily heterophonic interpretation. Best has this texture in common with a 1983 recording by the *Grupo Universitario de Camara de Compostela* and Carlos Villanueva, a 1988 recording by the U.S. based Ensemble Alcatraz, Jordi Savall's 1993 collaboration with *La Capella Reial De Catalunya*, and Australian Winsome Evans' recording with The Renaissance Players in 1996.

Another point that applies to Best's recording and the contemporaries listed above is that this period was also marked by a lapse in creativity and original interpretation. Many of these groups were satisfied to play from editions, sometimes Anglès', but after 1986, the newly available edition by Walter Mettmann inspired many groups (those who wished to latch on to the rising medieval music trend) to crank out a recording of the *Cantigas*. These groups spent most of their liner notes appealing to interest in the novelty of the *Alfonso* legend and the story of the creation of the *CSM*, rather than explaining how they arrived at their performance style.

Best does not specify the performance resources that his group used, and his recording was produced before the availability of Mettmann's edition. In comparing his performances to the facsimiles, the rhythmic interpretation appears to primarily be based on Higinio Anglès' strict modal interpretations. The first track, *Santa Maria strela do dia* (*Cantiga 100*), is interpreted in a straight 4/4, with the predominant pattern (again based on the dactyl third mode) of long-short-short expressed as half-quarter-quarter. Best's *Cantiga 140*, *A Santa Maria dadas*, is dominated the short-long rhythm of the third mode. His version of 159 *Non sofre* also employs this third mode. The result is fast and dancelike like Lamandier's, but the texture is less improvisatory.

The fourth recording was made in the same era as Best's and those of his contemporaries and makes use of both performing editions popular at the time, but differs considerably in style. Sequentia's recording *El Sabio. Songs for King Alfonso X of Castiglia and Leon (Vox Iberica III)* was produced in 1992 under directors Barbara Thornton and Benjamin Bagby. The texture includes greater vocal participation than many contemporary recordings, with a women's ensemble of six and a men's ensemble of five. They use only three instrumentalists.

In their liner notes, Sequentia states outright that they performed from a combination of facsimiles of manuscripts To and E and Walter Mettmann's edition. They also mention that they

occasionally consulted Anglès edition.<sup>xx</sup> These choices have a mixed effect upon the recording. Certain *Cantigas* were based entirely upon one of these editions and are performed in steady, modal rhythm. Others that the performers interpreted directly from facsimile are heavily improvised and contain rhythm that sounds much more rhapsodic, flowing with the text instead of in a set meter.

Sequentia's interpretation of *Cantiga* 100 is solidly in the former group, with a steady duple rhythm based on the third mode. I have yet to find a performance in which any rhythmic liberties are taken with this *Cantiga*; every group seems to perform it in this way. Sequentia's *Cantiga* 250, *Por Nos, Virgen Madre*, however, is a better example of the second type of performance found in the recording, in which rhythm is treated less proportionally, there is no set meter, just long and short values depending on how many notes fall per syllable. The *Cantigas* that are performed this way contain the most improvisation and textural experimentation, in the form of heterophonic melodic ornaments as well as polyphonic lines.

Rhythm in Sequentia's recording displays a combination of influences both liturgical and lyric, but does not incorporate any major Eastern influences. The final recording I will discuss, *Theatrum Instrumentorum's* Alfonso "El Sabio": *Cantigas de Santa Maria* comes from a separate era in *Cantigas* interpretation. The later 1990's into the 21<sup>st</sup> century marked a revival of Julià Ribera's previously ignored Arab theory. The *Theatrum Instrumentorum* recording along with several contemporaries largely left behind the liturgical and French theory that was so widely used and began to experiment with the influence of folk music, especially the Andalusian tradition.

The distinctive sound of *Theatrum Instrumentorum's* interpretation of the *Cantigas* stood out to me as I researched the *Cantigas* discography, so I contacted director Aleksandar Sasha

Karlic. Unlike many ensembles that tend to be comprised of classical musicians who received early music training, the musicians of *Theatrum Instrumentorum* are primarily folk musicians who received early music training. They approached the *Cantigas* with a pre-existing fluency in Mediterranean and Arabic folk traditions. Karlic found this appropriate as he considers the *CSM* a repertory that “lies in the border area between popular and cultivated.”<sup>xxi</sup>

This recording contains an important hallmark of more modern interpretations, what can be referred to as a “blended” approach: informing performance with as many relevant traditions as possible. Karlic discussed how this approach was especially relevant to *Cantigas* performance, due to the diversity of traditions that coexisted on the Iberian Peninsula during the thirteenth century. This approach is evident in the way that this ensemble devised their performing edition: by combining elements of all four surviving manuscripts with elements from two editions, one old (Ribera’s) and one new (Mettmann’s).<sup>xxii</sup>

The primary influence that bears upon the rhythmic interpretation of *Theatrum Instrumentorum*’s recording is Arab theory. Karlic stated that the principles of *wazn*, the classical Arab rhythmic cycles helped them sort out rhythmic discrepancies between manuscripts, because “it (*wazn*) flows directly from the text.”<sup>xxiii</sup> In addition to this, the instrumental preludes and interludes were improvised “according to the principles of *taqsim* – [the] rules of improvisation according to a particular *maqam*.”<sup>xxiv</sup>

*Theatrum Instrumentorum*’s *Prologo* is presented as a text-based interpretation, with standard one-beat-per-syllable organization, but this basic structure is overlaid with heavy Mediterranean-style ornamentation, so that the moving notes are often accomplished by several smaller note values than written in a diminution-like technique. *Cantiga* 1, *Des oge mais*, is one example that incorporates several of the instrumental *taqsims*. The first phrases are pure

improvisation, but as they draw closer to the start of the *Cantiga* refrain, they begin to incorporate melodic and rhythmic material from the *Cantiga*. The refrain and verses in these cases are presented in an Arab singing style, so that the rhythm is embellished with classical Arab-style ornaments.

These *Cantigas* that are presented with classical Arab improvisation and singing style are underlain with percussion using one of the classical Arab rhythmic cycles, which has an effect on how the notated rhythm is interpreted. Because performing directly from the facsimiles tends to result in a rhythmic interpretation that uses flexible note values from phrase to phrase, the result is that the values within the phrases are either stretched or shortened to fit the length and accents of the cycle in the percussion.

A few other recordings from this period exhibit similar interpretation styles to *Theatrum Instrumentorum*'s. These include Joel Cohen's recording from the same year with *Camerata Mediteranea, Alfonso X el Sabio: Cantigas de Santa Maria* and a 1996 recording by Eduardo Paniagua with *Musica Antigua, El Camino de Santiago*. The Cohen recording was made in Morocco by musicians primarily trained in classical Arab music, the Abdelkrim Rais Andalusian Orchestra of Fès. Eduardo Paniagua is the brother of Gregorio Paniagua, one of the directors of the 1977 Musical Heritage recording, and the young Eduardo performed in the instrumental ensemble for that recording. Eduardo's own recording differs greatly from his brother's; *El Camino de Santiago* is heavily Arab influenced.

The above recordings in addition to *Theatrum Instrumentorum*'s are very much modern realizations of the ideals purported by Julián Ribera all the way back in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These modern recordings combine a variety of influences, but the newfound

enthusiasm for applying classical Arab theory to Western music composed in Arab-influenced locales like Andalusian Spain is most evident.

As a group, these five recordings display a remarkable diversity of influence. We clearly see elements of the work of both 20<sup>th</sup>-century forerunners, Julián Ribera and Higinio Anglès, as well as the results of personal interpretational and performance choices on the parts of the ensembles. In the case of the legacies of these two scholars, it is interesting to note that for perhaps the first two-thirds of the years covered by the recordings, the mid-seventies through the early nineties, Anglès' influence prevails, but across about the last third, the later nineties into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we see a revival of Ribera's ideas relating to the employment of Arab tradition.

In my opinion, the most compelling recordings, regardless of the individual traditions that they may be based upon, are those that did not rely singularly on any edition, but built their interpretations on their own inquiries into the facsimile sources, perhaps supplementing their decisions with the work of preceding scholars. Two recordings out of my selected five inspired these criteria: Esther Lamandier and *Theatrum Instrumentorum*. I also believe that the rhythmic success of these performers owes in part to their degree of musicianship, for the most persuasive interpretations belong to ensembles that incorporate a high level of improvisation. The freedom and instinctive musicianship that results of expert historically-informed or indigenously-informed improvisation is most appropriate for the rhythmic interpretation of a repertory that survives from a period when notated music was the exception.

When confronted with the rhythmic questions of repertories like the *Cantigas* that are characterized by the fluidity of pre-Franconian notation, we must first acknowledge that it would be unreasonable to ever expect to arrive at a definitive method for interpretation and be aware of the possibility that multiple accepted interpretations coexisted when the manuscripts were

created. In doing so, we must also recognize the importance that improvisation must have held in the performance of the music of such a young, post-oral tradition. Once we have considered all of these circumstances, it becomes apparent that we cannot rely solely on the scholarly study of the manuscripts. The active performance of such a repertoire is the most effective way of arriving at an acceptable, historically informed interpretation, and the comparison of performance to performance rather than performing edition to performing edition is the most productive method for determining the success of a particular method of interpretation. Thus, at least in the case of the *Cantigas*, we can also surmise that the constant rotation from explanations based in liturgical traditions to those based in folk (here Arab) traditions is driven as much by the personal preferences and practical discoveries made by performers as those of scholars in the field of medieval music.

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### Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> Manuel Pedro Ferreira, "Iberian Monophony," in *A Performer's Guide to Medieval Music*, ed. Ross Ferreira (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2000), 152.

<sup>ii</sup> Manuel Pedro Ferreira, *Andalusian Music and the Cantigas de Santa Maria*, in *Cobras y Son*, ed. Stephen Parkinson (Oxford: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2000), 7.

<sup>iii</sup> Julian Ribera, *Music in Ancient Arabia and Spain*, trans. Eleanor Hague and Marion Leffingwell (California: Stanford, 1929), 178.

<sup>iv</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>v</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>vi</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>vii</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>viii</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

<sup>ix</sup> See Ribera, *Music in Ancient Arabia and Spain*, 195 for illustration.

<sup>x</sup> Ribera, 199.

<sup>xi</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>xii</sup> Ribera calls square puncta "squares" and oblique puncta "rhomboids."

<sup>xiii</sup> Ribera, 195.

<sup>xiv</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>xv</sup> Ferreira, "Iberian Monophony," 153.

<sup>xvi</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>xvii</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>xviii</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>xix</sup> "Cantigas de Santa Maria On Display," *University of Miami Libraries Blog*, January 6, 2012, <http://library.miami.edu/blog/2012/06/01/cantigas-de-santa-maria-on-display/>.

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<sup>19</sup> Liner notes to *El Sabio*, Benjamin Bagby and Barbara Thornton, *Sequentia* (Freiburg: Harmonica Mundi, 1992), 1-5.

<sup>20</sup> Aleksandar Sasha Karlic. E-mail message to author, February 6, 2013.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

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

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*