Review: *Colonial Counterpoint: Music in Early Modern Manila*

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DOUGLAS BACHORIK

Douglas Bachorik (Ph.D. candidate in Musicology, Durham University) is the founder and director of the music program at Bob Jones Memorial Bible College. He regularly lectures on biblical musicology at seminaries, colleges, and churches across the Philippines and greater Asia.

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In this era of instant communications, jet travel, and multinational corporate entities, we might be tempted to view the twentieth century as the genesis of globalization and intercultural exchanges. There is no doubt that technology continues to drive international connections, which enable interactions between peoples, societies, and cultural expressions. This is not, however, unique to the contemporary world—Sumerians, Phoenicians, Tyrians, Greeks, Romans, and Chinese were traveling various "silk roads" between ancient kingdoms, and the early modern era was launched with the ships of Muslim and European colonizers. It is those European travelers, especially the Spanish, that ethnomusicologist and cultural historian David Irving credits with sparking the modern era's global exchanges, specifically in its conquest of most of the islands in the archipelago now known as the Philippines. Irving makes the case that "Manila was the world's first global city" and that it "was, essentially, a microcosm of the world" (Irving 2010, 19). Starting in the mid–sixteenth century, Spanish Manila was a meeting point for Europe, the Americas, Africa, and Asia. From an incredibly tangled web of primary source material, largely unexamined until now, Irving has begun the process of "reconstructing [the] colonial musical cultures of Manila and the Philippines" (15). He makes no claim of having finished the work; in fact, one of his goals is that other scholars will join him. I believe he is largely successful, both in formulating a preliminary reconstruction and in showing others how and where to look. Having taught in a college and seminary in Manila for over ten years, I have marveled at the kaleidoscope of music and worship styles practiced throughout the Philippines. But I have often been bothered by the relatively small interest in Philippine-produced sacred compositions. Why is *imported* normally viewed as superior to *local*? Why so little distribution of Filipino music, while American and Australian materials are easily acquired? Why do so few congregations sing in their dominant language? Irving does not directly address such issues, but his book provides a nuanced picture of this complex musicological landscape, something most helpful to those of us interested in the many expressions of Christianity and worship styles found in today's Manila.

To explore these complex transcultural interactions in a Manila of over one hundred years ago, Irving uses the metaphor of counterpoint to describe his ideas about precolonial music, receptions and subversions of colonial music, and other musical and sociological information that has been masked by colonial hegemony. Specifically, Irving uses *colonial counterpoint* in three different ways: as social analogy, "the combination of multiple musical voices according to a strict, uncompromising set of rules wielded by a manipulating power"

(3); the effect of time-delayed importation of new musical ideas from the parent state on the colonial music scene (4); and the numerous cultural upheavals and social inversions that inevitably occur in a colony so geographically removed from the colonial power (4).

Irving's inspiration for the use of contrapuntal analysis comes from a number of sources: concepts of opposition elaborated by Saussure and by Lévi-Strauss; Derrida's deconstruction; and Said's literary criticism. For this foundational study, Irving looks at texts "produced *in* the colonies or *about* the colonies themselves" (7). Looking at contemporaneous ethnographies, descriptions of indigenous music-making, biographic writing about colonial missionaries and Filipino converts, archival material, early dictionaries, and extant notated music, Irving presents a sketch of musical life in early modern Manila and other regions of the Philippines from 1565 to 1815.

Although I found Irving's use of counterpoint a helpful tool in working with often difficult "instruments," due to "the dispersal, fragmentation, and outright loss of sources" (13), I believe he overlooks the possible implications of at least three of his own assumptions or predispositions. I do not necessarily disagree with his premises or the outcome of his work, but I think that using a term from European music potentially confuses the power relationships that his analysis tries to describe. For instance, Irving uses counterpoint as a conceptual tool of historiography while also stating that musical counterpoint is a sonic expression of hegemony. If the latter were true, then it would seem that the use of such an investigative tool only furthers the colonial dominance Irving deplores. Better for Irving to have borrowed a metaphor from a precolonial, indigenous musical genre, such as the Visayan *ambahan* or Tagalog *awit*. The Ilokano *dayao* or even the hybridized Spanish-Filipino *pasyon* might be more appropriate for this historical reconstruction.

Second, he writes about a musical life that is foreign to him in terms of time, language, and culture, while "[critiquing] the ways in which Spaniards [in much the same condition] and other European observers wrote about Filipino music" because "*they* wittingly or unwittingly contributed to the demise of many [Filipino musical practices]" (74; emphasis mine). How did he wittingly avoid doing damage in some other fashion?

Third, Irving believes that there will be a benefit in the recovery of indigenous musical expression lost at the birth of globalization, yet he also recognizes that a meeting and mixing of cultures had been taking place long before the arrival of the Spanish. Malay, Chinese, and Muslim peoples had been creating a cultural counterpoint in the Philippine islands for centuries. In his 26-page discourse on the meeting of peoples in Manila, he gives scant presentation of, or even reference to, data that might better establish the second "theme" of this fugal history. Perhaps future studies will give us more of the structure and "voice-leading principles" behind the subaltern music in Irving's contrapuntal framework.

In spite these seeming shortcomings, *Colonial Counterpoint* is a model of skillful and equitable handling of diverse sources from three different continents. Irving recognizes the negative impact of colonization on music, while also acknowledging the interplay of indigenous musicians and peoples, who adapted Spanish and Hispanicized Filipino music for personal, professional, religious, and economic reasons. But he does reach beyond his sources in claiming that Filipino musicians were actively, consciously, subverting Spanish authority; he gives no documentary evidence of such subversion during most of the colonial period. His conclusion to a

series of speculative questions, while interesting and worth pursuing, does not carry the same weight of evidence that he brings to most of his judgments: "Filipino singers of the pasyon [singing of the Passion story] and performers of the sinakulo [a type of Passion play] *may* have subverted the meanings and significances of the Lenten rituals approved by Church and Crown to present the central meaning of the Passion story as a symbol for struggles against social injustice—and to convey the message that suffering and self-sacrifice would eventually triumph and result in redemption" (151; emphasis mine). If true, then there should be evidence, but none appears until the nationalist period of the late nineteenth century. We might presume that once colonial rule was removed such musical and dramatic expressions would subside, yet both expressions live on in contemporary Manila and provincial areas. Unfortunately, Irving does not present reasons why such voices may be silent during the colonial period, leaving us to guess why that was the case.

Irving presents much documentation on the Spanish view of native music-making ability: a very positive view that I myself share after eleven years of working with Filipino musicians. He treats the sources with care, balancing multiple voices and their various motivations, but does not seem to extend that same consideration to contemporaneous writers from other parts of Europe. When quoting the French traveling astronomer Guillaume Le Gentil's criticism of the performance of a mass in Cavite, Irving writes dismissively, "Of course, a well-educated Frenchman like [Guillaume] probably hoped to convince his European readership of his own good breeding and refined taste in music by leveling harsh criticism at the hispanized traditions of Filipino church musicians, thus assessing his own qualities of aesthetic taste through oppositional self-definition" (183). An amusing and likely accurate statement—I have read many such musical reviews in newspapers and musicology journals—but why condemn this particular "well-educated Frenchman"? Irving's contestation of European snobbery is an interesting position in itself, which shows why present-day historical accounts are loaded with the same kinds of power-based biases that they hope to highlight and avoid.

Evidence of Irving's almost favorable view of the syncretist reaction to the meeting of colonial and indigenous musics raises an interesting question. Concluding Chapter 5, "Courtship and Syncretism in Colonial Genres," he makes this remarkable comparison:

> a literal counterpoint between cultures not only emphasized musical difference at the point of contact [when Spain first conquered most of the islands]; it also provided a framework for subsequent exchange through enharmonic engagement and even allowed for intercultural inversion. After members of different [Spanish and various Filipino] groups had tempered their musical perspectives to accommodate a sufficient degree of intercultural empathy, enharmonic engagement allowed musicians from one ethnolinguistic group to appropriate and redefine musical elements from another, different cultural system. (153)

Just what is the dominant theme of this cultural and musical counterpoint? Perhaps Irving, during his writing and research, moved from an eighteenth century fugal metaphor to a late sixteenth century motet as his tool of investigative analysis.

Colonial Counterpoint contains a few other intellectual leaps or conclusions that Irving fails to substantiate, such as his assertion that "hispanization was the Filipinos' reciprocal response to Spanish ethnology," a "form

of observing and attempting to understand Spaniards," providing "an unsettling mirror for the colonial overlords, for Spanish observers saw their own civilization reflected in the cultural traits of the Filipinos" (132); and "we can see that transculturation by indigenous populations was a purposeful means of coming to terms with cultural bigotry, subverting cultural and social hierarchies by minimizing difference" (121). I don't disagree with these potential conclusions, but I wish that Irving would have produced evidence of intentional *coming to terms* and *subverting* and evidence for the indigenous populations "attempting to understand" during the process of transculturation.

This first book by Irving, a research fellow at King's College, London, is written for both serious and general readerships. Ninety-six pages of notes and a 30-page bibliography are rich resources to guide further study by musicologists and cultural historians alike. A professional knowledge of music is not necessary for the reading of this work, but perhaps the book will inspire more music-intensive scholarship. In his desire for insightful understanding of the colonial music scene as it was lived out, Irving presents many nuanced panoramas, such as his discussion of the use of Filipino musicians in colonial worship:

> Filipino ecclesiastical musicians were valued members of colonial society. They held positions in every parish throughout the islands, and they were exempt from tribute and other forms of colonial oppression. Of course, some historians might see service to the Church as a form of oppression in itself, but we should recognize that musical activity was predominantly voluntary on the part of Filipino musicians and was actively used as a means of improving their material circumstances. (158)

I finished Irving's first major work with a far greater understanding of the musical landscape of my adopted home. The Philippines, and Manila in particular, was a meeting place of multiple voices long before America entered the ensemble with its own voice. I look with great anticipation for the continued development of his cultural *Art of the Fugue*.