



TRANSATLANTIC ARIAS:
EARLY OPERA IN SPAIN
AND THE NEW WORLD

B I B L I O T E C A Á U R E A H I S P Á N I C A

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in Spain and the New World*

CHAD M. GASTA

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For my girls, Sofía and Victoria

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INTRODUCTION

MANIPULATING THE MASSES? IDEOLOGY AND EARLY OPERA

The subject of early New World opera is a difficult one, when one considers that there are few critical studies on the topic—and even fewer operas. In fact, even the most renowned specialists of colonial Latin American literature are usually unaware that operas were produced in the New World in the time after Spain's conquest. What are the reasons for this unawareness? In part, the lack of research—particularly outside of musicology and a few literary circles—is related to a general dismissal of New World opera's forerunner, Spanish opera, and the accompanying lack of investigation into the genre both in Spain and its colonies. Spanish opera is a product of Italian and French traditions and of course is the most direct precursor of early opera in the Americas. This unfamiliarity with Spanish opera is a long-standing problem related to the fact that non-Hispanist scholars historically ignore Spain's contributions to world culture, a problem that is especially severe in the field of drama studies where English and French drama enjoy great attention whereas the Spanish theater is rarely studied by anyone except specialists in that area¹. A similar unawareness of early opera in Spain and the Americas is partly a result of the genre's irregular development in the

peninsula, and its parallel intermittent emergence in the New World, both shaped by increasingly problematic political and economic times for Spain's empire. For most of the seventeenth century, opera was embraced in Italy, Germany, and England, but it floundered in Spain². It would not be until the first decades of the eighteenth century that opera finally matured in the peninsula to such an extent that it was regularly staged and could be simultaneously exported to the New World. Other than experiments that featured musical pieces integrated into drama, opera's sporadic development in the New World—first in Lima, followed a short time later by Mexico City, then into the Jesuit missions in South America—arose soundly within the European lyrical drama tradition as exported from the peninsula.

The chief significance of this study is to reassess the role and impact of early opera in Spain and the New World by resituating the genre within its cultural context to elucidate how the dramatic and the musical were combined to offer public entertainment on the one hand, and to impart a particular ideological agenda on the other. In the chapters that follow, I survey the historical and cultural origins of opera in Europe, its intermittent development in Spain, followed by its importation into the American cultural scene. Chapter 1 provides an appraisal of the historical roots of key operas in Europe, particularly in Italy. Chapter 2 discusses how the genre's early development impacted the dramatic structure and musical configuration of the first productions in Spain and its New World colonies, and how opera played considerable roles in shaping the political and religious landscape. Finally, in Chapters 3 and 4, I take up close analysis of the three first extant operas in the New World, viewing them not only as extraordinarily unique complex lyrical and musical works for their time and place, but critical for illuminating inimitable perspectives on the

cohabitation and collaboration of New World inhabitants and Europeans. Taken as a whole, this study demonstrates how early opera in the New World was an ideologically-charged aesthetic tool that is of value to our present-day perspective as much for its dramatic and musical characteristics as for the insight it affords on the role of musical theater in the political and religious panorama of the colonial period in the Americas. As such, American opera was a transatlantic creation that crossed space and time, sometimes bridging cultural differences, sometimes exposing them, but ultimately revealing a reciprocal relationship with Europe. New World opera emerges from the shadow of Spain's empire to challenge prevailing ideological attitudes about the colonies and their peoples.

In nearly all ways this study is original because few scholars survey New World opera, and those who do are occupied with only one or two of opera's many aesthetic components. As might be expected in their disciplines, specialists stick with what they know. Hence, musicologists study the music (voice, instrumentation, musical notation, etc.) and the culture that gave rise to it. Literary critics tend to examine the dramatic verse, performance, staging, and spectacle. Historians are interested in the chronology of events, biographical data, and other archived materials. Likewise, psychologists or sociologists might analyze the meaning behind the words and the music or the actions that brought them together in one place. All espouse a particularly valid point of departure, but none tend to look beyond their own fields. What I propose is to act as a sort of intermediary between these valued disciplines and offer a multifaceted examination of opera that provides an alternate picture of how the development of opera in Europe led to the genre's transmission to the New World where it emerged as quite a potent cultural, political, and religious force. What becomes immediately visible is that, despite great obstacles, New World opera has a rightful place in

analyses of musical theater not least because of its surprising appearance in locations far removed from the great European centers but because the genre played an active role in shaping New World politics and religion. New World opera emerges as a very ideological art form fraught with often-hierarchical questions of authority, control, and propaganda.

If early opera were to achieve any sort of success in the New World, it had no other choice than to do so within Church and state power structures. The most significant scholar on early opera in Spain and the Americas, the musicologist and historian Louise K. Stein, consistently shows in her work that there was a causal relationship between ideology and music as the latter was used to promote the former. Stein discusses how early opera in Spain and the New World was produced within circumstances that were extraordinarily political. She matches great opera productions to particular historical events to show how operas were produced to honor or promote a crucial political moment. She is quite right both historically and politically. However, a deeper examination of the actual dramatic verses of these same productions moves beyond the contextual to show exactly how and why music and text can have ideological implications. Indeed, this study looks closely at individualized singing parts to determine what exactly defines these operas as political or ideological. What surfaces is that particular verses, scenes, or characters were introduced because they were extraordinarily ideological, especially when one matches the operas' content with the religious or political context within which they were produced.

Such an examination of ideology in music or theater is certainly not a new one. Critics such as Louis Althusser and Theodor Adorno³, and more recently, Fredric Jameson,⁴ have similarly suggested that aesthetics and other cultural

products are mediums that were deliberately manufactured to uphold and advance state ideology. The Church and state, the ultimate holders of power, were also the ultimate benefactor of artistic trends since without their patronage, artists, musicians, and writers normally had no alternate employment. For these reasons, artists were beholden to these authoritative bodies because, quite simply, they were paid to do so.

Theorizing that aesthetics have political or ideological purposes, as Althusser, Adorno, and Jameson have, is especially appropriate in a world where one's political status and riches were entirely necessary to produce great public opera, such as in Lima or Mexico City. But, if we look beyond the political overtures and economic advantages afforded only a few, there are more explicit ways to match ideology in music to unfolding events. In his now well known study, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, Jacques Attali views music as a cultural form intimately tied up in the mode of production in any given society that has transformed over time due to a change in the relationship between musicians and their patrons as well as to the invention of technologies for producing, recording, and disseminating music⁵.

According to Attali, music is a «channelization of noise»⁶, which is the control and subjugation of clatter into a harmonious and appealing structured order of sound. Until «noise» has been harnessed and systematized into something akin to music, it is nothing but an interruption, a meaningless construct that represents disorder and disunity. Noise is, in short, noise. In this channelization, Attali adeptly shows how music has passed through four distinct cultural stages in history: *Sacrificing*, *Representing*, *Repeating*, and *Composing*. What interests me most in his analysis of music is the economic and social function of music prior to its becoming a commodity, during its sacrificial period. For Attali, this is the period prior to the late eighteenth century,

which was dominated by ritualized sacrifice of music to higher powers, generally the monarchy. Drawing on Renee Girard's theories of ritual and sacrifice, Attali equates the Medieval and Renaissance musician to a minstrel who played when commanded, his art nothing more than a function of the ideological apparatus of his employer. The musician's music had no material worth since it was rarely copied, distributed, and sold; he and his product had no market value outside the court that employed him. In this position, music was ritualized, and the player became a sacrificial offering: «Tool of the political, his music is its glorification, just as the dedicatory epistle is its explicit glorification. His music is a reminder that, in the personal relation of the musician to power, there subsists a simulacrum of the sacrificial offering, of the gift of the sovereign, to God, of an order imposed on noise»⁷. Music, then, regardless of its beauty, had a political function in that it represented the will of the patron:

The musician, then, was (...) economically bound to a machine of power, political or commercial, which paid him a salary for creating what it needed to affirm its legitimacy. Like the notes of tonal music on the staff, he was cramped, channeled. A domestic, his livelihood depended on the goodwill of the prince. The constraints of the work became imperative, immodest, similar to those a valet or cook was subjected to at the time.⁸

It would not be until the late eighteenth century that the musician enters the commodity exchange, his music possessing some value and contributing to society's capital (*Representing*) only to be consumed, fetishized, and disseminated on a mass scale by new technical means (*Repeating*) in the twentieth century, before becoming an object of utopian self-expression thereafter (*Composing*). Up

through the late eighteenth century, however, the musician falls victim to the whims of his benefactor and his work is a cog in the ideological machine of the Church and state.

It is quite intriguing to transfer Attali's theory to the New World musical venue. On the one hand, composers like Lima's Tomás de Torrejón y Velasco who composed the first opera in the New World, *La púrpura de la rosa* (Chapter 3), was completely beholden to the Viceroy and the Church for material support. Torrejón's compositions enjoyed regular rotation in the ecclesiastical facilities in the city before being distributed to churches in smaller cities outside Lima. On the other hand, no matter what he created he earned very little for his work and even struggled to pay his own bills. Hence, mounting grand public performances was impossible without the patronage of the Viceroy, as is evidenced by the 1701 production of *La púrpura de la rosa*, composed in honor of the new King, Philip V. Similarly, in the ecclesiastical missions of South America, the Jesuits composed short tunes and taught the Indians to sing them before allowing indigenous musicians to compose complex operatic works. Their sole purpose was to uphold Church principles and transmit orthodoxy, and both European and Indian composers and musicians did so willingly. Their capital was not money but rather faith in God and the Catholic Church as well as an interest in advancing the order's mission. The results of these cultural advances were two extant operas under study in Chapter 4, *San Ignacio de Loyola* by the Jesuit organ master Domenico Zipoli and *San Francisco Javier* by an unknown Indian composer. Composed separately in different geographical locations of the Americas, and with several years between them, both operas were then copied and circulated among other missions where local Indian musicians, singers, and performers collaborated with their Jesuit masters to present the pieces as part of their glorification of the Church. Their musical pieces were likewise disposable cultural products

that could be easily replaced by others, hence the shortage of historical data indicating their popularity. They were, in a word, sacrificial.

Such analysis of music as ritual has far-reaching effects. While musicians had no control over the sale or representation of their works until the nineteenth century, opera composers sometimes were exempt from this status and enjoyed a privilege of literary and musical protection that led to a possible source of revenue, at least in Europe. Even Attali admits that royal patronage did not disappear overnight as musicians and composers long continued to find solace and pay by working at the beckon of their patron⁹. The practice of patronage in the New World likewise endured well into the nineteenth century—much longer than in Europe—suggesting that musicians and composers as well as playwrights, actors, and producers remained under the influence of the state or Church for quite a long time. Much of this prolonged system of patronage for opera has to do with economics and politics. Based on the complex and elaborate nature of staging opera and its associative high cost, opera was a genre for the wealthy, the only class who could afford to employ among their households musicians and composers. This is particularly the case in the Americas where Bourbon viceregal representatives were plagued by financial problems in the everyday operation of colonial cities, and they simply were not willing (or permitted) to expend endless resources on artistic works. Unlike their Habsburg predecessors, Bourbon patrons and patronage abated for a time after France's Philip V came to the Spanish throne in 1700. Although patronage persisted under the Bourbons, the practice was more focused and strategic. Unless a composer occupied the position of Chapel Master or principal church organist in a major city—and these were coveted positions and infrequently vacated—musicians were regarded as nothing more than lowly servants or craftsmen,

not worthy of receiving anything more than an occasional commission for their work¹⁰. Even among the self-sustaining Jesuit missions, which were far from the cities, composers were generally priests (or those studying to be priests), and music was one responsibility among many. In these missions, the composer, obviously for different reasons, worked at the behest of a higher calling and wrote and played musical works that advanced His mission.

What emerges is the notion that early music was a powerful tool to negotiate identities, conceptualize romantically distant worlds, represent particular belief systems, and neutralize opposing views. Attali's stages of music's political economy help describe music's transformation since the Middle Ages, and how musicians were economically bound to the machine of power¹¹, but there are germane and obvious questions, of course, as to just how, on a more semantic level, opera became an ideological tool. The most recent theories for understanding manipulation and control through music are offered in Steven Brown and Ulrick Volgsten's *Music and Manipulation: On the Social Uses and Social Control of Music*. Brown writes that music is intrinsically and implicitly connected to propaganda since there is always a willing «sender» whose music propagates group ideology among mostly passive «receivers». He sees music as a functional object that holds a powerful influence over behavior because it reinforces collective actions and isolates heterogeneity, thus demanding group conformity¹². Within the same volume, Peter Martin admits that a specifically constructed social context can establish a particular viewpoint or foster social identity, but he cautions against assuming the passivity of any listener since many studies suggest that the receiver interprets very little of the implied message¹³. This suggests that there is a remarkable gap between any intended message and what is actually internalized by a given

audience. It also opposes Theodor Adorno who quite famously insisted that the culture industry inculcates absolute ideological acceptance and compliance to the message being sent while simultaneously concealing the method of delivery¹⁴. What seems to be the consensus is that while spectators may not always be aware of an ideological message being imparted by the sender, or they do not care what it is, this does not preclude the sender from trying to convey one¹⁵. Music itself has always enjoyed an unusual capability to capture meaning and shape opinion via several specific devices, such as rhythm, harmony, and melody.¹⁶ In Steven Brown's enlightening introductory essay to *Music and Manipulation*, the cognitive neuroscientist specifically illustrates six ways that music successfully influences behavior. Among other points, Brown shows how music has a homogenizing effect on people, persuades them to conform and comply, provides a context for groups to define or reinforce a specific social identity, inculcates values and beliefs, is useful for conflict resolution, and channels emotional expression at the group level¹⁷. In reviewing Wayne Bowman's analysis of Attali's sacrificial stage of music, it seems that here Attali and Brown converge. According to Bowman, music's ritualistic uses of individuality is essentially erased as group cohesion becomes music's dominant goal: «In musical ritual, participants physically enact the subordination of individuality to the greater whole, events that worked powerfully to crystallize collective social organization»¹⁸. These views are not unlike those taken by Malena Kuss who sees music in the Americas as a form of kinetic energy that communicates with ancestors and the supernatural on the one hand and bonds communities and erases social tensions on the other¹⁹. Seen through this lens, music elicits social cooperation and cohesion and works against group

incongruity as it reaches beyond the here and now as it attempts to force inclusion.

Composers and dramatists alike, in their capacity to write at a particular moment in time and for a precise audience, use the stage as a purposeful object to elicit desired audience behavior and participation. In the Early Modern period, composers were «centralized on the level of ideology and decentralized on the economic level»²⁰ because they fell under the direct influence of Church and the state, not least of all because these institutions employed them. It would be these two bodies that provided the ideological impetus and the financial backing to write and perform music for public spectacles. Within this setting, music often was conceived as a communication system with a specific lexicon of acoustic devices shared by a particular culture or subgroup. The sender shapes this lexicon by matching sound with message and attempts to achieve a desired action or reaction from his audience. Few would agree that musicians and composers make music simply for themselves. Instead, they create particular harmonies, melodies, and the like because they believe their works will elicit a response *in others*. Applied to the operas studied here, the sender, aware of the social, political, religious, and economic situation in which he finds himself, exploits opera as a unique and rare musical device—sometimes in the language of the conquerors, sometimes in that of the conquered—to demand compliance on the group level.

Theories of music production, dissemination, and ideology mostly consider the effects of voice and music on listeners. But, it must never be forgotten that opera was originally a dramatic genre, and from its inception it was widely believed that music should aspire to drama, not the reverse. Beginning with the first operas in Europe in the late fifteenth century, the words of an opera—the poetic verse structure that expresses the plot, the characterization, and

the climax and denouement—were normally written well before the work was put to music. As the Florentines conceived it, sung poetic verse accompanied by light music was to be the fundamental feature of opera. And up through the middle of the seventeenth century, opera in Europe was generally considered a «tragédie en musique», as the French composer Jean-Baptiste Lully called it, emphasizing the primacy of poetry and tragedy, which was then set to music. Here, the dramatic rendering was still central. But, under Claudio Monteverdi's genius, music's significance was greatly increased so that music and verse held equal footing. Monteverdi believed that only when sung poetry was integrated carefully into dramatic action, when music articulated both action and song, and when spectacular stage sets and costumery were visually realized, could opera then come to full fruition and achieve unification between the stage and its audience. After Monteverdi, the advance of opera followed a pattern: a librettist created a dramatic poetic text, a composer put it to music to combine word with song, and a stage designer crafted elaborate sets, costumes, special effects, and mechanizations that, together, transformed the stage into a new and exotic world. Nowhere in these early works was there a particular hierarchy elevating voice, music, or poetry. It would take opera's great expansion in the second half of the seventeenth century, and especially in the eighteenth century, to demarcate the dramatic text in favor of grand orchestras and singers.²¹ For Attali, this later period corresponds to *Representation*, the time of the great spectacle when the public opera house or concert hall replace the more intimate religious or official court venues and music begins to be printed and sold.²²

Today, most would agree that when it comes to opera, music and verse should be examined as a cohesive whole²³. It is this fundamental misunderstanding that music or song

supersedes the dramatic text, or the opposite, against which Joseph Kerman rails in *Opera as Drama*: «Of the many current partial attitudes towards opera, two are most stultifying: the one held by musicians, that opera is a low form of music, and the one apparently held by everyone else, that opera is a low form of drama. These attitudes stem from the exclusively musical and the exclusively literary approaches to opera (...)»²⁴. Opera studies by musicologists, philosophers, historians, musicians, designers, and literary critics, among other interested critics, have mostly privileged one aesthetic facet of the genre over another. However, this really should not at all be surprising; after all, opera is an all-encompassing genre as it stretches beyond each of these disciplines to enter many other areas, such that no one critical approach could ever really give it the attention it requires. Any examination of opera from its inception through the eighteenth century makes plain the genre's multifarious aesthetic groundings. In Early Modern Europe, playwrights understood the effect produced by powerful storylines, interesting characterization, and unique staging devices as well as how captivating themes of honor, love, jealousy, and hatred could transport the audience from Early Modern cities to some other exotic time and place. This is precisely why the theater in Spain, called the *comedia nueva*, was so triumphant among audiences for the entire seventeenth century and part of the eighteenth. Dramatists were well aware that their success depended upon making an impact on spectators. They were beholden, to some degree, to audience appreciation, and so Spanish plays had a communal relationship with its audience. Constantly overcoming theatrical and dramatic limitations—to stay fresh and relevant—sometimes required great ingenuity on the part of playwrights. The strategic placement of popular instrumental pieces or brief songs into theatrical works

promised to be one inventive resource that would draw in spectators. At first, these short musical pieces were derived directly from the traditional *romances* and were already known to many spectators, sometimes by heart. Little by little, however, these simple and catchy tunes became ever more complex as playwrights began to experiment with longer musical numbers until some dramas, such as the *zarzuela*, were nearly entirely sung (but falling just short of full-blown opera). For Spanish playwrights, totally sung musical drama provided an innovation the stage had not known, and stories took on dramatic new life. Hence, music was linked to drama early on and would remain so in Spain and the Americas during the colonial period²⁵. It would take the daring and ingenious Lope de Vega and Calderón de la Barca to initiate opera in Spain, the first by writing a Florentine style opera, the latter by initiating a Spanish genre based upon an amalgamation of previous Italian and Spanish models. Both attempts were not without their detractors or their defects, and Spanish opera would not reach its maturity until the first decades of the eighteenth century. At that time, thanks to royal patronage, several Italian schools of opera emerged in Madrid which developed out of coalesced forms from Naples, where it would then be transported to Spain's colonies in the New World.

In the Americas, musicians and composers were almost always working in cathedral music. These composers had to fight for notoriety and pay by working within the realm of the sacred musical themes imposed by the Catholic Church, which was for a time the only benefactor of musical life. And no matter what they wrote or played for public consumption, the popular *comedia* routinely overshadowed the composers' pieces. As in Spain, New World opera was rarely funded and therefore not easily installed into the artistic scene. But, there were exceptions. Chapter 3 describes how available patronage in Lima, easily the most

accommodating location for both music and theater in the Americas during the period, secured a place for the genre in the early eighteenth century where a few secular operas were produced to celebrate the king and the monarchy. There, in the City of Kings, Tomás de Torrejón re-staged the first opera in the Americas, *La púrpura de la rosa*, a work originally written by the great Spanish playwright Calderón de la Barca and staged in Madrid in 1660. Torrejón was Chapel Master of Lima's Cathedral and, by 1700, the New World's greatest musician and composer. His refashioned opera—complete with a new *libretto*—exalted the new King Philip V, a French Bourbon, and championed the Peruvian Viceroy's decision to support the new monarchy over the competing Austrian Habsburgs as a War of Succession raged. Passed down to us today, the opera exudes propaganda, not just for its blatant praise of the monarchy, but because Torrejón sought to use it in order to secure additional patronage at a particularly difficult economic time in the colonies. It was therefore a magnificent public display of music and aesthetics that was a significant development in the history of opera.

La púrpura de la rosa and subsequent operas in Lima from the period were inspired by previous Spanish models and dependent upon Italian and French lyrical-dramatic trends. As was the case with Torrejón's work, opera in Lima often featured secular themes. In the areas outside of Lima, however, opera was unquestionably more sacrosanct. In the Jesuit missions of South America, another significant area to cultivate an opera tradition, missionaries believed the religious themes dramatized and brought to life through music were an excellent method to Christianize and educate the Indians. The Jesuits produced several short operas (or brief musical dramas), most of which were either written in one of the principle cities and distributed to the mission towns, or composed by European missionaries installed in the jungle villages of South America. Chapter 4 examines

two operas from these Jesuit missions. The first was *San Ignacio de Loyola*, written by the grand Roman organist and composer Domenico Zipoli who was studying the priesthood in Córdoba, Argentina and writing pieces for distribution to the missions. The second was a mission opera titled *San Francisco Xavier*, by an unknown Indian composer and written in the local native language. The two operas are extremely important to our understanding of cross-cultural collaboration since through the intercession of music and dance Europeans and the indigenous worked together to introduce spectacular musical pieces extolling the virtues of the faith. Therefore, New World opera developed along two branches: one that reflected secular European palatial and court tastes in the metropolitan centers such as Lima; and a sacred style in the Jesuit missions in the Andean region of South America where indigenous musicians, singers, and composers played active roles in sacred music making. Regardless of where, why, or how early American opera came about, the genre was, from its initiation, an ideologically-driven medium that glorified the state or the Church, primarily because composers were beholden to these two authoritative bodies.

One aspect that both traditions had in common was their European derivation. Early opera in the New World has no specific pre-Colombian precursor as the genre had in Medieval and Renaissance Europe. Instead, New World opera was an adaptation of both secular and sacred European opera as well as a receptor of a few theatrical and musical traditions drawn from pre-Colombian drama. For example, it has been well documented that prior to the Spaniards' arrival, the Indians had a strong theatrical *and* musical tradition but nothing that was entirely sung. The anonymous *Rabinal Achi* (Guatemala), *Apu Ollantay* (pre-Colombian Peru or reconstructed in the seventeenth century), *Diún-Diún* (Ecuador), *Güegüence* or *Macho Ratón* (Nicaragua) are a few of the extant indigenous plays of the

New World which survive today. Several of these plays—*Rabinal Achi* and *Diún-Diún*, for example—were set to music and danced,²⁶ suggesting a pre-Columbian tradition of matching music and song to drama, at least in isolated cases. Song and dance, whether in traditional indigenous styles or fashioned from European modes, were important indigenous cultural rituals that eventually were incorporated into European-styled works. In his *Natural and Moral History of the Indies* (1590), the Jesuit priest and historian José de Acosta describes the Indians' attraction to music and song while dancing, making it apparent that European styles could be adapted to their cultures:

They play different instruments for these dances. Some are like flutes or pipes, others like drums, others like conch shells; the usual thing is for them to use their voices, all singing, with one or two reciting their poetry and the others coming in with the refrain. Some of these ballads of theirs were very ingenious and told a story; others were full of superstition, and still others were pure nonsense. The members of our society who work among them have tried to put things of our Holy Faith into their way of singing, and this has been found to be extremely useful, for they enjoy singing and chanting so much that they can spend whole days listening and repeating, never getting tired. They have also translated compositions and tunes of ours into their language, such as octaves and ballads and roundelays, and it is wonderful how well the Indians accept them and how much they enjoy them. Truly, this is a great way, and a very necessary one, to teach these people²⁷.

The great interest in musical genres paved the way for the Jesuits and other missionaries to assimilate doctrinal lessons into traditional cultural spectacles. In fact, in his

Royal Commentaries (1609), the famous chronicler of the Incan people, El Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, states that the Indians also had a long tradition of pre-Colombian theater such that dramatic productions were a frequent part of everyday life and easily adapted to European styles: «Some ingenious religious men, of various orders but especially Jesuits, have composed comedies for the Indians to perform so as to give the Indians a feeling for the mysteries of our redemption. They realized that the Indians performed plays in the time of the Inca Kings and saw that they had great natural ability (...)»²⁸. Early historians like Garcilaso consistently provided narratives about the long musical tradition among many Indian groups in the Americas. Once exported, these accounts fueled the belief and wonder of a curious European readership, and European courts took note of the Indians' musical abilities. European missionaries wrote vivid descriptions of a variety of celebrations that included singing, dancing, and music as well as details regarding the advanced ability of several Indian musicians and singers to rise to a level on par with their counterparts in Europe. Indians in Jesuit schools in Potosí, Cuzco, and Lima learned to sing musical dramas with such skill that the Spaniards took note that «la gracia y habilidad y buen ingenio trocaron en contra la opinión que hasta entonces tenían, de que los Indios eran torpes, rudos e inhábiles» («Their grace and ability and ingeniousness conflicted with the opinion held until then that the Indians were simple, uncouth, and inept») ²⁹. There was no doubt, then, of the Indians' strong musical abilities or of their interest in dramatic performance.

The foundation and population of cities and towns by Spaniards spelled the end of indigenous theater. It was supplanted by Spanish drama, which quickly rose to prominence as the principal form of both court spectacle and popular entertainment³⁰. Early on, stage performances