

# African and Amerindian Elements in Portuguese Early Music

Rui Vieira Nery

**Fifteenth- and sixteenth-century courtly music in Portugal seems to be largely unaware of the cross-cultural processes taking place in the context of the Portuguese colonial expansion of the period.**

The music of the Portuguese elites continues to adopt the same cosmopolitan models of most Western European courts, both in the sacred and secular repertoires. In sixteenth-century Brazil, however, Jesuit missionaries such as José de Anchieta and Manuel da Nóbrega are already adopting traditional Amerindian melodies to the Catholic liturgy or translating the Latin official texts of a few chant and polyphonic items into the Guarani language. And from the beginning of the seventeenth century on even mainland Portuguese cathedrals and monasteries are performing Christmas, Marian and Corpus Christi villancicos which not only use texts imitating the African Creoles of Portuguese and Spanish, but depict scenes in which African characters participate in the adoration of the newborn Christ and even incorporate African dance

rhythms. In Mexico, the Portuguese composer Gaspar Fernandes does the same with texts in the Nahuatl, the language of the former Aztec empire, and the extant guitar manuscripts in Portugal and Brazil preserve multiple examples of African dances, such as the Cumbe or the Paracumbe. Finally, in the second half of the eighteenth-century an African-Brazilian dance, the Lundum, becomes the rage of public theatres and domestic salon in the main cities of the Portuguese monarchy, on both sides of the Atlantic.

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*A light reception will follow the lecture*

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