

Nathan K. Reeves

Northwestern University

Urban Space, Plebe Musicians, and Buon Governo in Spanish Naples, 1537-1632

My dissertation investigates the effects of Spanish urban reforms in early modern Naples on musical life among the city's rapidly expanding lower classes (collectively termed plebe). Beginning with the reign of Pedro de Toledo (r. 1532-1552), the Spanish viceroys implemented a project to construct a new main thoroughfare, both to expand the western and northern sectors and to extend the city walls to double the enclosed area. These long-term urban improvements, which continued well into the seventeenth century, were accompanied by aggressive attempts to control the city's vast urban poor. Crime was redefined to encompass "enemies of the public good," which included "idleness," "public disturbance," and "vagabondage," charges often indexed by the presence of plebe musicians. By examining the role of sound-making in contemporary government documents, I demonstrate how discursive moves operated as techniques with which the Spanish state identified sounds potentially "dangerous" to the social welfare of Neapolitan citizens, promulgated through the political ideals of *buon governo* (good government). These techniques disproportionately targeted members of the plebe and transformed conditions of poverty into crimes that came to earn sentences in penal institutions like the Spanish galleys.

I argue that while these initiatives resulted in the criminalization of forms of economic and social precarity, they also rendered marginalized communities of the early modern plebe visible and audible within the historical record. In this regard, my project converses with recent research that has demonstrated the cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and religious plurality of peoples inhabiting the peripheries of this Mediterranean port city. Moreover, state techniques designed to identify these diverse residents coincided with practices that inscribed the sounds of "others" in musical and literary media. These representations both reflected and distorted the realities of plebe life, and often depicted Neapolitans as vulgar, violent, and over-sexed. Such stereotypes proved essential to how non-Neapolitans (broadly, northerners) conceived of ethnic and racial differences throughout the region of southern Italy. Thus, my dissertation posits that the Neapolitan became recognizable and reproducible as a precarious figure in early modern Europe through the production and consumption of sonic difference, propelled by an ideology of securitization that was the consequence of Spanish colonialism in Naples.