

Music has always been an important aspect of my life. Having played the flute for nearly ten years, I find music to be a source of relaxation and personal enjoyment. Until recently, my academic experiences with music had always been limited to casual reading, usually in relation to my own playing. This situation changed when I was assigned a research paper in my Northern Renaissance art class. While searching through books trying to find a potential topic, the abundance of musical imagery from this period in art history piqued my interest. Once I began to research in earnest, however, I learned that these images were more than representations of quaint, antiquated instruments. I discovered an approach to music that differed greatly from my own, an approach that concerned far more than musical sounds and extended as far as the rhythms of heaven itself. I still have much to learn about this remarkably complex world of music theory, but I will always appreciate this project for introducing me to it.

I'd like to thank Professor Roberts for allowing me the freedom to explore such a rich and fascinating subject. I'd also like to thank my advisor, Professor Benton. Finally, I would like to thank all readers of this essay. I hope sincerely that you enjoy it.

The Angels of the Nájera Panels: Musical Representation of the Divine

Sara Woodbury

Professor Roberts

Art 223: Northern Renaissance Art

### The Angels of the Nájera Panels: Musical Representations of the Divine

The angel musicians in the paintings of Hans Memling are among his most frequent and intriguing motifs, and one particularly notable work that features these angels are three large panels known as *Christ Surrounded by Musician Angels* or the Nájera panels. At first glance, these musical angels appear to accurately represent a late fifteenth-century musical performance. This impression changes, however, when the angels' arrangements and their musical instruments are compared to contemporary musical performance practice, sacred music theory, and other religious paintings featuring musical subjects. Consequently, a new impression concerning the function of these pieces emerges, and that function is a religious one. The Nájera angels, while they do accurately depict several aspects of contemporary musical practice, are primarily intended to express religious beliefs.

The Nájera panels consist of three large paintings depicting Christ and sixteen musical angels, all of whom are dressed as deacons and sub deacons.<sup>1</sup> The life-sized figures stand against a gold background within a circle of dark clouds, giving the images a traditional, antiquated

---

<sup>1</sup> Maurice McNamee, *Vested Angels: Eucharistic Allusions in Early Netherlandish Paintings* (Leuven, Uitgeverij Peeters, 1998), 178.

appearance.<sup>2</sup> The central panel presents Christ as a heavenly king flanked by two singing angel trios, while the other panels feature ten angel instrumentalists.<sup>3</sup> The instruments depicted in the left panel are, from left to right, a psaltery, a tromba marina, a lute, a trumpet, and a shawm. The right panel, from left to right, shows a straight trumpet, a folded trumpet, a portative organ, a harp, and a fiddle.<sup>4</sup> All of these angels seem to offer their viewers enticingly realistic visual remnants of the late fifteenth-century musical world. Before the musical accuracy of these figures can be assessed, however, the panels should be placed into their historical context, beginning with their commission.

The panels were commissioned in the late 1480s for the church of the Monasterio de Santa Maria la Real in Nájera, a town within the kingdom of Castile. Memling was not a Spanish artist, however; he worked in Bruges. The commission was the result of mercantile connections. Spain and the Low Countries held mercantile links through the merino wool trade, and Spanish patrons often commissioned Netherlandish pieces.<sup>5</sup> It is unlikely that Memling, with a busy workshop to supervise, traveled to Castile himself. Instead, Spanish intermediaries discussed the panels with him.<sup>6</sup> According to Dirk de Vos, the panels once formed part of a large work depicting the Assumption of the Virgin, but this central piece is now lost.<sup>7</sup> The panels were completed in the early 1490s, and hung in the church until the nineteenth century, when an art dealer bought and eventually sold them to the Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten in

---

<sup>2</sup> Dirk De Vos, *Hans Memling: The Complete Works*, (Ghent, Ludion Press, 1994), 57; Herbert Myers, "Slide Trumpet Madness: Fact or Fiction?" *Early Music* 12, no 3 (Aug 1989): 387-388.

<sup>3</sup> De Vos, *Hans Memling*, 289; McNamee, *Vested Angels*, 178.

<sup>4</sup> De Vos, *Hans Memling*, 289; Ildikó Ember, *Music in Painting: Music as Symbol in Renaissance and Baroque Painting*, (Corvina Kiado, Budapest: Kossuth Printing House, 1984), 64-65; Kathi Meyer-Baer, *Music of the Spheres and the Dance with Dance: Studies in Musical Iconology*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970); Patrick Tröster, "More About Renaissance Slide Trumpets: Fact or Fiction?" *Early Music* 32, no 2 (May 2004): 263.

<sup>5</sup> Maximilian Martens, "Hans Memling and his Patrons: A Ciolmetrical Approach" from *Memling Studies: Proceedings of the International Colloquium (Bruges 10-12 November 1994)*, (Leuven, Utigeverij Peeters, 1997), 36-41.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> De Vos, *Hans Memling*, 56, 289.

Antwerp, where they remain today.<sup>8</sup> The Nájera panels were created within the context of trade and contact between the Spain and the Flemish regions, but they were also created within musically active societies. In order to analyze the musical imagery of the Nájera panels, fifteenth-century musical culture needs to be discussed, including the function of music within society.

Music in fifteenth-century Europe was considered an accompaniment rather than an independent art form.<sup>9</sup> While early independent musical concerts did appear in Bruges in the late fifteenth century, music primarily directed the listener to a different subject, such as a procession or a play, rather than to itself.<sup>10</sup> In addition, different kinds of musical accompaniment carried different connotations. For example, trumpets were often associated with rulers because they played at their entrances into cities, while flutes and drums tended to be connected with secular dance music because they were usually played at dances.<sup>11</sup> Certain musical instruments could also play in sacred situations. For example, organs were considered primarily church instruments.<sup>12</sup> Throughout Europe however, vocal music was esteemed as the highest form of sacred music, and it dominated liturgical settings.<sup>13</sup> Regardless of whether it was sacred or secular, however, music was an accompaniment, although it was not considered unimportant. On the contrary, music appeared in a variety of contexts throughout Europe, and one of the most musically active centers was Bruges itself.

Music was integral to the culture of Bruges. Musicians played or sang at nearly all public event and appeared in both religious and secular contexts. For example, music accompanied the

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 289.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Westermeyer, *Te Deum: The Church and Music: a Textbook, a Reference, a History, an Essay* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1998), 118.

<sup>10</sup> Reinhard Strohm, *Music in Late Medieval Bruges* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 4-7.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 76, 80; Iowa State University, "A Guide to Medieval and Renaissance Instruments," *Musica Antiqua*. <http://www.music.iastate.edu/antiqua/instrumt.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Westermeyer, *Te Deum*, 120.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 117-120.

city's frequent religious processions and ducal parades.<sup>14</sup> Music was also performed at mystery plays and accompanied living pictures, modeled reenactments of religious episodes such as the Annunciation and the Nativity.<sup>15</sup> In addition, many documents survive discussing instrument makers, suggesting that musical instruments were accessible to local citizens.<sup>16</sup> The abundance and availability of music in Bruges undoubtedly influenced Memling's imagery, but Bruges was not the only musically inclined European region. Spanish culture also valued music.

Music was prevalent in Spain, particularly in religious contexts. For example, minstrels, as in Bruges, accompanied religious processions. In addition, minstrels appear to have occasionally played in the actual church services, an unusual role for instrumental music during this period.<sup>17</sup> The importance of instrumental music in Spanish religious services may have influenced Memling's decision to depict the Nájera angels' musical instruments so prominently. Even if Spanish musical practices did not directly influence the panels' composition however, Memling would have known through his intermediaries that his audience would appreciate his musical angels. The prevalence of music in both Spain and Bruges demonstrate that Memling created images for patrons who valued music, although actual musical performances were not his only influence. Fifteenth-century musical culture also had a complex tradition rooted in sacred music theory, which linked music to the divine.

Sacred music theory in the fifteenth century focused on the divine. One of the most influential theories was the music of the spheres, which Paul Westermeyer explains in his book *Te Deum: The Church and Music*. Believed to have been originated by Pythagoras, medieval theologians embellished this theory, and it continued to influence fifteenth-century approaches to

---

<sup>14</sup> Strohm, *Music in Bruges*, 4-7, 76, 80.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>17</sup> Kenneth Kreitner, "Minstrels in Spanish Churches, 1400-1600," *Early Music* 20, no 4 (Nov 1992), 533-534.

sacred music. According to the theory, music exists in three levels. The highest level is *musica mundana*, the music of the spheres or heavens. The second level is the music of the body and soul or *musica humana*. The lowest level is the music that humans actually hear or *musica instrumentalia*. While theologians believed that humans could attain *musica mundana* through mathematical calculations, most agreed that ordinary people could only aspire to perfecting *musica instrumentalia*.<sup>18</sup> The music of the spheres created multiple realities of music, but music theory addressed more than perceptible and non-perceptible music. It was also a discourse on harmony and Christ.

Music represented the rational harmony of the universe, which ultimately existed in Christ. Christ was believed to be the source and the sustainer of all harmony, and sacred music was supposed to reflect this stability to the listener. Consequently, church musicians valued music for its rationality rather than its emotive qualities and, rather than discover the most affecting sounds, tried instead to find the correct balance in their music.<sup>19</sup> While a few fifteenth-century composers and musicians did begin to explore the emotional qualities of music, rationalism and balance would dominate music theory until the Enlightenment.<sup>20</sup> Fifteenth-century sacred music was steeped in theological meaning, but music also shared links with religious art. Before these images and their similarities to the Nájera panels can be discussed however, the accuracy of the Nájera panels' musical representations needs to be examined.

The Nájera panels present several problems for viewers in terms of their accuracy. On the one hand, the paintings do depict several popular fifteenth-century musical instruments that were traditionally associated with rulers and courts. In addition, the panels also demonstrate the dominance of the clergy in sacred music. At the same time, however, the Nájera panels' musical

---

<sup>18</sup> Westermeyer, *Te Deum*, 116-119.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 117.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 119.

arrangements and the actual construction of several of the instruments conflict with contemporary practices. These inconsistencies express theological statements, but these meanings should not be discussed until the images' accuracies are examined, beginning with the musical instruments.

The Nájera panels accurately depict several popular late fifteenth-century instruments that would have been played in Spain and Bruges.<sup>21</sup> One instrument is the tromba marina, a stringed monochord with a trumpet-like sound. Unlike most stringed instruments, which have a stable bridge, the tromba marina has a trembling bridge which Memling correctly depicts.<sup>22</sup> Another example is the basic shape of the psaltery, a zither-like instrument. The psaltery existed in many forms, but Memling depicts one especially popular triangular form known as the pig's head psaltery.<sup>23</sup> The Nájera panels correctly show several musical instruments that church viewers would have recognized, but the images' accuracies are not limited to the actual representations of individual instruments. The images in panels also accurately reflect the kinds of instruments that rulers favored.

The Nájera panels' musical instruments reflect contemporary tastes in courtly music. This preference for courtly instruments is the result of the basic composition itself. The panels present Christ as a king; he presides over an eternal, heavenly court. Consequently, the panels also depict instruments that were associated with rulers and courts. One example is the lute, which was highly revered in the Renaissance period and held a high status at royal musical courts.<sup>24</sup> The trumpets are another example because they signaled the entrances of rulers at royal

---

<sup>21</sup> De Vos, *Hans Memling*, 292; Tröster, "More About Renaissance Slide Trumpets," 264.

<sup>22</sup> Dwight Newton, "The Tromba Marina: A Study in Organology," *Oriscus: Arts, Culture, Technology and Meaning*. <http://www.oriscus.com/mi/tm>; *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol 25 s.v., "Trumpet Marine."

<sup>23</sup> Iowa State University, "A Guide to Medieval and Renaissance Instruments," *Musica Antiqua; The New Grove Diction of Music and Musicians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol 20, s.v. "Psaltery."

<sup>24</sup> Iowa State University, "A Guide to Medieval and Renaissance Instruments," *Musica Antiqua*.

processions.<sup>25</sup> The panels accurately reflect both the social status as well as the physical appearance of several fifteenth-century musical instruments, but the panels' accuracies are not limited to instrumental depictions. They also depict the dominance of the clergy in sacred music.

The liturgical attire of the Nájera angels reflects the clergy's supremacy over the performance of late fifteenth-century sacred music. The Nájera panels represent a heavenly scene as well as a courtly one. Consequently, the angels play sacred music, and all are dressed as clerics.<sup>26</sup> Formerly, the laity and the clergy had sung together, but in the ninth and tenth centuries the clergy, through increasingly complex melodies as well as doctrinal teachings, started to exclude the laity from singing.<sup>27</sup> By Memling's time, only clerics performed liturgical music. This development is reflected in the angels' dress; angels are clerics, not laity.<sup>28</sup> The musical instruments and clerical garb of the Nájera angels accurately represent several aspects of late fifteenth-century musical performances, but not of all of the panels' imagery corresponds with contemporary practice. In order to understand Memling's theological statements, these inconsistencies must be addressed, beginning with the panels' musical orchestrations.

The Nájera angels conflict with contemporary musical arrangements. First, instrumentalists and singers rarely appeared together in liturgical settings in the fifteenth century. Vocalists, even in Spain and Bruges, dominated liturgical services and masses, and if an instrument was used at all, it was usually only an organ.<sup>29</sup> Second, the arrangement of the vocalists is fairly atypical. The singers consist of two trios, and each trio most likely consists of cantus, contra-tenor, and tenor voices. According to Dirk De Vos, this arrangement had been

---

<sup>25</sup> Strohm, *Music in Bruges*, 76, 80.

<sup>26</sup> McNamee, *Vested Angels*, 178.

<sup>27</sup> Westermeyer, *Te Deum*, 107.

<sup>28</sup> McNamee, *Vested Angels*, 178.

<sup>29</sup> Meyer-Baer, *Music of the Spheres*, 183-186; Westermeyer, *Te Deum* 120; Emanuel Winternitz, *Musical Instruments and Their Symbolism in Western Art: Studies in Musical Iconology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), 138-139.

popular in earlier centuries, but it was considered somewhat outdated by Memling's time as more complex polyphony developed.<sup>30</sup> Third, the juxtaposition of instruments raises issues. Instruments were grouped according to their volume in the late medieval and Renaissance periods. The two central groups were loud instruments, such as trumpets and shawms, and soft instruments, such as strings.<sup>31</sup> Both groups play together in the panels, but the reality of this combination is uncertain because the volume of the loud instruments would have been disproportionate to the softer ones.<sup>32</sup> The accuracy of the panels' orchestrations is questionable, but these arrangements are not their only inconsistencies with contemporary musical practice. Many of the musical instruments themselves, despite their realistic appearances, have been changed.

Several of the instruments in the Nájera panels have been altered. Herbert Myers, a musical historian, points out these alterations in his article "Slide Trumpet Madness: Fact or Fiction?" First, the psaltery has 60 strings. This number gives the instrument three full octaves, but most psalteries had far fewer strings. Second, the shawm has no flared bell and no visible vent holes, two important aspects of the instrument's structure. Third, the trumpets' constructions follow an unusual 2-3-4 ratio that seriously affects their natural note divisions. Finally, the pipes of the portative organ and the frettings of the fiddle and the lute do not follow Pythagorean principles.<sup>33</sup> The Nájera panels have several inconsistencies with contemporary practice, but many of these alterations are intentional. The panels belong to an artistic tradition of altering musical practice in order to communicate religious meaning.<sup>34</sup> Before the images' own religious messages are discussed, these precedents will be briefly examined.

---

<sup>30</sup> De Vos, *Hans Memling*, 289.

<sup>31</sup> Winternitz, *Musical Instruments in Western Art*, 147.

<sup>32</sup> Meyer-Baer, *Music of the Spheres*, 183-186; Winternitz, *Musical Instruments in Western Art*, 138-9, 148.

<sup>33</sup> Myers, "Slide Trumpet Madness," 388-389.

<sup>34</sup> Meyer-Baer, *Music of the Spheres*, 183.

The Nájera panels follow a tradition of adapting musical imagery in religious paintings to convey theological statements.<sup>35</sup> One prominent example is Jan van Eyck's *Ghent Altarpiece*. Created in the 1420s, two panels from this enormous altarpiece feature angel musicians. Several of the angels play realistically-depicted instruments, but the number of pipes on the organ has been changed from fifteen to twenty-one, giving the instrument three full octaves. According to Ildikó Ember, van Eyck changed the number of pipes to invoke the Holy Trinity.<sup>36</sup> Artists also altered musical arrangements in order to convey ideas such as the fullness or completeness of heaven.<sup>37</sup> One example is the Master of Saint Lucy's *Assumption of the Virgin*, which was painted between 1480 and 1500.<sup>38</sup> This composition, like the Nájera panels, shows both vocalists and instrumentalists as well as brass and stringed instruments playing together.<sup>39</sup> These examples demonstrate that Memling worked within a tradition of altering musical practice in order to communicate the divine. It is now time to discuss the religious messages of the Nájera panels themselves.

The Nájera panels make several religious statements through their musical imagery. First, the arrangement of the musicians and the construction of the musical instruments center around the number three, invoking the Holy Trinity. Second, the arrangement suggests the hierarchy of angels. Third, Memling's choice of instruments visually depicts the balance and fullness of heavenly music, invoking contemporary sacred music theories. Finally, the figure of Christ himself invokes both the music of the spheres and Christ as the sustainer of harmony. The angels celebrate Christ and the divine, and one of Memling's most noticeable religious statements is the angels' compositional focus around the number three.

---

<sup>35</sup> Ember, *Music in Painting*, 17.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 50.

<sup>37</sup> Meyer-Baer, *Music of the Spheres*, 183-187; Winternitz, *Musical Instruments in Western Art*, 139-142, 146-148.

<sup>38</sup> De Vos, *Hans Memling*, 291; Winternitz, *Musical Instruments in Western Art*, 145.

<sup>39</sup> Meyer-Baer, *Music of the Spheres*, 166; Winternitz, *Musical Instruments in Western Art*, 146-148.

The Nájera panels concentrate on the number three, a holy number in Christianity because it invokes the Holy Trinity, one of this religion's fundamental beliefs. First, Memling depicts three distinct musical categories: soft instruments, loud instruments, and vocalists.<sup>40</sup> Second, the vocalist angels are grouped into trios, a quaint arrangement by Memling's time but ideal for invoking the Holy Trinity.<sup>41</sup> Finally, instruments such as the psaltery have been altered, like van Eyck's organ, to refer to the number three. Memling designed the Nájera angels to invoke the Holy Trinity, but his musical arrangements also suggest the angel hierarchy.

The Nájera panels invoke the hierarchy of angels, an old religious tradition that divided angels into a nine-level hierarchy. The lowest angels corresponded with humans, while the angels closest to God existed within the higher realms.<sup>42</sup> By the fifteenth century, the formal divisions of the hierarchy had in essence dissolved in visual art, but Memling subtly evokes the hierarchy by arranging his musicians to correspond with contemporary attitudes toward sacred music.<sup>43</sup> Ildikó Ember summarizes Memling's allusions to the hierarchy in *Music in Painting: Music as Symbol in Renaissance and Baroque Art*. First, the vocalists, the figures who are closest to Christ, constitute the highest levels because vocal music was considered the highest form of sacred music. The trumpeters constitute the middle realms because their music signals the Last Judgment, which determines the eternal fate of all human souls. Finally, the soft instruments comprise the lowest divisions because stringed instruments had a particularly close spiritual relationship with humans. For example, psalteries were played as an accompaniment to prayers and psalms. In addition, King David, the author of the psalms, was usually depicted with a

---

<sup>40</sup> De Vos, *Hans Memling*, 292.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Meyer-Baer, *Music of the Spheres*, 143.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

stringed instrument, usually a harp.<sup>44</sup> Memling's arrangements evoke traditional religious beliefs, but his statements are not limited to the arrangement of his musicians. The musical instruments themselves have been carefully selected to depict the actual sound of heavenly music.

The technical properties of the instruments in the Nájera panels to represent the balance and completeness of *musica mundana*. First, the Nájera panels, represent instruments from almost all musical groups. Nearly all known musical sounds of the period play together, suggesting the fullness of heavenly music.<sup>45</sup> Second, the technical properties of each instrument are intended to depict balance. Each instrument contributes a different kind of sound, but no particular instrument, at least visually, overwhelms the others or acts as a soloist. To better distinguish Memling's method of instrumental selection, the technical properties of the instruments depicted in the panels will be compared to one popular instrument that is not shown: the hurdy-gurdy.

The hurdy-gurdy, or symphonia, was a mechanical violin with a handle and a keyboard. The turned handle produced a droning sound, and a melody was played on the keyboard. The hurdy-gurdy appeared frequently at both religious and secular festivals, and it also appears in art, including one Memling's *Last Judgment Altarpiece*.<sup>46</sup> The instrument however, is not featured in the Nájera panels, and one reason for its absence may be the concept of balance that Memling wished to portray. Medieval music theorists had argued that divine music was characterized by pure equilibrium, and church musicians tried avoid deficiencies as well as excesses of music.<sup>47</sup> A hurdy-gurdy, which produces two relatively strong sounds simultaneously, may have been considered an excess of music, particularly when the technical abilities of the Nájera instruments

---

<sup>44</sup> Ember, *Music in Painting*, 64-65; Iowa State University, "A Guide to Medieval and Renaissance Instruments," *Musica Antiqua*.

<sup>45</sup> De Vos, *Hans Memling*, 289.

<sup>46</sup> *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol 12, s.v. "Hurdy-Gurdy."

<sup>47</sup> Westermeyer, *Te Deum*, 117.

are examined.

The instruments that Memling depicts have different technical capabilities which limit their contributions to the overall sound. First, several of the louder instruments depicted, particularly the trumpets and the tromba marina, are incapable of playing complex melodies, limiting their repertoire to single, sustained tones. They could play loudly, but they could only play simple melodies.<sup>48</sup> Second, most of the instruments are incapable of producing more than one sound, limiting their contributions to one voice. These instruments include, in addition to the trumpets and tromba marina, the shawm and the portative organ.<sup>49</sup> Third, the instruments which can produce two sounds simultaneously are stringed instruments whose plucked notes are very soft and short in comparison to the sustained notes of the trumpets or tromba marina. These stringed instruments may be able to produce multiple sounds, but they cannot sustain their tones. These examples include the harp, the lute, and the psaltery.<sup>50</sup> Finally, the most versatile instrument in the Nájera panels, the fiddle, is depicted in a relaxed playing position. The fiddle could be held in two ways. For more strenuous music, the fiddle was held between the chin and shoulder in order to stabilize the player's grip on the instrument.<sup>51</sup> If the music was not especially difficult, the instrument was held in a lower position and supported by the arm.<sup>52</sup> The fiddler in the Nájera panels holds the instrument in this lower position, implying calm rather than technically demanding music. All of the instruments use their technical properties to depict balance. The abilities of one instrument, whether it can play a complex melody in short, crisp notes or sustain a full, single note, balances another, but no instrument can sustain the entire

---

<sup>48</sup> Myers, "Slide Trumpet Madness," 383; Dwight Newton, "The Tromba Marina," *Oriscus*, <http://www.oriscus.com/mi/tm>; Tröster, "More About Renaissance Slide Trumpets," 253; *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol 25, s.v., "Trumpet Marine."

<sup>49</sup> Iowa State University, "A Guide to Medieval and Renaissance Instruments," *Musica Antiqua*.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol 8, s.v. "Fiddle."

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

sound alone. No soloists are depicted among these angels, and that is because they are not the focus of the image. Christ is the main subject of the panels.

Christ is the soloist of the Nájera panels, and the angels' music is meant to accompany his glory. First, Christ is located in the center of the compositions; the viewer focuses on his figure.<sup>53</sup> Second, Christ is much larger than the angels, invoking a medieval tradition of depicting the most important figures as the largest.<sup>54</sup> Finally, Christ's garb illustrates his role as the harmony of the universe. Christ wears a billowing cope, and the cope's golden border is outlined with spheres.<sup>55</sup> An enormous disk filled with rounded gems fastens this cope.<sup>56</sup> In addition, Christ holds a large sphere with a cross mounted to it, a traditional emblem of rulers.<sup>57</sup> All of these circles, when seen within the context of the musician angels, evoke the music of the spheres. Christ is the music of the spheres; he is the purest and most beautiful music. The Nájera angels play their music, a recognizable aspect of daily culture, to show the viewer that Christ is the harmony of the universe, the king of heaven and earth. When placed within the context of religious meaning, the Nájera panels become more than a catalogue of contemporary musical practices; they transcend the everyday world in order to glorify Christ.

The angels in the Nájera panels celebrate Christ through the harmony and balance of divine music. While the compositions do not always concur with contemporary musical performance practice, ultimately the Nájera angels do accurately reflect the role of music in late fifteenth-century culture. Just as music in Bruges and Spain was primarily used as an accompaniment to other events rather than as an independent art form, the Nájera angels play their music not to record contemporary musical practice but to focus the viewer on Christ. The

---

<sup>53</sup> De Vos, *Hans Memling*, 290-291.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

<sup>55</sup> McNamee, *Vested Angels*, 178, 215; De Vos, *Hans Memling*, 290-291.

<sup>56</sup> De Vos, *Hans Memling*, 290-291.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

angels direct the viewer to Christ, providing a tantalizing glimpse at the divine harmonies that can only be known in heaven itself.

### Bibliography

De Vos, Dirk. *Hans Memling: The Complete Works*. Translated by Ted Alkins. Ghent: Ludion Press, 1994.

Ember, Ildikó. *Music in Painting: Music as Symbol in Renaissance and Baroque Painting*.

Translated by Mary and Andras Boros-Kazal. Corvina Kiado, Budapest: Kossuth Printing House, 1984.

Iowa State University. "A Guide to Medieval and Renaissance Instruments," *Musica Antiqua*.

<http://www.music.iastate.edu/antiqua/instrumt.html>

Kreitner, Kenneth. "Minstrels in Spanish Churches, 1400-1600." *Early Music* 20, no 4 (Nov 1992): 532-546. <http://links.jstor.org>

Martens, Maxmilian, "Hans Memling and his Patrons: A Cliometrical Approach" from *Memling Studies: Proceedings of the International Colloquium (Bruges 10-12 November 1994)*.

Ed. Helene Verougstraete, Roger Van Shoute, Maurits Smeyers with collaboration of Anne Dubois. Leuven, Uitgeverij Peeters, 1997. 35-41.

McNamee, Maurice. *Vested Angels: Eucharistic Allusions in Early Netherlandish Paintings*.

Leuven, Unitgerij Peeters, 1998.

Meyer-Baer, Kathi. *Music of the Spheres and the Dance of Death: Studies in Musical Iconology*.

Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970.

Myers, Herbert. "Slide Trumpet Madness: Fact or Fiction?" *Early Music* 12, no 3 (Aug 1989):

382-389. <http://www.jstor.or/search/AdvancedSearch>.

Newton, Dwight. "The Tromba Marina: A Study in Organology." *Oriscus: Arts, Culture, Technology and Meaning*, <http://www.oriscus.com/mi/tm>.

Strohm, Reinhard. *Music in Late Medieval Bruges*. Oxford: Claredon Press, 1985.

*The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 8, s.v. "Fiddle."

*The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 12, s.v. "Hurdy-Gurdy."

*The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 20, s.v., "Psaltery."

*The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 25, s.v., "Trumpet Marine."

Tröster, Patrick. "More About Renaissance Slide Trumpets: Fact or Fiction?" *Early Music* 32, no. 2 (May 2004): 252-268.

[http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/early\\_music/toc/emu32.2.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/early_music/toc/emu32.2.html)

Westermeyer, Paul. *Te Deum: The Church and Music: a Textbook, a Reference, a History, an Essay*. Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1998.

Winternitz, Emanuel. *Musical Instruments and their Symbolism in Western Art: Studies in Musical Iconology*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979.