Musical Practice & Spatial Transfer in Early Modern Europe (Mainz, 17-18 Dec 26)

Mainz, JGU Mainz, Institute for Art History and Musicology, Dec 17–18, 2026
Deadline: Oct 15, 2026

Margherita Antolini

Sacred Sound in Transit.
Musical Practice, Spatial Transfer and Local Adaptation in Early Modern Europe.
International and Interdisciplinary Workshop.

In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, new forms of sacred music circulated across Europe together with musicians, repertories, instruments and ideas about performance. Changes in musical style and ensemble size affected the spatial disposition of performers and thus the relationship between music, architecture, acoustics and liturgy. In Rome, polychoral performance practices made extensive use of permanent cantorie and coretti as well as temporary palchi, while the increasing importance of pratica concertata introduced changing requirements for the positioning and accommodation of singers and instrumentalists. Yet such developments cannot be understood as the simple diffusion of a single Roman model. Venetian polychorality, Roman concertato practices and other Italian traditions intersected with local musical, architectural and confessional cultures north of the Alps.

The interdisciplinary workshop, which will take place at Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz in December 2026, focuses on the transfer and spatial translation of sacred musical practices between Italy and Central Europe. Rather than asking only how repertories circulated, we investigate what happened when particular performance practices entered new architectural, institutional and liturgical environments. Special attention will be given to the Rhine-Main region and neighbouring ecclesiastical territories, including Mainz, Würzburg, Frankfurt, Cologne/Bonn and Fulda, which provide particularly promising case studies for different forms of musical and spatial adaptation. These Catholic contexts will be considered in comparison with better-researched Protestant centres such as Wolfenbüttel and Dresden. Guiding questions could be: What exactly was transferred – repertory, scoring practices, ensemble structures, spatial dispositions, acoustic knowledge or architectural solutions? Who acted as mediators: travelling musicians, court chapels, religious orders, ecclesiastical princes, architects, organ builders, printers or institutional networks? How can direct transfer be distinguished from mediated adaptation or independent parallel development? To what extent did imported musical practices require temporary stages, galleries, organs or more permanent architectural interventions? And how can 3D reconstruction and acoustic simulation contribute to reconstructing such ephemeral and often poorly documented performance situations?

The workshop brings together approaches from musicology, architectural and art history, liturgi-

cal history, transfer and mobility studies, acoustics and Digital Humanities. Its aim is to develop a shared methodology for a comparative history of musical-spatial transfer and to identify promising case studies, sources and archival holdings for future international cooperation. The workshop is organised by the research project „CANTORIA – Music and Sacred Architecture“ at Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz.

Papers of 30 minutes will be accepted in English, German and Italian. Interested speakers are invited to submit an abstract of their proposed paper (max. 500 words) and a short CV (max. 300 words) by October 15 2026 to: anmeldung-musikwissenschaft@uni-mainz.de

Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz,
Institute for Art History and Musicology, Department of Musicology,
Research Project „CANTORIA – Music and Sacred Architecture

Concept and Organisation: Dr. Margherita Antolini, Prof. Dr. Klaus Pietschmann and
Dr. Tobias C. Weißmann

Contributions by junior researchers will receive special attention. Travel and accommodation expenses will be reimbursed.
Further information: https://en.cantoria-mainz.de

Reference:

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