

Angel musicians and Neo-platonic representation in Sixteenth-Century New Spain

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Three early Augustinian convents in New Spain (colonial Mexico) - *Acolman*, *Metztitlan* and *Yuririapundaro* - feature sculptures of angel musicians on their principal facades. Unique in sixteenth-century church architecture, these statues stand in the position occupied by standard mendicant symbols in other buildings and count among the earliest images of European music making in the viceregal Americas. This paper aims to correct literal interpretations of the sculptures as descriptive of conventual's musical life by situating them within traditions of Neo-platonic representation in sixteenth-century New Spain. It will identify the instruments as the *vihuela* and the *shawm*, show how the combination of soft and loud instruments symbolizes the idea of the harmony of the spheres according to contemporaneous European traditions of representation, argue that the ensemble emblematically marks the building as Augustinian by indexing St. Augustine's writings on music, and suggest that a 1536 Spanish image of Orpheus served as a model.