

# Music as an angelic message in El Greco's *oeuvre*

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Angels are assumed to represent messengers from God and in Christian art they are traditionally depicted as winged human beings. In the visual arts all figures are mute; therefore angel music as the divine message relayed to the viewer needs to be interpreted as a form of visual gestural rhetoric with an imaginary auditive reference. In order to treat this theme, the article is introduced by a general discussion of the representation of angels in El Greco's *oeuvre*, followed by a brief orientation to the theme of angel musicians in Medieval and Renaissance art. An analysis of El Greco's paintings that include heavenly musicians reveal that the interaction between heaven and earth becomes continuous, eliminating the contrast between these zones that was postulated by Aristotle. Even though only a limited number of El Greco's paintings include angel musicians, their active presence in some of his most imaginative compositions illustrate the way in which he evolved an unique iconographical convention related to the theme of these consorts, and his innovative expansion of the meaning of the being and missions of angels.

**Keywords:** El Greco, angel consort, harmony of the spheres, musical instruments

## Musiek as 'n engel-boodskap in El Greco se *oeuvre*

Dit word veronderstel dat engele boodskappers van God is en in Christelike kuns word hulle tradisioneel as gevlakte mensfigure voorgestel. In die visuele kunste is alle figure stom; dus moet engel-musiek as die goddelike boodskap wat aan die aanskouer oorgedra word, as 'n vorm van visuele gebare-retorika met 'n denkbeeldige ouditiewe verwysing geïnterpreteer word. Ten einde hierdie tema te ondersoek, word die artikel ingelei deur 'n algemene bespreking van die voorstelling van engele in El Greco se *oeuvre*, gevolg deur 'n bondige oriëntasie tot die tema van engel-musici in Middeleeuse en Renaissance-kuns. 'n Ontleding van El Greco se skilderye wat hemelse musici insluit, toon dat die interaksie tussen die hemel en die aarde daarin aaneenlopend word, waardeur die kontras tussen hierdie sones, soos deur Aristoteles gepostuleer, geëlimineer word. Selfs al sluit slegs 'n beperkte aantal van El Greco se skilderye engel-musikante in, illustreer hulle aktiewe teenwoordigheid in van sy verbeeldingrykste komposisies hoe hy 'n unieke ikonografiese konvensie met betrekking tot engel-konsortiums ontwikkel het, asook sy innoverende uitbreiding van die betekenis van die wese en missies van engele.

**Sleutelwoorde:** El Greco, engel-konsortium, harmonie van die sfere, musiekinstrumente

If angels are assumed to represent messengers from God, then their presence in Christian art should not fulfil a mere decorative purpose, and should be more meaningful than functioning as space-filling elements in the celestial or terrestrial zones of paintings or other works of visual art. It is therefore assumed that the inclusion of angel musicians in El Greco's (1541-1614) complex compositions is meaningful in relation to the themes presented and warrants analysis.

As a messenger, a depicted angel is mute and its purpose is unified with the theme of a coherent pictorial composition. In postmodern theory all visual works of art are designated "texts" and the criteria for interpreting language texts are applied, which implies a "reading" of the visual image as if it were a speech utterance. By contrast, an attempt will be made to treat the message that angel musicians convey in El Greco's paintings visually. Therefore, the following definition of semiosis by Christopher Collins (1991: 7) as "the relay of a message via a messenger that is a signified via a signifier", should be modified because the message is relayed by angel consorts<sup>1</sup> that are represented visually, to the receiver (viewer) who stands outside the depicted scene in real space. This viewer's task in understanding the message is to decode the angels' musical performance as a form of visual gestural rhetoric with an auditive reference, since in the case of a depicted angel musician as a messenger relaying its message, there is no verbal communication: in visual representations both the messenger and the recipient of the message are mute.

Collins completes the above statement by explaining: "The messenger carries burdens, verbal and perhaps also objectal, that within the social context are interpretable by all the addressees as meaningful." He notes that, in imaginative literature "we prize the verbal skill of

poets and novelists to ‘portray’ persons and settings so vividly that we seem to view them with what some have called an ‘inner eye’ ” (1991: 1). However, not only literary artists should be lauded for “portraying” visual settings vividly; traditional Western narrative painting and relief sculpture also often communicate so vividly with viewers that they may “hear” the message relayed by the figures with an “inner ear”. This fulfils the requirement of rhetorical *enargeia* – the power to create a vivid presence of that which is represented – in which El Greco excelled in his depiction of both humans and angels.

### Angels in El Greco’s *oeuvre*<sup>2</sup>

Since the beginning of Christian art, angels have been embodied in idealised, mostly genderless and heavily draped, human form, but with the addition of wings, whereby they are distinguished from the depictions of mortals. El Greco’s *oeuvre* is replete with representations of angels and archangels that are easily recognised by a viewer acquainted with the iconographical traditions of Christian art, because the artist represented them in a conventional way as winged human figures to signify their primary function as messengers sent by God, moving or situated between heaven and earth. Following the tradition of most Renaissance painters and sculptors of religious works, El Greco initially idealised angels as male human beings of Michelangelesque physical beauty and grace, their spiritual nature indicated mainly by means of the addition of wings to their figures. Since time immemorial wings were idealised because humans are earthbound.<sup>3</sup> The idea expressed by Plato (1914: 473), whose work El Greco was certainly acquainted with, expressed the symbolic meaning of the wing as follows: “The natural function of the wing is to soar upwards and carry with it what is heavy to the place where dwells the race of gods. More than any other thing that pertains to the body it partakes of the nature of the divine.”

Later in his career El Greco began to dematerialise, or render as translucent, the bodies of the angel figures he depicted, thus emphasising their implied weightlessness. At the same time, a process of figural elongation and a diminished emphasis on physicality becomes evident in his portrayal of human figures and they acquire angelic characteristics, aspiring to disembodiment and ascent. In El Greco’s *oeuvre* angel figures progressively become metafigures, that is figures connecting heaven and earth, linking divine and human figures in the compositions. Therefore angels in El Greco’s *oeuvre* cannot be interpreted as belonging to the transcendental or divine realm – the irrefutable Other – while human beings are part of the world and therefore inferior. On the contrary, El Greco erases the tension between the earthly realm and the transcendental as it is commonly understood.

To the extent that the physicality of El Greco’s angel figures decreases, their supramundane mission gains emphasis. Consequently, the angels that he depicted evolves from winged male forms to more androgynous figures who are heavily draped in silken garments, the swirling of which often accentuates the spiral-like forms in which they are composed, as well as the direction of their movement. Furthermore, they are depicted as both sources of light, and as radiant reflectors of a divine light source, in keeping with the ideals of Christian Neoplatonism.<sup>4</sup>

In El Greco’s paintings that include angels, they not only enhance the compositional complexity, but also the meaning of the presentation. They are depicted as engaged in tasks requiring movement between the realms of heaven and earth, the divine and the human. Their spiritual purpose as intermediaries is revealed in their movement or situation between heaven and earth, and in this respect they comply with Thomas Aquinas’s (1945: 481) insight, which he adapted from Aristotle’s schema of form and material, or act and potential: “Motion is ... taken in the sense in which to understand and to will... . Therefore an angel is called an ever mobile

substance, because he is always actually intelligent, and not as if he were sometimes actually and sometimes potentially, as we are.”

El Greco depicted angels in a variety of figural postures that suggest their innate mobility in a manner that also fulfils various aesthetic ideals formulated in the very wide scope of Italian Renaissance art theory. They are represented as standing on the same plane as Christ as witnesses to his baptism,<sup>5</sup> but also in the heavenly zones of pictures, weightlessly moving in midair, or supported by clouds on which they are often seated at musical instruments. In these various narrative contexts they indicate their mission by means of El Greco’s expressive use of the rhetoric of gesture to suggest feeling, denote speech, and the sound of music.

In his late paintings, El Greco formally integrates the movement and gestures of the angels into a complex, continuous *serpentinata*, or spiral movement. With time, El Greco came to reinforce this subtle continuous movement by figural elongation which resulted in the vertically extended formats of his later compositions. The verticality and elongation of both his figures and compositions, especially those in which angels are depicted, have symbolic allusions. In addition to its obvious formal qualities, the representation of light by means of colour and texture adds to the intensity of the suggested movement of figures and the total compositions, since light and movement are symbolically linked in terms of the convention that ascent towards heaven is filled with the light of the divine world where celestial music can be heard.

In the accomplishment of their tasks as messengers in El Greco’s *oeuvre*, angels appear alone, as they do, for example, in versions of the *Annunciation*.<sup>6</sup> In the heavenly regions of various paintings such as the *Allegory of the Holy League* (also called the *Adoration of the Name of Jesus*),<sup>7</sup> the *Martyrdom of St Maurice and the Theban Legion* (figure 3) and the *Burial of the Count of Orgaz*,<sup>8</sup> they appear in composed groups, acting collectively in adoring of the name of Christ, serving as mediators between God and mortals, or playing on musical instruments. When they appear in the earthly zones of the paintings, angels appear as witnesses to a divine event, as in the two versions of the *Baptism of Christ*.<sup>9</sup> In the *Trinity*<sup>10</sup> and the *Crucifixion with the Virgin, St John the Evangelist, the Magdalen and Angels*,<sup>11</sup> they are depicted as mourners at the death or passion of Christ. Their active presence in the heavenly realm create compositional fields of force whereby secular space is transformed into sacred space, which is of extreme importance in the case of celestial musicians. Even more so than is the case with human figures, El Greco subjects angels to a continuous twisting of limbs and drapery to suggest a flame-like, nonmaterial grace that reflects their charisma. The compositions which are centred around such figures tend to assume a spiral-like growth pattern that has neither a fixed beginning, nor a closed ending. This illusion of infinity is created in the later paintings in which the earthly locus is schematically rendered to become abstracted while the heavenly zone is treated as an infinite source of radiance.

El Greco initially seems to have echoed Aristotle’s (1939) belief that the heavens are the realm of perpetual harmony and perpetual peace, while the sublunary world is the realm of dissonance and discord, as is visible in the *Martyrdom of St Maurice and the Theban Legion*. In the later paintings and those that include musicians there is a visual accord between both realms.

### **The representation of angel musicians in Western art**

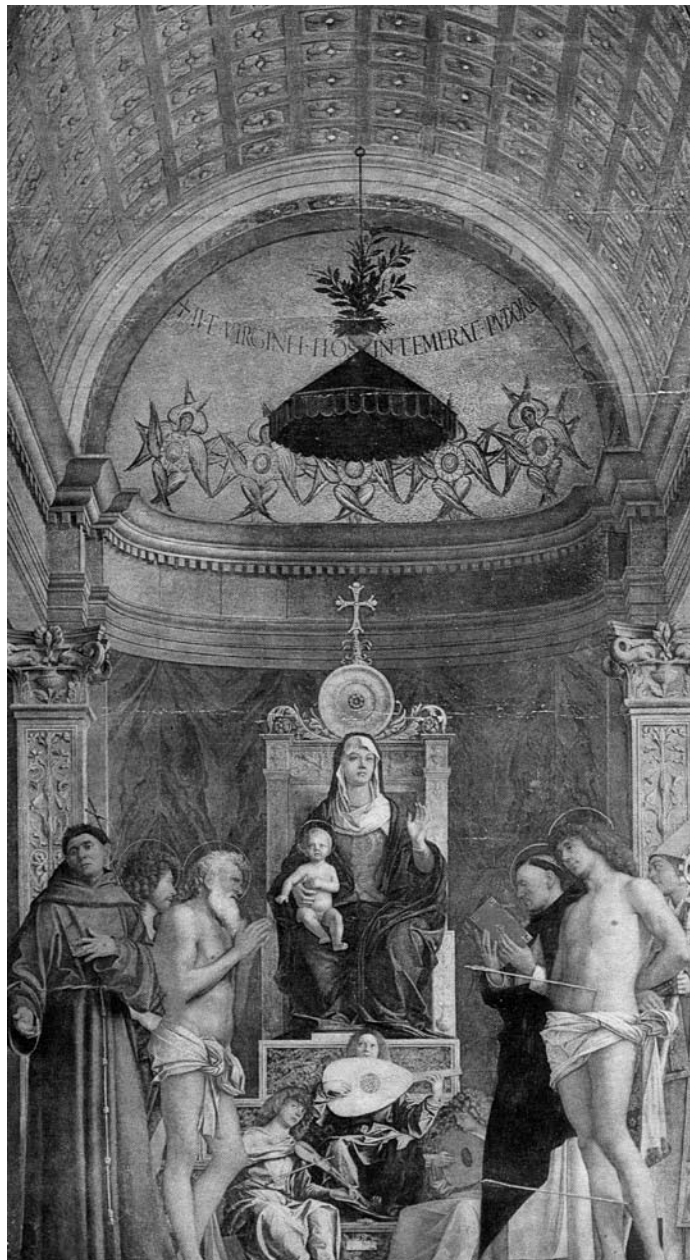
During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance music, as the most “mathematical” of all the arts, was also considered to be the most spiritual. Marsilio Ficino (1576: 614) believed that music had a harmonising effect on the *spiritus* (comprising both the soul and mind) because it was a

microcosm of the harmony of the heavens. It is therefore appropriate that the representation of angel musicians in the visual arts had become a venerable tradition.

Angel musicians symbolise both the harmony of nature and the harmony of the celestial spheres, as Heinrich Rombach (1983: 68) explains:

Sie waren die enträtselte Weltgeschichte, das offengelegte Buch der Natur, die klare Spiegel, der die Schöpfung heller zurückwarf, als sie in den materiellen Dingen erschien. Darum waren sie "Rühmung", "Lobpreis", Chor, wurde doch erst in ihnen die kunstvolle Architektur, die "Musik" des Ganzen offenbar.

Da jeder Engel eine Einheitsdeutung der Welt war, können sie nicht in einer Ordnung des "Nebeneinander" gedacht werden, sondern nur in der Ordnung des "Übereinander" in der Ordnung der Sphären. Das jeweils "höhere" Geistwesen umfasste auch die niederen und besass die höhere, einheitlichere, durchsichtigere Weltdeutung. Die Welt kann in unterschiedlicher Höhe gesehen und gedeutet werden. Alle Höhenlagen sind gleichberechtigt. Diese ihre gleichberechtigte Stimmigkeit wurde bildlich als Stimme in einem Chor veranschaulicht. Der "Chor der Engel" ist das älteste Symbol der Deutungsmannigfaltigkeit der Welt.



**Figure 1**  
Giovanni Bellini (1430-1516), *Pala di San Giobbe: Virgin and Child, Six Saints and Musical Angels*, 1487, oil on panel, 471 x 258 cm, Venice, Gallerie dell'Accademia (source: Abore 1978: figure 34).

Because every angel is a “weltumspannende Geistsphäre” [spiritual sphere surrounding the earth](Rombach 1983: 70), the correlation between music, the spheres and angels was self-evident to Medieval and Renaissance observers. The spheres were said to correspond to various musical tones and, when these resonated simultaneously, they constituted the harmony of a cosmic music -- a doctrine attributed to Pythagoras. According to his teaching, the spheres of the planets produce tones which vary according to the velocity of their movement, and the geometrical proportions of the distances between the spheres. The symphony of these tones sounding together produce this Pythagorean derived “harmony of the spheres”, which is far superior to any earthly musical composition. *Musica mundana*,<sup>12</sup> which reflects the superior music of the spheres, made the art of music supreme among the arts during the Renaissance, excelling even the visual arts based on draftsmanship or *disegno*.<sup>13</sup>



**Figure 2**  
**Paolo Veronese (1528-88), *Allegory of the Battle of Lepanto*,**  
**1572, oil on canvas, 169 x 137 cm, Venice, Gallerie dell'Accademia**  
**(copyright: H.E. Wethey).**

In connection with the representation of angels in Christian art, Reinhold Hammerstein (1962: 195) asks: “Wie wurde überhaupt Engelsmusik sichtbar gemacht?” The tradition of depicting angels who either sing or play on musical instruments implies that the presence of cosmic harmony may also be suggested pictorially, which is why there is an iconography of the harmony of the universe in Christian art. In this connection, Charles de Tolnay (1943: 90) confirms that in the Middle Ages the harmony of the universe was expressed by angels playing music. In the fourteenth century artists began to assign individual spheres to individual angel-musicians; then followed the tradition of portraying the spheres in the form of arcs in the

fifteenth century. Finally, from the time of the Renaissance, the iconography of the representation of the heavenly spheres assumed a new form: “A transition between the two-dimensional medieval and the spatial renaissance pattern is the funnel-shaped form which appears in the mid-fifteenth century” (De Tolnay 1943: 94). What this implies is the opening of space so that heaven and earth are linked.

However, in Renaissance paintings angels are often represented in groups to fill space in what is usually the heavenly zone or the celestial region of religious scenes. Those playing on musical instruments are nevertheless often represented as seated at their instruments on the same level as human beings in terrestrial space, for example in Giovanni Bellini's, *Pala di San Giobbe*, in which the angel musician enhance the sacredness of the *sacra conversazione* (figure 1). When represented in the heavenly zone, they enhance such paintings with winged movement and incandescence, as in Paolo Veronese's *Allegory of the Battle of Lepanto* (figure 2) in which the sky is crowded with angels to the left of the Virgin and the celebrants of the victory. Not all of these angel figures hold musical instruments with which the enhance the religious solemnity of the heavenly gathering, but the angel to the right of the picture fires flaming darts into the fray below.

### Heavenly musicians in El Greco's oeuvre

In this article the corpus of selected paintings by El Greco includes some of his major works from various periods of his career. The selection covers mainly the figures of groups of celestial beings engaged in the art of music making. In these paintings the angel musicians are represented in the heavenly zone. Their presence in harmonious consorts playing on instruments of the period<sup>14</sup>, accompanied by singers, suggests that their purpose is to harmonise the interaction between heaven and earth. By linking heaven and earth and eliminating the contrast between them that was postulated by Aristotle these divided spheres become continuous.

Even though only a limited number of El Greco's paintings include musicians, their presence in some of his most imaginative compositions illustrate the imaginative way in which he evolved a unique iconographical convention related to the theme of angel consorts, and his innovative expansion of the meaning of the nature of angel figures and their missions. In his paintings that include angel-musicians, the sacred space occupied by the earthly figures is expanded, not spatially as in a *istoria*,<sup>15</sup> based on perspective, but audibly, by symbolic reference to the harmony of angelic music.

Forthwith notable examples are discussed in which El Greco portrays angel musicians who relay a celestial message, linking what is above with what is below. Appropriately, the consorts comprise musicians who play on soft instruments: that is stringed and wind instruments, not drums and trumpets that have more secular connotations.

In the *Martyrdom of Saint Maurice and the Theban Legion* (figure 3) the angels who are visible on the mutilated upper part of the canvas are divided into two groups: those on the left who are seated perform as musicians, while the two in the centre descend, bearing victors' laurels for the martyred. The essence of the theme is simply stated by John Elliott (2003: 51): “With a classical gesture (*adlocutio*) Saint Maurice exhorts the idea of martyrdom, which is triumphantly heralded by angels making music and holding palms and wreaths of victory.” However, the role of the angels making music has a more extensive meaning than heralding Saint Maurice's martyrdom.

In El Greco's representation of angel musicians in this painting, the implied music that the consort, consisting (from left to right) of players on a viol,<sup>16</sup> a lute, a flute and a singer holding

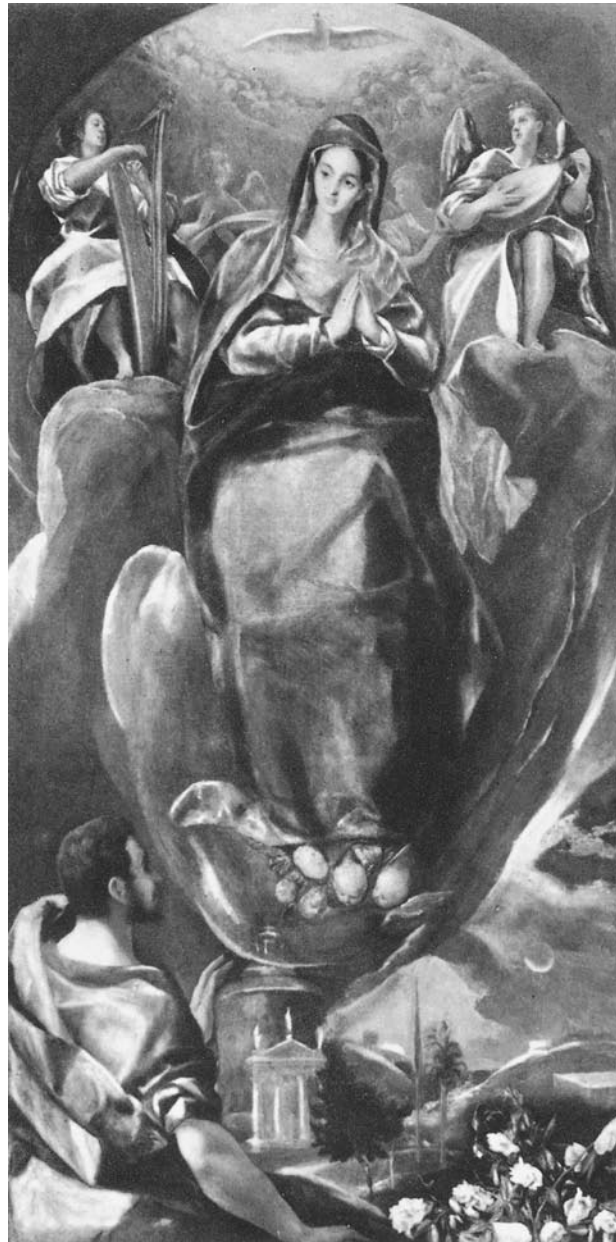
a bound score, produces intensifies the pictorial symbolism of the upper zone of the painting where the infinity of heaven is expressed as a vortex of light and angelic movement. This is in direct contrast with the medieval abstract zone of concentric circles meant to symbolise the angelic hierarchy postulated by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. In a very different vein, the angels whom El Greco represents as musicians underline the belief that music represents harmony in a cosmic context. In the *Martyrdom* an echo of the medieval *musica mundana* tradition remains, because liturgical music, as Emmanuel Winternitz (1979: 145) points out, was not only meaningful in terms of church doctrine, but afforded “an imitation of celestial liturgy”. Thus, angels depicted playing on musical instruments make the celestial liturgy audible, as it were, and the vivid representation of the movement of the heavenly figures complements this music. In the earthly zone of the *Martyrdom* human cruelty is evident but the musicians as sources of light, directly above the earthly horror of the beheading of martyrs, fulfil the role of linking the heavenly expanse with the earthly zone by means of rays of light.



**Figure 3**  
**El Greco, *Martyrdom of Saint Maurice and the Theban Legion*,**  
**1580-82, oil on canvas, 448x301 cm, Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial**  
**(copyright: H.E. Wethey).**

In the *Apparition of the Virgin to St John* (figure 4) the figure of the Virgin is suspended as a vertical link between an earthly landscape and the human figure of St John. Curiously, the dome of heaven is represented in a way that is reminiscent of the scheme of Pseudo-Dionysius’s heavenly

hierarchy. The angels flanking the Virgin have the characteristic Mannerist *serpentinata* posture as they play their music on a lute and a harp. El Greco's unique contribution to the theme of angels playing music relates both to the iconography of *musica mundana* in this painting and his representation of the angels themselves who are seated on clouds in a remarkably symmetrical composition.



**Figure 4**  
**El Greco, *Apparition of the Virgin to St John*,**  
**1580-86, oil on canvas, 236x118 cm, Santa Cruz Museum, Toledo**  
**(source: Gudiol).**

In discussing El Greco's stylistic development in the *Annunciation* (figure 5), David Davies (2003: 56) mentions the Virgin's sewing-basket and the rose-bush in flames, and explains: "The flames are rendered so naturalistically that they probably would have appeared to mirror real candle flames burning on the altar during the celebration of Mass. But above and beyond El Greco has distorted light, colour and form. Indeed the forms are in a state of flux. The grand rhythm of the wings of Gabriel and the Holy Spirit quicken the drama. [...] Corporeality is abstracted to symbolise their spiritual being." Most surprisingly, Davies makes no mention of the eight angels accompanying "the drama" with celestial music. However, with reference



to a much reduced copy of the work,<sup>17</sup> Davies (2003: 170) that the Colegio de Doña Maria de Aragón, for which it was painted, was – according to Jonathan Mann (1986: 80) – associated with the mystic Alonso de Orozco (1500-91), whose meditations about the Incarnation probably inspired El Greco, and adds: “The music-making angels may refer to Alonso’s description of the heavenly music that marked the Incarnation.” This is an acceptable statement since the Incarnation is the primal Christian event that linked heaven and earth.



**Figure 5**  
El Greco, *Annunciation*, 1596-1600, oil on canvas,  
315 x 174 cm, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid  
(copyright: H.E. Wethey).

Of the eight angels in figure 5 five hold musical instruments, that from left to right can be identified as a flute, a keyboard instrument (most probably a clavichord or a virginal),<sup>18</sup> a lute (held by the back-turned angel), a harp and a viol. The angel second from left who holds a

bound score is obviously a singer who also seems to be the conductor of the consort. The angel farthest to the left and the one with a seemingly disembodied head behind the harp who makes eye contact with the audience may also be singers. Strangely enough they seem wholly engrossed in their timeless celestial existence, seemingly oblivious of the silent drama being enacted between the archangel Gabriel and the Virgin. Nevertheless, their music can be interpreted as the message that is conveyed between the heavenly messenger of the Incarnation and the earthly addressee.

In the *Virgin of the Immaculate Conception* (figure 6) heaven and earth are linked in a most striking way by the ascending movement of the foreground angel and the figure of the Virgin. Together these figures effect a continuous spiral conduit between what is below and what is above where the two angels are situated, playing their instruments. The music of the angels forms an audible conjunction with the vortex-like composition in which closed, hierarchical space is superseded by open-ended spiralling movement. The demarcation between the earthly, intermediate and heavenly zones is eliminated in the representation of upward flowing movement. The imaginary visual movement is enhanced by the imagined rising sound of the angel's instruments, suggested by their elongated figures, and most prominent in the performing angel to the right of the Virgin. He is performing on a lute, being part of a consort of three, with the other members of the trio performing on a flute and a contra-bass.



Figure 6  
El Greco, *The Virgin of the Immaculate Conception*,  
1608-13, oil on canvas, 345x174 cm, Santa Cruz Museum, Toledo  
(copyright: H.E. Wethey).

In the mutilated late *Annunciation* (figure 7), the upper section is entitled *Angel Concert*, but unfortunately they have been severed and are preserved in different collections. In the upper section El Greco painted a seemingly isolated group of late Mannerist figures, taken up with their own performance. Below is an Annunciation scene which is remarkably inferior to other similar scenes by the master, completed after his death by his son, Jorge Manuel. The composition of the *Angel Concert* is reminiscent of *istoria* or narrative painting with the emphasis on a variety of body postures and instruments. It aptly sums up the way in which El Greco portrayed motion, even in the sedentary figures which sway to the rhythm of the music.



**Figure 7**  
El Greco and Jorge Manuel, *Annunciation* (below) and *Angel Concert* (above),  
1608-22, oil on canvas, respectively 294x209 cm and 112x205 cm,  
Banco Urquijo, Madrid and National Picture Gallery, Athens  
(source: Gudiol 1970, figures 653 & 659).

This angel consort is remarkable in the sense that it seems to consist of three individualised groups: to the left two angels are singing from a bound score, the central group is singing to the accompaniment of a harpist, while to the right a duet is being performed by a flautist and a viol player. However the central group of angels, in a burst of light behind the descending Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, link the message of the divine music to the mundane sphere where the Virgin is to receive “word” of the Incarnation from a gesturing archangel.

### **Conclusion: a summary of the message of angel consorts in El Greco’s *oeuvre***

The rhetoric of gesture refers to their playing on instruments or singing by angel musicians in El Greco’s *oeuvre* to connote the sound of their celestial music. Since these angel figures are situated midway between heaven and earth it is implied that their music descends towards the earth and ascends towards heaven. In parallel, the celestial light of the divine world descends towards the earth and inspires ascent towards the infinite source of radiance. The active presence of angel musicians midway between the heavenly realm and the earth creates compositional fields of force in El Greco’s paintings whereby secular space is transformed into sacred space and the earthly realm of humans becomes part of a divine reality.

### **Coda**

When El Greco arrived in Venice he most was probably apprenticed in the studio of Titian (*circa* 1488-1576) the greatest of great Venetian painters. Since the master was well to do he lived like a prince and hired musicians play during his meal times. Legend has it that El Greco, at the height of his fame in Toledo, when he occupied a twenty-four roomed palatial residence, likewise hired musicians to entertain him. It is tempting to see the angel musicians El Greco painted as elevated consorts that actually played for Titian or in his own home. Could they be playing the music of the masters of Spanish polyphony? Most probably El Greco was acquainted with the spiritual and mystical music of composers such as Francisco de Peñalosa (1470-1528), Christobal de Morales (1500-53), Francisco Guerrero (1525-99) and Tomas Luis de Victoria (1548-1611), or the music by Italian composers he remembered from his sojourn in Venice. If this is true, the representation of the angel consorts in El Greco’s *oeuvre* also document the musical practice of the sixteenth century in Italy and Spain.<sup>19</sup>

### **Notes**

1. “A consort is a small instrumental ensemble for playing music composed before *circa* 1700. Consorts of viols were found at courts as well as in homes from the early sixteenth century. The term was originally applied to groups of different kinds of instruments as well as the inclusion of voices” (<http://vdgsa.org/pgs/stuff.html>, accessed 2009/06/09).
2. See Maré (2003).
3. For an overview of the iconography of the winged figure, see Maré (1998, Chapter IV).
4. See Davies (1990).
5. See Maré (2001).
6. For example the *Annunciation*, 1570-75, oil on canvas, 26x19 cm, Prado Museum, Madrid.
7. *Allegory of the Holy League* (also called *Adoration of the Name of Jesus* or *Dream of Philip II*), 1578, oil on panel, 58x35 cm, National Gallery, London.
8. See Maré (1999).
9. See Maré (2001).
10. *Trinity* 1577-79, oil on canvas, 300x178 cm, Prado Museum, Madrid.
11. *Crucifixion With the Virgin, St John the Evangelist, the Magdalen and Angels*, 1600-05, canvas, 312x169 cm, Prado Museum, Madrid.

12. The term *musica mundana* originated was coined by Anicius Manlius Severinus Boetius (480-524 or 525), a Christian philosopher, in his work on music, *De musica*. He introduced a fourfold classification of music, of which *musica mundana* is the first and refers to the music of the spheres and its harmony with the world.
13. See Preiss (1970: 164).
14. For an survey of musical instruments in the Middle Ages, most of which are the forerunners of Renaissance instruments see McGee (2009). This work also contains frequent references to and illustrations of angels playing on various instruments.
15. According to Alberti (1976: 75) an "*istoria* that you can justifiably praise and admire", includes an abundance of figures in a variety of poses in a painting: "I say that *istoria* is most copious in which in their places are mixed old, young, maidens, women, youths, young boys, fowls, small dogs, birds, horses, sheep, buildings, landscapes and similar things." He adds that provided the variety is appropriate to what is represented in the picture "variety [in every *istoria*] is always pleasant. A painting in which there are bodies in many dissimilar poses is always especially pleasing. There some stand erect, planted on one foot, and all the face with the hand high and the fingers joyous. In others the face is turned, the arms folded and the feet joined. And thus to each is given his own action and flecion of members; some are seated, others on one knee, others lying. If it is allowed here, there ought to be some nude and others part clothed in the painting; but always make use of shame and modesty" (1976: 76).
16. This kind of viol was called *viola da gamba* because it was held between the legs. It is distinguished from the *viola da braccio*, a generic term of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries for any bowed instrument played on the arm. See "About the viol" (<http://vdgsa.org/pgs/stuff.html>, accessed 2009/06/09).
17. El Greco, *The Annunciation*, Museo Thyssen-Bornemiza, Madrid (*circa* 1597-1600, oil on canvas, 114 x 67 cm).
18. The clavichord, harpsichord and virginal were all forerunners of the piano.
19. See Winternitz (1979). The practice of presenting angel concerts in the fifteenth century prompts Winternitz (1963: 451) to ask: "Did the painters simply transfer earthly ensembles, profane or ecclesiastical, into the celestial spheres?"

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