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**Nicolaus Zangius : the musician at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries :  
the life of an unknown : summary**

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# SUMMARY

## **Nicolaus Zangius: The Musician at the Turn of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries**

### The Life of an Unknown

Nicolaus Zangius (ca. 1568–1617) was a musician with a rather restless character, always seeking a more ideal patron. His life and travels are best illustrated by a brief look at his published compositions.

We can gather from a statement in his very first printed collection (*Schöne Neue Auszerlesene Geistliche und Weltliche Lieder mit drey Stimmen*, Frankfurt a. O. 1594) that Zangius was from northern Germany, since he is called ‘Marchiacus’, but nothing is known about his childhood and formative years.

Around 1568, in Augsburg, a certain Niclas was born, younger brother of a man who would later make a name for himself as a composer, Narciß Zängel. This Niclas served as a musician to the Fugger family, and the Fuggers paid for him to travel and study in Italy. Soon after his return to Augsburg, in 1585, he was succeeded in his post as the Fuggers’ chamber organist by Hans Leo Hassler, and his name disappears from record.

There is, therefore, a chance that these two musicians are in fact one person. In 1597, Zangius published another collection, this time at Cologne (*Etliche Schöne Teutsche Geistliche unnd Weltliche Lieder mit Fünff Stimmen*). From 1595 at the latest he had been Kapellmeister to Philip Sigmund, the (Lutheran) Duke of Brunswick. The collection’s dedicatory preface implies that the composer was working at the Duke’s residence, Schloss Iburg. Included are 21 five-voice compositions: four charming sacred motets and 17 secular songs. As in the previous collection, Zangius here presented his sacred works first – in this case 5-voice motets on German texts.

## Summary

From 1599, Zangius worked in the Hanseatic port city of Danzig, where he substituted for Johannes Wanning, the ailing Kapellmeister of the local Lutheran church. Zangius was almost immediately promoted to Kapellmeister, even though Wanning clung to life until 1603. In 1602 the plague gave him reason to leave Danzig; the town council nevertheless held his position for him. Zangius, meanwhile, was hired as a servant at the Emperor's court in Prague. Starting in October 1602, Zangius received from the imperial treasury a monthly salary of 25 gold florins. Zangius detailed the start of his engagement in Prague in a letter sent from Augsburg to the Danzig town council on May 7, 1603. Why Zangius was visiting Augsburg is still unclear, but it may have had something to do with the publication of another collection of his works. In that same month, the organist of Augsburg cathedral, Adam Gumpelzhaimer, copied out Zangius' 7-voice motet *Veni, dilecte mi*.

In his letter to the Danzig town council, Zangius mentions his stay in Prague the previous winter, the dedication of some of his works to the Emperor, and a consequent offer to become the Imperial Kapellmeister – an offer that his commitment to Danzig had forced him to decline! Already in April 1603 Zangius' letter indicates that he was thinking of travelling to Venice, and that he did not envision returning to Danzig until after Michaelmas (Sept. 29) of that year.

By the Autumn of 1604, Zangius had entered the service of Charles of Lichtenstein, whom he may have met at the imperial court in Prague. Lichtenstein had been Moravian hetman (governor) since January of 1604, and now engaged Zangius as Kapellmeister. Zangius last appears in Charles' ledgers in April 1606; the Lichtenstein accounts for the following four years have not survived. Based at Charles' residence in Valtice (or Feldsberg) in Lower Austria and Lednice (Eisgrub) in southern Moravia, Zangius recruited a large ensemble of instrumentalists for his new patron. On the aristocrat's instructions, he travelled to Vienna, where he purchased musical instruments and a large quantity of recently-printed sheet music. While Zangius seems to have been more or less anchored to the Lichtenstein court from 1604 until 1606, our sources for the following years show him on the move again. In 1607 he returned to Danzig and his position as Kapellmeister there, he even became a burgher of that city, but soon afterwards left the city for good.

In September of 1608, Zangius travelled from Neumünster (Schleswig-Holstein) to Prague in order to deliver a letter from the mathematician and theologian Detlef Forst to Johannes Kepler. In his letter, Forst calls Zangius a “most noble man and a musician of sweet tones.” Zangius seems to have remained in Prague to see to the publication of his six-voice *Magnificat secundi toni* (1609).

A remarkable and unique reminder of Zangius' time in the service of Charles of Lichtenstein is a list of his own motets that the composer made for an inventory of the court's musical establishment. This document, written in 1607 and

1608 at the chateau at Prostějov, lists 39 motets for ensembles ranging from six voices to 16. With one exception, all of the 6-voice motets were later published in the collection entitled *Cantiones sacrae* (Vienna 1612, reprinted Leipzig 1613). The sacred works of Nicolaus Zangius most widely disseminated by his contemporaries were the Christmas motets *Congratulamini nunc omnes* and *Angelus ad pastores ait* from this very collection, and several double-choir works. The latter appeared in 1611 and 1621 in two important anthologies, Schaede's *Promptuarium* and Bodenschatz's somewhat later *Florilegium Portense*.

It was from these publications that Zangius works were often copied, winding up in collections like the Rokitzan part-books or the Leutschau tablature book, which date to the years 1635-1645. There are also a few otherwise unknown Zangius motets in miscellaneous sources: the Breslau tablature and part books from the first half of the 17th century, manuscripts from the Lehnice collection of Count George Rudolf, and finally the above-mentioned Gumpelzheimer score-book containing three of Zangius' works.

Zangius' predecessor at Danzig, Johannes Wanning, was apparently the first to compose musical epithalamia. Following in Wanning's footsteps, Zangius wrote and published several such wedding compositions: the first in 1600 in Königsberg (now Kaliningrad), then two years later, in Bautzen, a double-choir 8-voice motet on the psalm text *Deus misereatur nostri*, dedicated to the Prince Elector of Saxony. In this dedication, Zangius calls himself a "musician from Danzig (Musicus Gedansis)." In 1606, in Breslau, he published a charming 6-voice motet on a text from the Song of Songs, *Tota pulchra es*, written for the wedding of a local lawyer, Georg Sebisch. The format of this edition is remarkable: quarto, almost square, in three fold-out parts – one for descant and altus, one for tenor I and II, and one for tenor III and bass. Zangius later added this composition to his collection of 6-voice Latin sacred motets. Still more interesting is a three-part epithalamium he published in Breslau in 1609. It contains motets for seven and eight voices and was composed for the wedding of Hynek the Younger of Vrbno-Freudenthal (Bruntálský z Vrbna) to Bohunka, daughter of Karel the Elder of Zierotin. This wedding took place on September 1, 1609 at the Zierotin chateau at Rosice (Rossitz). There are two more fascinating manuscripts, in quarto, that have come down to us from the Zierotin estate. These contain copies of pieces from Zangius' 3-voice secular song collections, and on the blank pages in between the songs, there are a Kyrie and Gloria from Zangius' 8-voice Mass Super Hierusalem gaude. In this mass, the voices are accompanied by a basso continuo as well as a bass part for violone. The above-mentioned Hynek the Younger of Vrbno-Freudenthal was also a member of the extended Zierotin family, and it was to this nobleman that Zangius would dedicate his 6-voice *Cantiones sacrae*.

We do not know exactly where Zangius worked between 1607 and 1612, but we can follow his travels thanks not only to the receipts issued when he claimed his

salary at the imperial court in Prague, but also to editions of his works published in various cities. Based on that information, we can surmise that he was in Prague in 1609, in Vienna in 1611 and 1612 and in May 1612 in Breslau (Wrocław), where he wrote an entry into the album amicorum of Gottfried Wagner, later main cantor in St. Elisabeth's Church. Around Pentecost of 1612, Zangius took up his final - and certainly best paid - position. He became Kapellmeister to the Prince Elector of Brandenburg, with an annual salary of 1000 gold florins.

Once in his new home in Berlin, Zangius put his old contacts to use. First he brought four trumpeters from Prague. In 1613, another 24 new musicians were engaged, and from 1614 to 1616, among the guests at Berlin was the Lichtenstein trumpeter Mikuláš Rašek. Even though we are fairly well informed as to who Zangius' patrons in Moravia were, we are at a loss to explain what he was doing in Olomouc when he died there sometime in the first half of June 1617. Zangius had evidently been in correspondence with Karel the Elder of Zierotin, who himself was in contact with the Prince Elector in Berlin. If these nobles had known of Zangius' passing, it seems unlikely that his position in Berlin would have remained vacant until February of 1619.

The subtitle title of this book (*The Life of an Unknown*) reflects the uncertainties surrounding Zangius' life and is also a tribute to Alain Corbin, French historian and specialist on microhistory. Among contemporary composers and fellow musicians, Zangius does not stand out as particularly successful or prolific. His total output is limited to several collections of German part songs for from three to six voices, including some in the popular genre of Quodlibets, one collection of Latin motets for six voices, and several individually published double choir motets. A selection of his sacred works was recorded on CD in 2017.

This book is also an attempt to deal with the life of a musician, but without a thorough technical analysis of his music. The book reflects Zangius' career and his position or social status in the society of the early seventeenth century. It includes, in the second chapter, a discussion on his printed (and yet not always published) works, based on some thoughts from Natalia Zemon Davis and Claudio Annibaldi about the meaning of gifts and the system of patronage in Zangius' era. Several collections of German part songs were published even after Zangius' death; these are therefore not dealt with in the first chapter, dedicated solely to his life, but as they became an important part of the music market and staked out Zangius' position as an important representative of this dying genre, they are discussed in the second chapter.

The third chapter deals closely with the life of Charles of Liechtenstein (1569–1627), one of the wealthiest Moravian aristocrats. As a part of his court, he established a music ensemble and appointed Nicolaus Zangius as its head. The activity of the ensemble reflects Liechtenstein's role as the governor (hetman) of Moravia in the years 1604 to 1607. Although rather short-lived, it was probably the very

first and certainly the most important court music ensemble in Moravia, rivalled only by the older and more permanent musical tradition at the Rosenberg court in Southern Bohemia. Although Liechtenstein's power was rising (in 1608 he was named prince), in later years he usually retained only court trumpeters (doubling as clerks) and a chapel organist, with other musicians employed solely for special occasions.

