

The Streets of Madrid: Urban and Symbolic Space in a String Quintet by Luigi Boccherini

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At various moments in the history of Western art music, musical works have sought to represent urban space. Especially when a city's soundscape is captured in detail and with a high degree of accuracy, and when the composition highlights particular musical practices within this soundscape, we are dealing with a form of mapping musical life conducted from an unusual angle: rather than being the object of mapping, the musical artwork becomes its subject. This kind of mapping, insofar as it is integrated into the artistic work, may also give rise to symbolic projections. One such case is Luigi Boccherini's (1743–1805) “quintettino” for strings in C major, *La musica notturna delle strade di Madrid* [*Night Music of the Streets of Madrid*], op. 30, no. 6, G 324.¹ The present article examines how this composition

1 The work is scored for two violins, viola and two cellos. The string quintet with this type of ensemble is the genre Boccherini cultivated most assiduously in his instrumental music, composing more than one hundred such works. For Boccherini's overall musical production and its articulation in different genres, the reference study remains Yves Gérard, *Thematic, Bibliographical and Critical Catalogue of the Works of Luigi Boccherini*, trans. Andreas Mayor (London: Oxford University Press, 1969). In identifying the compositions by Boccherini, I refer to Gérard's catalogue number (here G 324) and, immediately before, to the opus number (op. 30, no. 6) provided by the catalogue published by Boccherini's great-grandson: Alfredo Boccherini y Calonje, *Luis Boccherini. Apuntes biográficos y catálogo de las obras de este célebre maestro* (Madrid: A. Rodero, 1879). Opus numbering, however, is a complex matter, intertwined with the even more complex and problematic issue of Boccherini's catalogues. On this point, see at least Marco Mangani and Federica Rovelli, “Boccherini's Thematic Catalogues: A Reappraisal,” in *Understanding Boccherini's Manuscripts*, ed. Rudolf Rasch (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2014), 109–28. It is sufficient here to recall that, during his lifetime, Boccherini treated the numbering of his compositions with considerable flexibility. Opus numbers, even when taken from an “authentic” catalogue—that is, one traceable to the composer's intentions, such as the one published by Boccherini y Calonje—

produces an aestheticized representation of Madrid's musical life in the last decades of the eighteenth century, interpreting the implications and symbolic projections of Boccherini's proposed musical mapping and representation of urban space.

These questions are situated within the broader framework of the relationship between music and space, a topic that has progressively assumed a central position in both music and musicological studies.² It is now widely acknowledged that sound and music are fundamentally spatialized experiences: they are not merely situated in space but actively contribute to its construction, both physically and symbolically. In Boccherini's string quintet, these two dimensions—music *in* space and music *as* space—are closely intertwined. Although the present study does not adopt an ethnographic perspective, and although it focuses on a musical work as an artistic mediation of a specific soundscape, its approach to the relationship between music and space aligns with some of the fundamental principles of Steven Feld's acoustemology: an anthropology of sound that integrates *auditory space* (subjective) and *acoustic space* (environmental) in order to “investigate simultaneously the place of sound and the sound of place,” conceiving sound not simply as something emitted or perceived within space, but as a “localized mode of existence.”³

The composition of this string quintet by Boccherini—not confined to a single occasion but extending over several years against the backdrop of

cannot be considered in Boccherini's case a faithful and progressive chronological trace of his work. As for the term *quintettino*, in Boccherini's vocabulary it denotes a quintet conceived as an “opera piccola.” The composer distinguished between “*opere grandi*” and “*opere piccole*” based on the number of movements. The *opere grandi* usually consisted of four movements (and in any case always more than two), while the *opere piccole* of two movements at most. Boccherini explains this distinction in a letter to Carlo Emanuele Andreoli, mediator of the music publisher Artaria, dated September 22, 1780. See Luigi Boccherini, *Epistolario*, estudio preliminar por Remigio Coli, edición y notas por Marco Mangani (Madrid–Sant Cugat: Asociación Luigi Boccherini–Editorial Arpeggio, 2019), 21–7, 160–1. *La musica notturna delle strade di Madrid* is an exception: Boccherini considers it a *quintettino*, even though it is in five movements; each movement, however, is short, and the whole piece does not exceed the usual duration of an *opera piccola*.

2 For a concise overview, see Andrew Kania, “Space,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Western Music and Philosophy*, ed. Tomás McAuley, Nanette Nielsen, Jerrold Levinson, and Ariana Phillips-Hutton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 878–93.

3 Steven Feld, “Acustemologia,” in *Spazi sonori della musica*, ed. Giovanni Giuriati and Laura Tedeschini Lalli (Palermo: L'Epos, 2010), 36. Feld's seminal study on acoustemology is *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982).

decisive changes in Western history, foremost among them the French Revolution—makes the interpretative path particularly intriguing. The musical sources of *La musica notturna delle strade di Madrid* transmit two versions of the piece, developed by the composer under different biographical and professional circumstances and separated by a considerable number of years: no fewer than ten years, according to what can be reconstructed from relevant documents and from data drawn from the sources themselves. Each version survives in a manuscript of some authorial status.⁴

The first version is preserved in a non-autograph score, presumably produced under Boccherini's supervision, now preserved in the Deutsche Staatsbibliothek in Berlin. It belongs to a group of compositions that Boccherini sent from Arenas de San Pedro, while still in the service of the Infante Don Luis de Borbón, to Prince Frederick William of Prussia, who would later become King Frederick William II and Boccherini's patron.⁵ The *quintettino* G 324 is the sixth of a set of six compositions. From the title page of the first *quintettino* of the same opus, G 319, whose manuscript score, together with the others belonging to the group (G 319–24), is preserved in Berlin, we derive the date of composition: 1780.⁶ The annotation “opera 1a,” found on all six scores, refers to an additional contractual con-

4 For an overview of the quintet's sources see Gérard, *Thematic, Bibliographical and Critical Catalogue*, 365–7. On Boccherini's biography: Jaime Tortella, *Boccherini. Un músico italiano en la España ilustrada* (Madrid: Sociedad Española de Musicología, 2002); Remigio Coli, *Luigi Boccherini. La vita e le opere* (Lucca: Maria Pacini Fazzi, 2005); Marco Mangani, *Luigi Boccherini* (Palermo: L'Epos, 2005).

5 The source is digitized and available online: *Deutsche Staatsbibliothek in Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz*, KHM 498, accessed May 28, 2026, <https://digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/werkansicht?lang=de&PPN=PPN781633729>. On the characteristics of this source, within the context of the last group of pieces written by Boccherini for the Infante Don Luis, see Rudolf Rasch, “Boccherini's Manuscripts: A Typology,” in *Understanding Boccherini's Manuscripts*, 9–14. The copyist who wrote the score has been identified as Francisco Font, a member of the family of musicians who served the Infante Don Luis and with whom Boccherini established a close collaboration. See Loukia Drosopoulou, *Dynamic, Articulation and Special-Effect Markings in Manuscript Sources of Luigi Boccherini's String Quintets* (PhD Diss., University of York, 2008), 22–33; also, Loukia Drosopoulou, “Boccherini and the Copyists from His Immediate Circle,” in *Understanding Boccherini's Manuscripts*, 77–80.

6 This dating has not been refuted by studies that have reopened the question of the chronology of Boccherini's works and begun to shed light on such a complicated aspect of his artistic activity. See Germán Labrador López de Azcona, “Towards a Revised Chronology of Boccherini's Works,” in *Understanding Boccherini's Manuscripts*, 31–66; Germán Labrador López de Azcona, “Luigi Boccherini's Lost Music and a New Chronology for His Works: An Unknown Inventory from 1785,” *Philomusica on-line* 15, no. 2 (2016): 102–25.

dition governing Boccherini's service to the Infante Don Luis, which the composer explains in the aforementioned letter to Andreoli.⁷ Boccherini was required to write three "opere" each year, that is, three collections of six pieces each, belonging to various instrumental genres.

Another reliable copy, dating from the first half of the nineteenth century, transmits the second version of the quintet.⁸ It consists of a set of separate parts copied from the autograph parts that Boccherini had sent in 1797 to the Austrian publisher Ignace Pleyel, who at the time was active in Paris.⁹ The copy was made by Louis Picquot, a great admirer and collector of Boccherini's music, as well as a scholar and biographer of the composer.¹⁰ The fact that the principal surviving sources of the string quintet G 324 are held in Berlin and Paris, within the richest collections of Boccherini sources, suggests that the cultural reach of this piece extends far beyond both Madrid, the city it represents, and Spain.

Today, the *Musica notturna* is a well-known composition, perhaps Boccherini's best-known work together with his *Fandango*.¹¹ Why? One reason certainly lies in what Giorgio Pestelli calls its "overtly contemporary" [*scopertamente attuale*] gesture, through which Boccherini reproduces Spanish folk music.¹² From our perspective, nearly 250 years after the probable date of composition, we can understand Boccherini's "actualist attitude" in a twofold sense, corresponding to two forms of historical contemporaneity. On the one hand, there is the present of Boccherini's Spain, connected to the figures and environments of Madrid that the composer encountered in his everyday life. From 1768, the year in which he settled permanently in Spain, Madrid was the place where Boccherini spent most

7 See note 1.

8 *Bibliothèque nationale de France*, Rés. F. 1191, accessed May 28, 2026, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b74001392/f17.item.r=Boccherini%20G%20324>. See Gérard, *Thematic, Bibliographical and Critical Catalogue*, 366.

9 On the commercial negotiations between Boccherini and Pleyel see Mangani, *Luigi Boccherini*, 138–75.

10 Louis Picquot, *Notice sur la vie et les ouvrages de Luigi Boccherini, suivi du catalogue raisonné des toutes ses œuvres, tant publiées qu'inédites* (Paris: Philipp, 1851).

11 It is the first movement of the string quintet with two cellos op. 40, no. 2, G 341. Boccherini later transcribed it as a quintet for strings and guitar, G 448.

12 However, this interpretation emerges within a portrait of Boccherini that, while benevolent, tends to present him primarily as a skilled craftsman whose musical output is marked by "zones of quiet conservative mentality," rather than as a "modern" artist in the sense in which Franz Joseph Haydn, for example, may be considered modern. See Giorgio Pestelli, *L'età di Mozart e di Beethoven* (Torino: EDT, 1991), 145.

of his time. It is therefore first and foremost through the Spanish folk music practiced in Madrid that he captures a vivid “sonic image” of the world that surrounded him.

On the other hand, there is our own present (and recent past), that of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Within this second historical framework, oral and functional music—the categories evoked by the *Musica notturna*—have come to the fore both in artistic practice and in scholarly studies. The musical city portrait has likewise enjoyed renewed prominence. This is due to several factors, from a general fascination with the city as the emblematic space of modern life to a more specific interest, linked to sound and media, in environments rich in sounds and music and serving as a crossroad of communication in all its forms. Suffice it to mention two significant and very different works: the instrumental composition *Central Park in the Dark* (1906) by Charles Ives and the radio work *Ritratto di città* (1955) by Luciano Berio, Bruno Maderna, and Roberto Leydi, dedicated respectively to New York and Milan. Compared with these twentieth-century works, Boccherini’s *Musica notturna* may be regarded as a pioneering musical experiment, one that may now find fertile ground for renewed appreciation. It is no coincidence that Berio drew on the last movement of this quintet—in the various authorial transcriptions made, as we shall see, by Boccherini himself—as the material for one of his own compositions, *Quattro versioni originali della “Ritirata Notturna di Madrid” di L. Boccherini* (1975).

Berio states that “this is evidently a piece that enjoyed great favor with the public, and the composer transcribed it several times for various chamber ensembles.”¹³ In acknowledging the public’s appreciation of the piece, he undoubtedly reflects a widespread view in our own time, in which, as we have seen, ideal conditions have emerged for appreciating Boccherini’s *Musica notturna*.¹⁴ Regarding the success of this composition in Boccherini’s own

13 “Si tratta evidentemente di un pezzo che godeva di grande favore presso il pubblico, e il compositore lo ha trascritto parecchie volte per diverse formazioni da camera.” See “Quattro versioni originali della Ritirata Notturna di Madrid di L. Boccherini,” *Centro Studi Luciano Berio*, accessed May 28, 2026, <https://www.lucianoberio.org/nota-di-programma-op/quattro-versioni-originali-della-ritirata-notturna-di-madrid-di-l-boccherini-testo-1/>.

14 The enthusiasm of our time for the *Musica notturna* can be seen, for example, in a very well-informed and richly illustrated article addressed to a general audience: Pablo Jesús Aguilera Concepción, “La música nocturna de las calles de Madrid, de Boccherini,” *La Gatera de la Villa*, February 26, 2021, <https://www.gateravilla.es/musica-nocturna-de-las-calles-de-madrid/>.

time (as a whole, and not merely in its last movement), we must, however, ask further questions. First, we must understand the place occupied by folk and descriptive music within Boccherini's artistic imagination. Elisabeth Le Guin offers a nuanced reflection on this aspect, with which I largely agree, observing that references to Spanish folk music, as well as descriptive compositions more generally, play only a marginal role in Boccherini's output:

One might assume ... that, for all that he could write a rousing *fandango*, Boccherini was somewhat alienated from the musical culture of the country in which he lived for over half his life. Yet I doubt that Boccherini was alienated. It is simplistic to assume that he remained an outsider to Spanish music all his life; to do so is to locate that musical culture exclusively in its more highly marked indigenous practices, to fall into the trap of equating authenticity with folk music ... At their most truly enlightened, the thinkers and the artists of the *Ilustración*—among whom I would count Boccherini—avoided this trap by freely importing and developing influences from outside the Iberian Peninsula that seemed beneficial, profitable, or beautiful, confident that their adoption into Spanish culture was in itself enough to eventually ensure Spanishness even as it redefined it.¹⁵

This subtle process of defining and representing, through musical language, a mixed cultural identity—a process that reaches an extreme form in the *Musica notturna* and remains foreign to nineteenth-century folklorism—required an audience prepared to receive and decipher it.¹⁶

It is therefore legitimate to ask whether the documentary character displayed by the *Musica notturna* should be regarded as exceptional within Boccherini's instrumental music. This question applies not only to his other descriptive compositions, but also to non-descriptive works in which stylistic elements derived from pre-existing functional music, especially Spanish folk music, are assimilated. The question also extends to other eighteenth-century composers, such as Domenico Scarlatti and Franz Joseph

¹⁵ Elisabeth Le Guin, *Boccherini's Body: An Essay in Carnal Musicology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 101.

¹⁶ As Le Guin further observes, folklorism, laden with nationalistic implications, "constitutes a Romantic project with serious consequences for the reception of Boccherini's music." See Elisabeth Le Guin, "Algunos aspectos de la recepción de Boccherini," in *Luigi Boccherini: Estudios sobre fuentes, recepción e historiografía*, eds. Marco Mangani, Elisabeth Le Guin and Jaime Tortella (Madrid: Biblioteca Regional de Madrid 'Joaquín Leguina', 2006), 129.

Haydn, who, no less than Boccherini, absorbed the musical worlds they encountered into their instrumental works.

The *Musica notturna* is unique within all these contexts, although certain distinctions must be made. Within Boccherini's chamber music, it is unique because the composer extends his adherence to musical reality to an unusual degree, compared with his standards in other works in which Spanish music appears either as a topic or a more fully descriptive element.¹⁷ In comparison with the works of other composers, the uniqueness of this piece lies in the difficulty of finding, in the eighteenth century, musicians as willing as Boccherini to subordinate the primarily formal logic of their compositions to the sonic characteristics of the individual episodes they contain.¹⁸ A connective and transformative logic—and, with it, a high degree of authorial mediation of what is represented—is always discernible in Scarlatti's harpsichord sonatas, even in those that take the form of a “long story rich in digressions and twists,” perhaps precisely because they are dominated by references to the Spanish musical world.¹⁹ Such logic is, moreover, widely recognized as one of the cornerstones of Viennese Classicism, even in works that most explicitly absorb or depict musical reality.²⁰ In the *Musica notturna*, more vehemently than in his other descriptive compositions of documentary character, Boccherini does not renounce the authorial transformation of the material; rather, he shifts this action to a level different from that of musical form, namely one in which gesture becomes the central element, as we shall see in the fourth section of this article.

As for the exportability of this music beyond its place of origin and its capacity to traverse historical time without losing its communicative power, Boccherini himself, as we'll see, appears skeptical. I think this skepticism concerns not only the subject matter of the music and its stylistic uniqueness, but also, and above all, the way in which it seeks to represent not merely certain musical practices, but also the space—an urban space—animating

17 According to Leonard Ratner's formulation, which opened the way to topic theory, topics are characteristic figures developed in eighteenth-century music through the contacts with situations in the external world. See Leonard Ratner, *Classic Music: Expression, Form and Style* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1980), 9.

18 See Marco Mangani, “La verità della cosa che si va a rappresentare: Boccherini e la musica ‘altra.’” *Per archi* 12 (2024): 46.

19 Enrico Baiano and Marco Moiraghi, *Le Sonate di Domenico Scarlatti. Contesto, testo, interpretazione* (Lucca: LIM, 2014), 99–100.

20 See for example the case of Mozart's *Ein musikalischer Spaß* KV 522, compared with Boccherini's *Musica notturna* in Mangani, “La verità della cosa che si va a rappresentare,” 46–9.

them. Boccherini's doubt also concerns the mediation involved in representation, which is itself both spatial and temporal. In this process of mediation, which also includes Boccherini's revision of the piece through a striking modification of its final movement, urban and symbolic space are invariably and inextricably intertwined, and in original and compelling ways. In the following sections, I will examine this intriguing network more closely.

Music and the Map, Music as Map

Let us begin with the subject of Boccherini's piece, *what* the piece represents; let us therefore start with urban space. "This *quintettino* represents the music that passes at night through the streets of Madrid, beginning with the tolling of the Ave Maria and ending with the Ritirata."²¹ It is Boccherini who, in the first part of the note written on the title page, explains the descriptive program of his quintet: an excerpt from Madrid's lively nightlife is represented in five musical episodes, proceeding from the tolling of the Ave Maria on the parish bells to the passage of the soldiers' patrol signaling the military curfew. More specifically, the five short scenes (corresponding to the five movements of the composition) are: 1) *Ave Maria delle Parrocchie/Ave Maria del Quartiere*; 2) *Minuetto dei ciechi*; 3) *Rosario*; 4) *Passa Calle (Los Manolos)*; 5) *Ritirata*.

The route unfolds through the Madrid of Carlos III, passing through at least three of the eight *cuarteles* into which the city was then divided.²² It is worth noting how Boccherini's musical mapping intersects with the institutional mapping promoted by the Spanish monarchy. Madrid was a growing city at the time, and between the reigns of Fernando VI and Carlos III the process known as the *Planimetría de Madrid*—a mapping of the city for fiscal purposes, involving the rational organization of its different areas and the assignment of house numbers to buildings—was being completed for the first time.²³ The route traced by the *Musica notturna* appears to move, after an initial "panoramic" sonic call (*Ave Maria delle Parrocchie*),

21 "Questo quintettino rappresenta la musica che passa di notte per le strade di Madrid, cominciando dal tocco dell'Ave Maria, sino alla Ritirata." See notes 5 and 8.

22 Each *cuartel* was divided into eight *barrios*, each *barrio* into eight *ministros*. See Juan Francisco González, *Madrid dividido en ocho cuarteles con otros tantos barrios cada uno* (Madrid: Oficina de Miguel Escribano, 1770).

23 See "Madrid" in Jaime Tortella, *Luigi Boccherini. Diccionario de Términos, Lugares y Personas* (Madrid: Asociación Luigi Boccherini, 2008), 277–80.

from west to southeast, from the area of the royal palace, corresponding to the *cuartel de Palacio*, to the *cuartel de Lavapiés*, where the *manolos* entertained, passing through the central *cuartel de la Plaza*.²⁴

Let's now examine the movements of the quintet more closely. The opening movement, *Ave Maria delle Parrocchie/Ave Maria del Quartiere*, is built upon two sound effects that refer directly to the real situation the music seeks to depict.²⁵ This piece functions as a kind of introduction to the entire quintet. Whereas in the later movements the imitation of characteristic sound elements complements—through a strong referential power—the descriptive level established by the structural elements of the composition (melody, harmony, rhythm, and form), in this first movement it fulfils all functions on its own. In the first section of the movement, Boccherini has all the instruments except the first violin imitate “the tolling of the bells when they play the Ave Maria” [“il tocco delle campane quando suonan l’Ave Maria”] by playing pizzicato double stops on the highest open strings. The first cello anticipates the double stop, as if imitating the strike of the bell. In the second section, the four instruments fall silent and the first violin enters. Playing as forcefully as possible, it imitates “the drum of the soldiers’ quarter” [“il tamburo del quartier dei soldati”].

The first scene presenting characters, the *Minuetto dei ciechi*, features blind musicians: professional beggars, often organized into guilds recognized by the public authorities, who played entertaining tunes on guitar, flute, and *viella de rueda* (hurdy-gurdy), or performed songs and declamations on the latest political and social news, functioning as “street gazettes” and often mocking powerful figures of the day. Blind musicians are recurring figures in the Spanish short theater of the period, where examples of their minuets may also be found.²⁶ As regards musical form, Boccherini

24 A schematic map of Madrid at the time of Carlos III, divided into the eight *cuarteles*, can be found in Tortella, 278. Maps of Madrid made in the eighteenth century, around the time of the *Planimetría*, can be found at the following link: *Catálogo de la cartoteca – Instituto Geográfico Nacional*, accessed May 28, 2026, <https://www.ign.es/web/catalogo-cartoteca/apibadasid/cartoteca/searchComplex/@nih&@nih&@nih&@nih&@nih&701,1800>. I wish to thank Sara Navarro Lalanda for bringing this resource to my attention.

25 I deliberately refrain from providing transcribed musical examples to support the analytical description of the individual movements of *Musica notturna*. Instead, readers are invited to digitally consult the manuscript sources in Berlin and Paris (links are provided in notes 5 and 8), as well as the excerpts from the sources reproduced and discussed in Aguilera Concepción, “*La música nocturna de las calles de Madrid*, de Boccherini”

26 For example, in *El Prado por la Noche*, a *sainete* by Ramón de la Cruz. See Ramón de

reduces the minuet model he usually employs. He omits both the trio and the final reprise of the first section, replacing the latter with a rather unusual passage in which the succession of accompaniment chords played by the two cellos in the second section is repeated, but without the first bar. The *Minuetto dei ciechi* possesses a rustic character, conveyed by the “alla zoppa” profile of the melody and by the accompaniment provided by the cellos, roughly held and played like guitars.²⁷

The quintet continues with the *Rosario*. The practice of the rosary as a form of street singing was widespread in eighteenth-century Spain. Groups of singers, known as “rosary singers,” circulated through the streets of Madrid; consisting mostly of nuns, monks, and priests accompanied by instrumentalists (the bassoon is specifically mentioned in the quintet), they moved through the city in small processions that could be heard both at night and during the day.²⁸ The expressive power of this movement lies in the contrast between its two sections, evoking the responsorial structure of the original functional music. The opposition between *Lento assai* and *Allegro* is reinforced by the contrast between the duple meter of section A (2/2) and the triple meter of section B (3/4), as well as by the dynamic range between the *piano* of the first section (not stated in the score, but clearly implied by the instruction “dolcissimo e con grazia”) and the *forte* of the second. The fundamental difference between the two sections, however, lies in the texture. In the first juxtaposition, the change in texture (two voices at varying distances in A against five compact voices in B) creates the perception of a gap between two sound masses, evoking the asymmetry of two opposed vocal groups. In the subsequent alternations (A' B A' B), the textural contrast becomes even more radical through the contrapuntal entrance of the cello, imitating the bassoon. In order to characterize the two sections, Boccherini draws on stylistic solutions that recur throughout his output, here used for descriptive purposes. In section A, the melody of the first cello is doubled by the first violin: the pairing of these two instruments, although usually with the roles reversed, is a distinctive feature of Boccherini's quintets. The octave doubling of the parts, employed in section B to create a compact and powerful sound, is instead one of the techniques the composer de-

la Cruz, *Sainetes*, ed. John Dowling, vol. 1 (Madrid: Castalia, 1987), 92.

²⁷ On ‘alla zoppa’ rhythmic gesture see Ratner, *Classic Music*, 85.

²⁸ Mary Neal Hamilton, *Music in Eighteenth-Century Spain* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1937), 179–80.

rives from symphonic language and uses to emphasize episodes through abrupt contrasts between sound masses.²⁹ Thus, in the third movement as well, all the formal and stylistic elements—together with the sound of a “campanello,” imitated by the second violin in A and by the viola in A’—contribute remarkably to the rendering of a functional music drawn from reality: the responsorial form of the processional song, reproduced in the contrast between sections A and B. Boccherini offers a compelling scenic representation of a moment of popular religiosity.

The fourth movement is a *Passa Calle*. The composer, in the note preceding the music, briefly explains the meaning of the term and illustrates its character and function: “a manner of playing and singing called by the Spaniards *Passa Calle*, that is, *Passa Strada*, with which, or with something only slightly different, they amuse themselves at night by singing and playing.”³⁰ The subtitle *Los Manolos. Chanteurs des rues*, found in the principal source of the second version of the quintet, informs us who these “Spaniards” actually are, identifying them as the exuberant young people of the Lavapiés neighborhood. The *manolo* was a younger variant of the *majo*, the commoner who proudly displayed his Iberian temperament. With the title *Passa Calle*, Boccherini refers to the popular practice of the *passacaglia*, which had remained alive in Spain in the form of an instrumental refrain played on guitar between the verses of a song. This refrain consisted of a short cadential succession of chords developed from a bass pattern. The structure of the *passacaglia* performed by the *manolos* is built precisely upon the alternation between an instrumental refrain, melodic sections referring to the verses of a song, and a third episode that functions as a variant of the refrain. In this third episode, the texture becomes lighter, with the second violin left alone to perform, in rapid sixteenth-note arpeggios, the chordal succession of the refrain.

Finally, after a short introduction recalling the soldiers’ drum already heard in the second section of the first movement (*Ave Maria del Quartiere*), the last scene opens: the *Ritirata*, which represents the passage of the night patrol of soldiers signaling, by means of a march, that it is time for the

29 See Guido Salvetti, “Camerismo sinfonico e sinfonismo cameristico: alla ricerca di un approccio analitico pertinente,” in *Luigi Boccherini e la musica strumentale dei maestri italiani in Europa tra Sette e Ottocento, Atti del convegno internazionale di studi*, Siena 29–31 luglio 1993, eds. Francesco Degrada and Ludwig Finscher, *Chigiana* 43, nuova serie no. 23 (1993): 341.

30 “Modo di suono e canto chiamato dagli Spagnoli *Passa Calle*, cioè *Passa Strada*, con il quale, o con altro poco differente, si divertono la notte cantando e suonando.”

troops to return to headquarters.³¹ The main difference between the first and second versions of the *Musica notturna* lies in the reworking of this final movement.

The first version of this movement is divided into four sections, in which the theme of the *Ritirata* undergoes no melodic variation. Changes in texture and dynamics distinguish the sections, imparting a sense of movement to the composition and thereby effectively conveying the impression of a march progressing through urban space. The basic “pipes and drums” module, together with the obsessive articulation of the martial theme, remains unchanged throughout the different sections. The theme of the *Ritirata* has been identified: it derives from an official collection of music for the military band of the Spanish court.³² The identification of the theme gives us a measure of the actual contemporaneity and realism of Boccherini’s musical representation.³³

From Sketch to Scene: The Ritirata with Variations

In the second version of the quintet’s final movement, Boccherini follows the theme of the *Ritirata* with a series of eleven variations. The theme-and-variations form is nevertheless placed at the service of the music’s representational function. Through form and dynamics, Boccherini introduces into the scene the spatial element of the soldiers’ patrol as it gradually approaches and then recedes from a point of observation and listening.³⁴ With re-

31 The function of the retreat, as a nighttime call for soldiers lingering in the city to return to their base is indicated in the *Ordenanzas* of Carlos III. See Aguilera Concepción, “*La música nocturna de las calles de Madrid*, de Boccherini.”

32 *Libro de la ordenanza de los toques de pifanos y tambores que se tocan nuevamente en la ynfanta [infantería] española*, 1761, manuscript, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, M/2791. The author of these *toques* is Manuel Espinosa de los Monteros, who was among the chamber musicians of Carlos III.

33 For a comparison between the *toque de retreta* and the theme of Boccherini’s *Ritirata* see again Aguilera Concepción, “*La música nocturna de las calles de Madrid*, de Boccherini,” which includes images of the sources of both pieces.

34 Boccherini later made several transcriptions of the *Ritirata* with variations. It became the third movement of the piano quintet op. 57, no. 6, G 418 and of the quintet with two violas G 390, itself a transcription of the piano quintet G 418, and an independent piece for guitar quintet. On the status of the two viola quintets within Boccherini’s instrumental production and on the question of their authenticity see Loukia Drosopoulou, “Luigi Boccherini’s String Quintets with Two Violas Opp. 60 and 62 (G 391–402): A Re-Examination of Their Origin,” *Boccherini Studies* 3 (2011): 169–96. The transcription for guitar quintet of the *Ritirata* with

gard to form, the impression of semicircular movement through space is achieved through the arched arrangement of the variations. Variations 1–10 are divided into three groups (1–3, 4–7, and 8–10) characterized by the return in the third group of the first three variations, with perfect mirroring contradicted only by the inversion of the second and third variations in nos. 8–9. Variation 11, entirely new, functions as a coda. On the level of dynamics, the general effect the composer intends to achieve is explained in the note preceding the music: “it is imagined that the *Ritirata* begins to be heard from a very great distance; therefore it must be played softly, so that it is barely audible at first, while the *crescendo* and *diminuendo* should proceed according to the way it is perceived.”³⁵ This effect is achieved through the gradual increase and decrease of dynamics, distributed so as to reach their peak of intensity—coinciding with the structural climax—in variation 6.

This structure and dynamic design seem to enhance the piece’s representational power, understood as music’s capacity to describe and stage reality, when compared with the first version. At the same time, however, Boccherini seems to distance himself slightly from the strict adherence to sonic reality that had characterized the first version of the *Ritirata*. He now resorts to a more elaborate style of writing, one that has no direct counterpart in the actual military retreat. Especially in the first three variations, the movement departs from the complete mimesis of real sound elements, returning instead to the musical style more commonly found in Boccherini’s chamber compositions without an explicitly descriptive character. This aspect is less evident in the central variations, where a more descriptive musical language is employed, similar to that of the first version. To summarize, in the *Musica notturna delle strade di Madrid*:

The bells announce the end of the day, the blind musicians sing their *coplas* while asking for alms, the prayers of the rosary can be heard, the young men of the *barrio* Lavapiés, known as *Los Manolos*, go out to dance in the streets

variations had been published by Heinrich Albert in 1920 as the fourth and final movement of the quintet that Gérard would later number as G 453. New sources discovered in recent years have shown that this movement was instead an autonomous piece. See Rudolf Rasch, “François de Fossa, Louis Picquot and the Transmission of Luigi Boccherini’s Guitar Quintets,” *Early Music* 50, n. 1 (2022): 77–96.

35 “Si figura che la *Ritirata* cominci a farsi sentire di lontano assai, perciò dovrà suonarsi con piano, che appena si senta, il *crescendo* e il *mancando* sarà poi conforme si andrà avvertendo.”

and squares, and the evening ends with the retreat, performed by the patrol troops of the royal guard, which signals that they should return to headquarters: it can be heard from afar, passes close to the listener, and then disappears into the darkness.³⁶

This is how Jaime Tortella sums up the representational content of Boccherini's quintet, effectively conveying, through his verbalization, the rapid succession of images and—as we would call it today—the immersive character of this music. One is almost led to wonder whether Boccherini was imagining an instant captured from multiple points of observation and listening, rather than a succession of moments. The note written by Boccherini at the beginning of the piece specifies “beginning with the tolling of the Ave Maria, until the *Ritirata*,” leading us to imagine the composition as unfolding chronologically and moving forward. Some elements of the quintet, however, introduce a fragmentary and circular temporality, almost as if we were not moving forward, but rather being offered fragments of music and sonic events occurring more or less simultaneously.

This sense of fragmentariness arises from the character of each movement as a brief descriptive sketch. It disappears only in the second version of the *Ritirata*, a piece with a clearer beginning and ending, although both are softened by the gradual dynamic attenuation of the sound. Circularity is introduced into the quintet through the return of the military drum, first heard near the opening in the *Ave Maria del Quartiere* and then reintroduced in the final *Ritirata*. The reprise of introductory material from the first movement in the final movement is one of Boccherini's cyclical strategies.³⁷ Here, combined with the circular motion of the *Ritirata* itself—albeit in different forms in the two versions of the piece—it contributes to softening the perception of linear temporality in favor of a temporality that turns back upon itself: static and self-enclosed, as though we were confronted with a single instant of reality that the music allows us to experience from multiple angles.³⁸

³⁶ “La musica notturna delle strade di Madrid,” in Tortella, *Luigi Boccherini. Diccionario de Términos, Lugares y Personas*, 257. By the same author, see also the section dedicated to the *Musica notturna* in “La música descriptiva o argumental en el catálogo de Luigi Boccherini,” *Nassarre. Revista Aragonesa de Musicología* 20 (2004): 193–220.

³⁷ On cyclical forms in Boccherini's music see Marco Mangani, “Tipologia delle forme cicliche nella musica di Boccherini,” *Codice* 602, nuova serie 1 (2010): 58–72.

³⁸ On the relationship between temporal circularity and immersion in sonic space in another descriptive composition by Boccherini, the quintet with two cellos op. 11, no. 6 *Luc-*

How and Why Does Boccherini Represent Madrid in Music?

These considerations lead us from the question of *what* is represented in the quintet to the questions of *how* representation is achieved, and *why* it was sought in the first place. The task now is to understand how urban space operates as symbolic space. Let us begin with the question of *how*. Boccherini opts for a form of meta-musical descriptivism in which musical language, in order to represent external reality, refers back to itself in the form in which it is necessarily bound to that very reality. Beyond this initial relationship, representation is articulated on two interconnected levels. The first may be defined as the level of *expression*, on which musical topics primarily operate.³⁹ In the *Musica notturna*, topics may be identified without much difficulty thanks to the functional nature—and therefore the strongly typified stylistic character—of the quintet's movements. One might say that the *Musica notturna* is an instrumental work that playfully stages an overexposure of topics. These are then anchored, through programmatic titles, to a precise musical reality.⁴⁰ Particularly eloquent in this regard is the second part of Boccherini's note on the title page of the Berlin score: "everything that does not conform to the rules of composition must be condoned by the truth of what is being represented."⁴¹

The second level of representation is that of *action*, through which the piece evokes the moments described in physical terms and stages the scenes in a theatrical sense. Each sonic element, by referring to its counterpart in the functional practice from which it derives, implicitly evokes the presence of the person or persons who actually produce it. Gestural imitation, accompanying sonic imitation, contributes to making the characters' stage presence perceptible. One may recall the aforementioned cellists who become guitarists in the *Minuetto dei ciechi*: "cellists will place the instrument across their knees and pluck with the nails of the entire hand turned backwards, like playing a guitar."⁴² Le Guin has emphasized how a form of

celliera (G 276), see Matteo Giuggioli, "Le voliere di don Luis. Modi e significati della rappresentazione nel Quintetto op. 11, No. 6 *Luccelliera* di Luigi Boccherini," *Estudios musicales del clasicismo* 3 (2016): 155–96.

39 See Ratner, *Classic Music: Expression, Form and Style*.

40 On the agency of topics in the *Musica notturna* see Mangani, "La verità della cosa che si va a rappresentare."

41 "Tutto ciò che non è conforme alle regole della composizione, deve condonarsi alla verità della cosa che si va a rappresentare."

42 "I violoncelli si metteranno l'istrumento attraversato sulle ginocchia, e pizzicaranno

theatricality, in which the performer actively contributes through gesture to the production of the music's affective meanings, is a constant feature of Boccherini's chamber compositions. The instrumentalist, like the actor or pantomime dancer of the time, is thus confronted with the problem of identifying with a specific role.⁴³

What, then, might be the reasons behind such a radical musical representation? From this perspective as well, the relationship between music and space is far from secondary. Boccherini composed his quintet far from Madrid, in Arenas de San Pedro, in the district of Ávila. In 1776 he had followed the Infante Don Luis to this place, where the Infante chose to spend the period of exile from the capital and from the royal court of his brother Carlos III, to which he had been condemned.

One fact that should not be underestimated is the considerable familiarity Boccherini must already have had at the time with Madrid's urban and cultural space. Before following Don Luis into exile, Boccherini had lived in Madrid for eight years (1768–1776). He maintained his residence there even after entering the service of the Infante in 1770, although Don Luis preferred to live outside the city, in his palace at Boadilla del Monte. In the years before his move to Arenas, Boccherini changed residence twice, living first in the *cuartel de Afligidos*, in the northwest of the city, and then in Calle de Atocha, in the very center of Madrid. After the nine years he spent in Arenas, Boccherini returned to settle permanently in Madrid. He changed residence at least four more times, once again moving between different areas of the city. The home in which he lived longest, for fifteen years, was located in the northern part of Madrid, in Calle de la Madera Alta, in the *barrio* of San Ildefonso, within the *cuartel de las Maravillas*.⁴⁴ Even considering the solid and well-established bond with the city that Boccherini already had at the time he composed the *Musica notturna*, one possible hypothesis is that the composer may have been prompted to conceive such a singular work by nostalgia for his life in Madrid—a feeling experienced not only by Boccherini, but all the members of the Infante Don Luis's private court, who had found

con le ugnie di tutta la mano posta al rovescio, come chi suona una chitarra.”

43 See Elisabeth Le Guin, “‘One Says That One Weeps, but One Does Not Weep’: Sensible, Grotesque, and Mechanical Embodiments in Boccherini's Chamber Music,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 55, no. 2 (2002): 207–54; Le Guin, *Boccherini's Body*.

44 The map of Boccherini's homes in Madrid can be reconstructed through the entries devoted to the different areas of the city where the composer lived, in Tortella, *Luigi Boccherini. Diccionario de Términos, Lugares y Personas*.

themselves following him to Arenas, an isolated place far removed from the dynamism of the city.

Nostalgia, however, can at most be regarded as an occasional motive behind the conception of the *Musica notturna*. A more substantial reason is probably to be found in the connections between the work's particular descriptive character—grounded in the reality of everyday life rather than in the conventional subjects more commonly cultivated in descriptive compositions of the period—and the contemporary Iberian artistic and cultural panorama. In particular, the *Musica notturna* reveals a close connection with *madrileñismo*, that is, the aesthetic and stylistic tendency, dominant at the time in Spanish visual and literary art, to depict scenes of popular life—above all in Madrid—in a sketch-like manner. In visual art, this tendency is exemplified by the cycles of preparatory cartoons for the tapestries designed for the royal residences of El Escorial and El Pardo, which Francisco Goya produced on several occasions. Boccherini, moreover, had the opportunity to meet Goya personally during the years in Arenas.⁴⁵ In literature, by contrast, *madrileñismo* is associated above all with the *sainete* and its most celebrated author, the Madrid playwright Ramón de la Cruz. Together with the *zarzuela* (Spanish comic opera), the *sainete* formed the essential nucleus of the *género chico* of Spanish theater. It consisted of a single act of variable length, though generally not exceeding twenty-five minutes, and featured characters drawn exclusively from Madrid's popular life. The poetics of Cruz—who states in the prologue to the edition of his works, published between 1786 and 1791, that the *sainete* is an “exact painting of the civil life and customs of the Spaniards”—closely resembles the mimetic purpose of the *Musica notturna*, in which Boccherini proves willing to sacrifice “the rules of composition” in favor of the “truth of what is being represented.” Boccherini also had direct contact with Cruz: he had most likely already met him during his first stay in Madrid, before the Infante Don Luis's exile to Arenas, and he certainly encountered him again in 1786, when he composed the music for the *zarzuela* *La Clementina*, for which the playwright had written the text. The *Musica notturna* may therefore be understood as a peculiar kind of *sainete* made entirely of music.⁴⁶

45 However, he composed the *Musica notturna* before meeting him, as Goya first arrived in Arenas in 1783.

46 The connection between Boccherini's chamber music and the forms of Spanish short theater, in particular with Cruz's *sainete*, goes beyond the affinity found in the *Musica notturna*, as Marco Mangani has shown in “‘El sainete interrumpido’: il metalinguaggio di Boccherini e l'estetica dell'Illuminismo,” in *Centros de poder italianos en la monarquía hispánica*

Symbolizing Urban Space

This adherence to specifically Iberian models, not only in content but also in forms of representation, may have been the principal reason for Boccherini's doubts when attempting to sell a piece such as the *Musica notturna* to Pleyel. In a letter to the publisher of July 10, 1797, he wrote: "in Opus 30, the *quintettini*, you will find one titled *La musica notturna delle strade di Madrid*. This piece is totally useless, and even ridiculous, outside Spain, since listeners can never understand its meaning, nor can performers play it as it ought to be played."⁴⁷ It is important to emphasize that, although Spain was often exoticized within the broader discourse of the so-called "Black Legend," Boccherini is not engaging with that discourse, which is fundamentally foreign both to him and his music.⁴⁸ As I have already noted, drawing on Le Guin's observations, Boccherini may instead be regarded as an artist and intellectual deeply aligned with the Spanish *Ilustración*. His words here seem almost intended to make precisely this point. There is no exoticizing intention in these remarks, nor in his music, and still less any racist undertone.

In presenting the case of the *Musica notturna* to Pleyel, Boccherini instead emphasizes the uniqueness of the Spanish musical and cultural context, as though this music were difficult to understand precisely because of its intrinsic and distinctive density of meaning. This aspect—which was evidently crucial to the question of the *Musica notturna*'s marketability outside Spain—seems to point to a deeper level of meaning, connected to a further dimension of the symbolic representation of Madrid's urban space in this composition.

In the 1780s, Boccherini seems to have had no difficulty allowing the quintet to circulate outside Spain. The principal Berlin source is, indeed, one of the scores that he sent to Prince Frederick William of Prussia for

(*siglos XV–XVIII*), vol. 3, eds. J. Martínez Millán and M. Rivero Rodríguez (Madrid: Polifemo, 2010), 2219–40; see also Marco Mangani, "El concepto de metalenguaje como metáfora del estilo boccheriniano," *Estudios musicales del clasicismo* 3 (2016): 13–37.

47 "Nell'Opera 30, quintettini, troverete che uno ha per titolo *La musica notturna delle strade di Madrid*. Questo pezzo è totalmente inutile, ed anche ridicolo fuori di Spagna, poiché non possono gli uditori giammai comprenderne il significato, né gli esecutori sonarlo come deve essere suonato." See Boccherini, *Epistolario*, 164. To compensate for this quintet, which he considered unpublishable, Boccherini sent to Pleyel the symphony op. 37, no. 1, G 515.

48 See Ruth MacKay, "Lazy, Improvident People": *Myth and Reality in the Writing of Spanish History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

self-promotional purposes; in this score, far from treating the musical representation as incomprehensible, the composer explains the rules of his game in great detail through performance directions. However, Pleyel did not contradict Boccherini's impression: he did not publish the *Musica notturna*. Further confirmation that Boccherini's doubts were well founded may be found in the poor reception of the *Musica notturna* during the *séances* organized in Paris in the first half of the nineteenth century by violinist Pierre Baillot. In these public concerts, Baillot—a great violinist as well as an admirer and connoisseur of Boccherini's music—regularly performed chamber works, especially Boccherini's quintets. The *Musica notturna* was included only once, in the first year of Baillot's *séances*, on February 27, 1815, and was never performed again.⁴⁹

What, then, had changed on the European scene between 1780 and 1797? Why was a piece of music entirely focused on the representation of a geographically specific musical space—in this case, the city of Madrid—intelligible outside its original context at the earlier date, but apparently no longer so at the later one? Different frameworks of musical appreciation in these two contexts of reception certainly played a role, beyond mere chronological distance. Le Guin has emphasized that Boccherini's music, written for cultivated patrons and musical connoisseurs—among whom Prince Frederick William of Prussia, himself a skilled musician, stands out—was not only of high quality but also open to a certain degree of experimentalism.⁵⁰ This is evident in the *Musica notturna*. Through the publishing market, however, Boccherini's music increasingly came into contact with a broader and less homogeneous audience, a process that intensified toward the end of the eighteenth century. In this respect, his major commercial negotiation with Pleyel represents a crucial moment. On the one hand, this music “formed” its new audience; on the other, the composer understood that he had to establish a compromise with it. Boccherini's doubts concerning the *Musica notturna* offer eloquent testimony to this awareness.

To attempt a deeper answer to the question of the changing conditions that affected the comprehensibility of the *Musica notturna* between the 1780s and the end of the century, we may also turn to a study by the iconologist Victor Stoichita and the art historian Anna Maria Coderch, which, I

49 Marco Mangani, “La música de Boccherini en las sesiones de Pierre Baillot (1814–1840),” *Estudios musicales del clasicismo* 6 (2022): 68.

50 Le Guin, “Algunos aspectos de la recepción de Boccherini,” 123.

think, offers a fruitful perspective on Boccherini's music as well.⁵¹ At the center of Stoichita and Coderch's study is the thesis that, with the French Revolution, the logic of reversal that had constituted the essence of carnival became reality.⁵² The spirit of carnival was thus exhausted, since carnival had become a profoundly serious key to modernity. It remained confined to the realm of spectacle; in practice, it became a simulacrum of itself, stripped of the subversive and playful force it had possessed within *ancien-régime* society.⁵³ As Stoichita and Coderch demonstrate, Goya was a highly sensitive and experimental pictorial interpreter of the carnivalesque dynamics that reflected these historical transformations.

That the Infante Don Luis's private court during the exile at Arenas—where the *Musica notturna* was composed—provided fertile ground for the development of this mode of thought and artistic representation is demonstrated, for example, by the large portrait of the Infante and his family painted by Goya at Arenas between 1783 and 1784.⁵⁴ As is well known, the painting probably also includes a portrait of Boccherini himself, depicted among the members of Don Luis's innermost circle. If so, this would constitute evidence of direct contact between the painter and the composer, traces of which continued to emerge in Madrid in the following years. Stoichita and Coderch interpret the portrait of the Infante's family as a complex and experimental metalinguistic construction centered on the staging of portraiture itself, in which the physical and psychological traits of the depicted figures are explored through the principles of physiognomy in a kind of role-playing performance. The paint-

51 Victor I. Stoichita and Anna Maria Coderch, *Goya: The Last Carnival* (Islington: Reaktion Books, 1999).

52 On the carnivalesque as a cultural and aesthetic category, the primary reference remains Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Sergei Sandler (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2025). Bakhtin's study was first published in Russian in 1965.

53 In Spain, and particularly in the Madrid of Kings Carlos III and Carlos IV, carnival, although it remained a deeply felt social ritual throughout the eighteenth century, bore the marks of this process of transformation. This was evident in the declining tendency toward the mingling of aristocracy and common people, as well as in the progressive restrictions imposed by the Bourbon monarchy on its more subversive and violent popular manifestations. See Julio Caro Baroja, *El Carnaval. Análisis histórico-cultural* (Madrid: Taurus, 1965); María José Del Río Barredo, "Burlas y violencia en el Carnaval madrileño de los siglos XVII y XVIII," *Revista de Filología Románica* 3 (2002): 111–27.

54 Francisco Goya, *The Family of the Infante Don Luis*, oil on canvas, cm 248x330, 1783–1784, Mamiano di Traversetolo, Fondazione Magnani Rocca, accessed May 28, 2026, <https://www.magnanirocca.it/goya-la-famiglia-dell-infante-don-luis/>.

ing is moreover laden with more or less explicit symbolic allusions to pressing contemporary questions concerning the aristocratic legitimacy of Maria Teresa de Vallabriga y Rozas—the morganatic wife of the Infante Don Luis—and the claims of the Infante and his descendants as potential successors to the Spanish crown.⁵⁵

Boccherini's *Musica notturna* proposes an intellectual as well as musical game based on continuous disguises and on the radical interchange between truth and falsehood. The highest degree of truth is represented through the highest degree of falsehood, with the instruments continually called upon to pretend to be something other than what they actually are. Boccherini's quintet is thus a clear manifestation of the carnivalesque in music and, in its own modest way, an emblematic one.

In the doubt Boccherini expressed to Pleyel at the end of the century concerning the comprehensibility of his experimental quintet outside Spain, one may perhaps glimpse precisely a perception of the changed horizon of the carnivalesque and, with it, an awareness of a change in historical epoch. By sending the *Ritirata* with variations to the publisher—that is, by attempting at least partially to normalize the game enacted in the quintet, which now becomes more conventionally representative in relation to the modes of descriptive music of the period—Boccherini changes strategy not only in shaping his representation of Madrid's urban space, but also in projecting symbolic meaning through it. With no less force than Goya, Boccherini stages, in this passage, the end of carnival.

55 See Stoichita and Coderch, "Royal Games," chap. 7 in *Goya*, 219–63.

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Abstract

In the string quintet in C major *La musica notturna delle strade di Madrid*, op. 30, no. 6, G 324 (1780) by Luigi Boccherini a tendency toward musical mimesis reaches its fullest expression. Through the ensemble of two violins, viola, and two cellos, the quintet depicts five episodes of Madrid's nocturnal life in a sophisticated play of musical "disguises." Yet the work's evident playful character should not obscure the complexity of its representational strategy. The selection of musical materials, the formal design, and the interplay among different sonic realities all contribute to the construction of a highly elaborate expressive device. At the same time, the quintet develops an original symbolic representation of the urban space of late eighteenth-century Madrid, in which broader aesthetic and cultural concerns converge. These range from the portrayal of Iberian cultural identity during a period of profound historical change to an ingenious artistic reflection on the relationship between reality and fiction, conceived in fundamentally theatrical terms yet realized entirely through the resources of instrumental music. By considering these interrelated dimensions, this paper reconstructs what appears at first to be a miniature genre piece but ultimately emerges as a rich, multifaceted, and highly distinctive portrait of a city.

Keywords: Luigi Boccherini, *La musica notturna delle strade di Madrid*, Madrid, symbolic space, carnivalesque

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