

Doña Leonor de Guzmán, a “good-natured and young” musician

LEÓN, SEBASTIÁN

Universitat de Barcelona

[0000-0002-2177-6911](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17634795)

doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17634795

Abstract

The 1610 inquisitorial trial against Leonor de Guzmán, a mixed-race musician who had connections with members of the Madrid nobility, reveals the era's prejudices against female artists. Though she found patronage among nobles and other prominent figures, her musical pursuits were abruptly ended by allegations of moral misconduct, leading to her banishment.

Keywords

inquisitorial trial , domestic music making , academy , theatre performance , musical evening , women and musical networks project , Leonor de Guzmán (musician) , Fernando de Guzmán (poet) , María Enríquez (=Ana de León) , Manuela Enríquez (actress and musician) , Jerónima de los Ángeles (actress) , Gómez Suárez de Figueroa y Córdoba (3th Duque of Feria) , Ruy Gómez de Silva y Mendoza (3rd Duke of Pastrana) , mulatto

An inquisitorial trial from 1610 focuses on a woman who embodies the ephemeral nature of musical practice at the time: Leonor de Guzmán. By then, Leonor had been living for over a year on Calle de la Reina in Madrid, accompanied by a maid, Ana de León—who went by the name doña María Enríquez—and her niece, doña Manuela Enríquez, daughter of the actress and later music agent Jerónima de los Ángeles. Leonor was accused of “being idly occupied” and leading a dishonest life, as she received numerous visitors in her home who paid to listen to her music—an activity viewed with suspicion at the time, given that she was both unmarried and mixed-race.

This woman of Granadan origin, described as a “mulatta of good appearance and youth,” had arrived in Madrid from Seville in 1600, accompanying the poet Fernando Mejía de Guzmán, nicknamed “the Heretic.” She had likely been in the service of him and his wife, María de Jaén y Sanabria, since childhood and lived with him until his death in 1604, after which she inherited his surname. During her years in Madrid, perhaps influenced by Mejía de Guzmán's circle, doña Leonor associated with theatrical figures and frequently attended plays and public events. On one occasion, after one such evening, she was arrested along with her housemates. Upon her release the following morning, she was forced to promise to part ways with these women, distancing herself from the world of theater courtyards to devote herself entirely to music and, from then on, living only with her maid.

The accusatory trial stated that “the aforementioned woman is seldom at home, as she is usually out,” yet her residence was frequented not only by Jerónima de los Ángeles and the aforementioned women but also by various gentlemen and nobles. Leonor also performed at the homes of prominent figures such as the Duke of Feria, the Duke of Alba, and the III Duke of Pastrana—a great music enthusiast and skilled guitar player—receiving daily allowances from them. Additionally, doña Leonor visited the chambers of other “lords of this court to play and entertain them, as she considers it her profession.”

It is highly likely that, due to her connections with these personalities—many of whom were part of Madrid's literary academies, such as that of the Duke of Saldaña—our singer attended these gatherings together with the actresses sponsored by these nobles, playing the guitar and singing alongside poets and playwrights such as Lope de Vega, Antonio Hurtado de Mendoza, Vélez de Guevara, Cervantes, or Vicente Espinel—known, like Leonor, for his “sonadas y cantares de sala (instrumental pieces and salon songs)” —not to mention the figures she would have met while attending theater courtyards. The music she performed, heard at these soirées, would have consisted of romances, letrillas, and sung dances, reflecting the ephemeral practice of pieces disseminated and learned orally, always accompanied by the essential strumming of the guitar. These tunes conveyed the lyrics that enriched the delights of the romancero nuevo genre, where artistic poetry and popular lyricism intentionally blended, along with dance patterns that by then bore imported influences from the Indies, such as zarabandas and chaconas, whose suggestive sensuality made more than a few blush.

Continuing with the accusatory trial, one witness, Isabel González, wife of a cosmetics maker, declared that doña Leonor “is a musician, and I have heard her sing and play, and I understand this is her profession.” Despite these statements and all the success and acceptance Leonor enjoyed among noble circles, her work and complex social position left her open to misunderstandings and false accusations. Thus, this “dark-skinned woman [...] who is a musician and makes a living as such,” as declared by another witness, notary Miguel Lozano, was sentenced to exile in February 1610.

Years later, in 1615, doña Leonor herself appeared in Zaragoza, testifying before the court about her trial and affirming that she lived there “as an honorable woman [...] from my labor and music.” She requested permission to return to Madrid, stating it was “where I was raised.” After this, all trace of this woman—who persevered in practicing her art despite the disdainful gazes and judgments she faced—is lost.

This publication is part of the research project METADRAMA (Ref. PID2024-161619NA-I00), supported by MICIU/AEI/10.13039/501100011033 and co-funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF/ FEDER)

Source:

Archivo histórico nacional, Consejos suprimidos, legajo 51171.

Bibliography:

Bouza, Fernando, “Decir -y oír decir- en el Siglo de Oro”, en *La vida cotidiana en el mundo hispánico (siglos XVII-XVIII)*, ed. Manuel Peña Díaz. Madrid: Abada, 2012, 335-356.

Galera Mendoza, María Esther, "Leonor de Guzmán: música, letras y mestizaje en el tránsito del Renacimiento al Barroco", en *Prácticas femeninas en la Edad Moderna: Entre el arte y el poder*, ed. Esther Alegre Carvajal. Madrid, UNED - Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, 2024, 303-16.

Published: 25 Aug 2025 **Modified:** 27 Aug 2025

Referencing: León, Sebastián. "Doña Leonor de Guzmán, a "good-natured and young" musician", *Historical soundscapes*, 2025. e-ISSN: 2603-686X.
<https://www.historicalsoundscapes.com/evento/1720/madrid>.

Resources



Pietro Paolini, *Allegory of the Five Senses*, c. 1630 (Baltimore, Walters Art Museum)

[External link](#)



Costume design for Recit de l'Amérique (America's Speech) in *Ballet Royal du Grand Bal de la Drouairie de Billebahaut*, ca. 1626 (McNay Art Museum)

[External link](#)

["https://embed.spotify.com/?uri=https://open.spotify.com/intl-es/track/1w14pi7YULOcIgdE9IBUlg?si=7f5905635a734820](https://embed.spotify.com/?uri=https://open.spotify.com/intl-es/track/1w14pi7YULOcIgdE9IBUlg?si=7f5905635a734820)

Levantándole el aire. Anonymous, ca. 1643

["https://embed.spotify.com/?uri=https://open.spotify.com/intl-es/track/5sdoMKyEGsjSVKLEm3zDka?si=4c6016f3fd094fa0](https://embed.spotify.com/?uri=https://open.spotify.com/intl-es/track/5sdoMKyEGsjSVKLEm3zDka?si=4c6016f3fd094fa0)

Ándalo, zarabanda / Cómo te pones, amores. Luis de Briceño

Historical soundscapes

© 2015 Juan Ruiz Jiménez - Ignacio José Lizarán Rus

www.historicalsoundscapes.com