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### *A Theology of Music in Worship: Practice, Experience, and Meaning*

LYDIA GRACE PADFIELD

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## Abstract

This thesis gives a theological account of music in worship. It draws on insights from musicology – particularly a series of resources known as the ‘new musicology’ – which emphasise the practical, embodied, affective, experiential, and epistemic nature of music. It observes substantial consonances between these insights and theological accounts of other Christian practices: language, liturgy, and prayer. And it notes, through the means of qualitative research, the way such insights recognisably relate to music in worship as it experienced and understood by ordinary Christians. It is from these musicological insights, theological accounts, and articulations of ordinary practice that this thesis draws, to interrogate the theological significance of the many ways in which music in worship is practised, experienced, and understood.

Against the backdrop of a growing body of literature at the intersection of music and theology – literature which predominantly treats music as a series of works – this thesis advocates for closer attention to the creaturely realities of music-making. It contends that music in worship is a fallible, finite, and risky gift, comprised of many practices, activities, and objects – each of which is meaningfully implicated in the life of the church. It suggests that music in worship is experienced in an extensive variety of ways, and these experiences may play a wide range of roles in the formation and worship of the body of Christ. It argues that the pluriform meanings associated with music make it a poor source for doctrinal theology, but that music can nonetheless help its participants to know something of God. And it notes the places where the practices and activities that comprise music fall short, creating distance between self, other, and God. In so doing, it observes the realities of music in worship, as it is really instantiated, and takes seriously the theological significance of these realities.

**A Theology of Music in Worship:  
Practice, Experience, and Meaning**

Lydia Padfield

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Department of Theology and Religion

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## Glossary of Musical Terms

*Note: this glossary serves to provide brief working definitions of the musical terms encountered in this thesis. It is not comprehensive, and does not contain extensive definitions of, or recognise the complex history or practices associated with, these musical terms.*

**Analysis** – Used here to refer to the study of pieces of music, almost exclusively through study of musical **scores**.

**Canon** – Can refer to a technique where a **melody** is overlaid with itself, at a specific time interval. Used here to refer to the pieces of music that are considered fundamental or normative to a particular **genre**.

**Chord** – Two or more **notes** sounding at the same time.

**Dominant** – The fifth **note** of a **major/minor scale** of **western tonality**, and the **chord** based on this **note**. The **dominant chord** is based on the fifth and seventh **notes** of a **western major** or **minor scale**, with an optional **note** two.

**Dynamics** – How loud or quiet a section or piece of music is.

**Equal temperament** – A tuning system which divides an **octave** into twelve equal **semitones**, rather than relying strictly on the ratios of the **harmonic series**.

**Fifth** – Can refer to the fifth **note** of a **western scale**, or to the **frequency** ratio of 2:3.

Used here primarily to refer to the **interval** between the first and fifth **notes** of a **major/minor** scale.

**Flat (adj.)** – Out of tune – sounding lower than the **note** desired.

**Folk music** – Music that originates in traditional popular culture, typically of unknown authorship and oral (as opposed to **score**-based) transmission.

**Frequency** – The number of times per second a sound wave repeats itself.

**Genre** – A style or category of music.

**Harmonic series** – A sequence of **notes** arising from dividing a vibrating string or air column into simple whole-number **ratios**, such as 1:3 or 1:4. The **octave**, for example, exists on a ratio of 1:2, and the **fifth** on the ratio of 2:3.

**Harmony** – Can mean the sounding of two or more **notes** at the same time – see **chord**. Largely used in this thesis to refer to the **chords** used collectively in a piece of music.

**Interval** – The distance in **pitch** between two **notes**.

**Jazz** – A music genre originating in African American communities of New Orleans in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

**Key** – The **scale**, and **chords** based on the **scale**, that form the basis of a musical composition, within **western tonal music** and **jazz**.

**Major** – Can refer to **scales, chords, and triads** which include the **note** which is a **major third** above the **root**.

**Major chord** – A **chord** involving a **major third**.

**Major scale** – A **western scale** involving a particular combination of **tones** and **semitones**, and most markedly the **interval** of a **major third**.

**Major third** – An **interval** of four **semitones**, i.e., two **tones**.

**Major triad** – A **chord** involving a **root**, a **major third** above the root, and a **fifth** above the **root**.

**Minor** – Can refer to **scales, chords, and triads** which include the **note** which is a **minor third** above the **root**.

**Minor chord** – A **chord** involving a **minor third**.

**Minor scale** – A **western scale** involving a particular combination of **tones** and **semitones**, and most markedly the **interval** of a **minor third**. There are three types of **minor scale**, but the distinction between them is not employed in this thesis.

**Minor third** – An **interval** of three **semitones**, i.e., one **tone** and one **semitone**.

**Minor triad** – A **chord** involving a **root**, a **minor third** above the root, and a **fifth** above the **root**.

**Melody** – A series of single **notes**, combining **pitch** and **rhythm**.

**Melogenic** – Music where the **melody** takes precedence over, and shapes, a given text.

**Notation** – A set of visual instructions for the performance of a particular piece of music.

**Note** – A distinct and isolatable sound, defined by its **frequency** and duration.

**Octave** – Two **notes**, one having twice or half the **frequency** of the other.

**Pitch** – The frequency of a **note** – where a high-frequency sound wave relates to a high **note**, and a low-frequency sound wave to a low **note**.

**Plagal cadence** – A progression from the **subdominant chord** to the **tonic chord** at the end of a passage of music.

**Popular music** – A broad term referring to music designed to appeal to a large proportion of any given population.

**Pythagorean comma** – The **frequency** difference – considerably less than a **semitone** – between seven **octaves** measured according to **equal temperament**, and twelve **fifths** measured according to the **harmonic series**.

**Quarternote** – An **interval** half that of a **semitone**.

**Rhythm** – The placement of sounds in time.

**Root** – The fundamental **note** on which a **chord** is built.

**Scale** – A series of **notes** in consecutive order.

**Score** – The written product of **notated** music.

**Semitone** – The smallest **interval** used in **western tonal music**, equal to a twelfth of an **octave**. Often recognised as the distance between keys on a piano, including both white and black keys.

**Sequence** – The repetition of a musical idea (such as a **melody**, or **melody** with **harmony**) at a higher or lower **pitch**.

**Sharp (adj.)** – Out of tune – sounding higher than the **note** desired.

**Subdominant** – The fourth **note** of a **major/minor scale** of **western tonality**, and the **chord** based on this **note**. The **subdominant chord** is based on the fourth and sixth **notes** of the **western scale**, with an optional **note** eight (or **octave**).

**Tempo** – The speed at which music is played.

**Timbre** – The sonic quality of a **note**, as distinct from its **pitch** or duration.

**Tone** – An **interval** of two **semitones**.

**Tonic** – The main **note** or **chord** of a **key** in the **major/minor** system of **western tonality**. The **tonic chord** is based on the first and third notes of the **western scale**, with an optional **note five**.

**Unison** – The sounding of the same **note** by two or more singers or musicians at the same time.

**Variation** – The alteration of a musical idea (such as a **melody**, or **melody** with **harmony**) according to **pitch**, **rhythm**, or style.

**Western art music** – Music written in the western musical tradition, usually using an established form, distinguished from **popular music**, **jazz**, or **folk music**, and usually designed for performance in dedicated musical spaces – e.g., a concert hall.

**Western classical music** – Can refer to **western art music** written in the period roughly between 1750 and 1820. Used here to refer more generally to music written in the western musical tradition, usually using an established form, and distinguished from **popular music**, **jazz**, or **folk music**.

**Western scale** – A **scale** within **western tonal music**, comprising eight **notes** within an **octave**.

**Western staff notation** – A system of musical notation used in most forms of **western classical music**.

**Western tonal music** – Music written according to the principles of western **tonality**, including **western classical music**, **western art music**, and many forms of **popular music**.

**Western tonality** – An organising principle for the **chords** and **harmonies** of a piece of **western tonal music**, based on a particular **scale** or **key**.

## Statement of Copyright

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the author's prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

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## 1 – Introduction

Make a joyful noise to the Lord all the earth;  
break forth into joyous song and sing praises.  
Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre,  
with the lyre and the sound of melody.  
With trumpets and the sound of the horn  
make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord. (Psa. 98.4-6, NRSV)

Otherwise you're just listening to [...] the prayers or the liturgy or what-have-you  
[...] but [...] you get together with a hymn[.]<sup>1</sup>

### **Music in Worship**

Every Sunday, and often midweek too, Christians engage in a series of activities that might be described as “music in worship”. From chanting psalms to leading a worship set, singing the Eucharistic responses to joining in with the CD player, harmonising with a choir to playing gentle synth, conducting a brass band to improvising on the organ, shaking a tambourine to humming the tune (but steadfastly refusing to sing the words), Christians make music. Through choosing songs, handing out hymn books, arguing about style, tuning guitars, selecting organ stops, printing off sheet music, rehearsing the band, advertising for a new pianist, setting up the sound system, composing, recording, and selling, Christians make music. In churches, cathedrals, chapels, convents, schools, residential homes, hospitals, festival tents, and crematoria, Christians make music. And they do so as part of their worship.

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony, Focus Group 2, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2022. I will explain the context of this quote, and the details of the fieldwork I undertook as part of this thesis, in chapter 4.

These activities are not ubiquitous: not all Christians sing and not all services involve music. They are also rarely called “music in worship”, or at least not in the contexts in which they are found – described instead as “liturgical music”, “congregational singing”, or, even, simply, “the worship”.<sup>2</sup> They are not particularly similar, either: sitting on the committee for a new hymnal bears little resemblance to conducting a children’s choir, and even singing an unaccompanied hymn in a congregation of five is likely to feel very different from singing a band-led worship song in a stadium of twenty thousand.<sup>3</sup> And yet, these activities (or at least some of them) have been imbued with great theological significance – something which is hardly surprising given the injunction to ‘Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord’ (Eph. 3.19). For Clement of Rome, ‘In the same way [as the angels] ought we ourselves, gathered together in a conscious unity, to cry to Him as it were with a single voice’.<sup>4</sup> For Clement of Alexandria, ‘the union of many into one, bringing a divine harmony out of many scattered sounds, becomes one symphony, following one leader and teacher, the Word’.<sup>5</sup> Or, for Ambrose, ‘A psalm joins those with differences, unites those at odds, and reconciles those who have been offended, for who will not concede to him with whom one sings to God in one voice?’<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Monique Ingalls suggests, ‘Evangelical commentators are often at pains to insist that congregational music-making and worship are not synonymous; the felt need of so many leaders to insist continually that “worship is more than singing” evidences how widespread the conflation is.’ Monique Ingalls, *Singing the Congregation: How Contemporary Worship Music Forms Evangelical Community* (Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> It is this variety in congregational singing alone that prompts Walter Brueggemann to observe: ‘If one were an anthropologist [...] congregational singing might appear odd indeed.’ Walter Brueggemann, *A Glad Obedience: Why and What We Sing* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Clement of Rome, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, trans. by Maxwell Staniforth, rev. by Andrew Louth (Penguin Books, 1988), pp. 36-37.

<sup>5</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *The Exhortation to the Greeks; The Rich Man’s Salvation; To the Newly Baptized*, trans. by G. W. Butterworth (Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 195.

<sup>6</sup> Ambrose, *Explanatio psalmi i*, in *Music in Early Christian Literature*, ed. by James McKinnon (Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 125-27 (p. 127).

This thesis seeks to extend these insights by incorporating a greater range of musical practices than singing or playing instruments into a theological account of music in worship. I propose that each of the activities listed above, and more – from operating the organ to operating the PowerPoint – forms a substantive part of Christian music-making and is meaningfully implicated in Christian worship. Music in worship is not limited to the places and moments where people sing or play instruments. It is also comprised by decisions, compromises, and painstaking practice; social relationships, institutional influences, and personal preferences.

This proposal is grounded in what is variously referred to as ‘the cultural turn’, ‘the new musicology’, or ‘critical musicology’ – a series of musicological ideas articulated in the 1980s and 1990s which emphasise the social, relational, embodied, and performative nature of music. Among other things, new musicology contends that music is best considered a series of practices rather than a series of objects, and that it is harder than we might expect, and not necessarily desirable, to distinguish between musical and extra-musical activities. These ideas give significance not just to works of art (however conceived), and not just to the activities of composing, performing, and listening, but also to affective experiences of music, to the interpersonal dynamics of a music group, and to the relationship between music, identity, and society.

Such insights may be musicological but, I will suggest, they are consonant with theological writing on other practices. In chapters 5-7, I will draw parallels with Rowan Williams and Janet Soskice on language; Andrew Prevot, Denys Turner, Grace Jantzen, Mark McIntosh, and Sarah Coakley on prayer; and Aidan Kavanagh, Nicholas Wolterstorff, and Stanley Hauerwas on liturgy.<sup>7</sup> And, more fundamentally, these insights reflect what Simeon Zahl

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<sup>7</sup> Rowan Williams, *The Edge of Words: God and the Habits of Language* (Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2014); Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Clarendon Press, 1985); Andrew L. Prevot, *Thinking*

suggests is ‘a question of foundational significance for Christian theology’, namely, ‘how is it that meaningful and effectual connections come to obtain between theological doctrines and the practical experience of Christians?’<sup>8</sup> They allow us to ask related questions such as: how might fierce disputes about whether or not to hold auditions for the church choir be doing work in the body of Christ? How can we give a theological account of experiences of music such as boredom, annoyance, and apathy, as well as joy, delight, and encouragement? How can we make sense of musical contingency, fallibility, and failure in the service of worship? Or, more simply, they allow us to ask the primary question of this thesis: *what can we say, theologically, about music in worship, if music is ‘an activity, something that people do?’*<sup>9</sup>

## Setting the Scene

This question sits against the backdrop of a renewed attention to the relationship between music and theology. Jeremy Begbie, David Brown, Gavin Hopps, June Boyce-Tillman, Maeve Louise Heaney, and Jon Michael Spencer (among others) are writing into an expanding area of research, rejecting any idea that ‘music and theology [are] fundamentally incommensurable: one deals with the affective and connotational, the other with the conceptual.’<sup>10</sup> This research marks a sharp shift from the generation of theological

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*Prayer: Theology and Spirituality amid the Crises of Modernity* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2015); Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge University Press, 1995); Grace Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge University Press, 1995); Mark Allen McIntosh, *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology* (Blackwell, 1998); Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay ‘On the Trinity’* (Cambridge University Press, 2013); Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology: The Hale Memorial Lectures of Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, 1981* (Liturgical Press, 1992); Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Acting Liturgically: Philosophical Reflections on Religious Practice* (Oxford University Press, 2018); Stanley Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them in the Truth: Holiness Exemplified* (T&T Clark, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> Simeon Zahl, *The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience* (Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Wesleyan University Press, 1998), p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Jeremy Begbie, *Music, Modernity, and God: Essays in Listening* (Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 3. See also David Brown and Gavin Hopps, *The Extravagance of Music* (Springer International Publishing, 2018);

engagements with music and musicology which precedes it. It would be difficult to find a contemporary account evocative of Hans Küng's suggestion that 'in [Wolfgang Amadeus] Mozart's music something can sometimes appear which goes beyond the human dimension and gives intimations of the mystery of a "bliss" which transcends all music', or Karl Barth's claims that trying to speak (again) of Mozart's music leads only to 'rapturous stammering.'<sup>11</sup> Begbie writes in awareness of 'new musicology' with its 'attention to music's social, cultural, and political embeddedness' (although also its supposed 'reductionist cul-de-sacs'); Brown and Hopps are keen to recognise music's 'context-dependent-character' (while objecting to 'the widespread exclusion of religious concerns in critical musicology'); and Heaney insists that 'music is best grasped not as a noun but as a verb, an activity and one that is not only personal but relational and socially embedded.'<sup>12</sup>

There is, however, more work to be done in incorporating new musicological ideas into theological study. Begbie, Brown, and Hopps clearly have reservations about these claims, and each – as I will suggest in the following chapter – stops short of fully incorporating them as method. Furthermore, although music *in worship* is a significant part of Christian life, it is relatively understudied; as Brown suggests, 'hymn singing is often treated as a sort of Cinderella subject and so seldom gains the attention it deserves from theologians'.<sup>13</sup> This thesis, then, argues for a greater integration of new musicological claims in theological study. I contend that musicology after the cultural turn is not reductionist nor utilitarian,

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June Boyce-Tillman, *In Tune with Heaven or Not: Women in Christian Liturgical Music* (Peter Lang, 2014); Maeve Louise Heaney, *Suspended God: Music and a Theology of Doubt* (Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2022); Jon Michael Spencer, *Theological Music: Introduction to Theomusicology* (Greenwood Press, 1991); *God's Song and Music's Meanings: Theology, Liturgy, and Musicology in Dialogue*, ed. by James Hawkey, Ben Quash and Vernon White (Taylor & Francis Group, 2017).

<sup>11</sup> Hans Küng, *Mozart: Traces of Transcendence*, trans. by John Bowden (SCM Press Ltd, 1992), pp. ix-x; Karl Barth, *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart* (W. B. Eerdmans, 1986), p. 16.

<sup>12</sup> Begbie, *Music, Modernity, God*, p. 3; Brown and Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, p. 28; Heaney, *Suspended God*, p. 40.

<sup>13</sup> David Brown, *God and Mystery in Words: Experience through Metaphor and Drama* (Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 73.

and not antithetical to theological concerns. Instead, it is a fruitful methodological starting point for a theological account of music. And I focus here on music in worship, as a series of underexamined activities in which Christians are routinely caught up, and a series of activities of which we can make significant theological claims, as well as the place where theology and music most incontrovertibly meet.

Implicit here are three interconnected, but distinct, rationales – each of which will be afforded particular prominence in different chapters of this thesis. The first rationale is ontological, taking seriously the claims made by those such as Christopher Small, Lydia Goehr, and Georgina Born that a practical approach to music stands up to greater theoretical scrutiny than works-based approaches.<sup>14</sup> The second rationale is ethical, acknowledging the demands made by the cultural turn and the possibility that a focus on activity allows us to resist value-laden hierarchies and their troubled history in the study of music.<sup>15</sup> The third rationale is practical: in conversation with Zahl, that such an approach allows for a closer connection to be drawn between a theological account of music and ordinary practice, taking seriously the hymn-singing of a declining parish church or the action songs of a school assembly. None of these rationales are – strictly speaking – necessary: even without accepting one or all of these claims, it is still reasonable to believe that approaching music from a different perspective may yield theological insight. However, this thesis both emerges from these rationales, and makes the most sense in relation to them.

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<sup>14</sup> See Small, *Musicking*; Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford University Press, 1994); Georgina Born, 'Music and the Materialization of Identities', *Journal of Material Culture* 16.4 (2011), pp. 376–88, doi:10.1177/1359183511424196.

<sup>15</sup> This is a point I will develop extensively in the following chapter, pp. 38-47.

## Establishing the Parameters

Music in worship, particularly construed in this way, is a vast area of study. By examining activities rather than objects, it makes little sense to focus, theologically, on the activity of singing hymns in a cathedral over and above the activity of singing worship songs in a parish church. This is not to negate differences of style, context, or architecture – although it is surprisingly difficult to draw neat stylistic categories between different types of music.<sup>16</sup> And nor is it to suggest that my account will be comprehensive in its treatment of different musical activities and events; while I believe there are gains in studying the many practices that comprise music, there are inevitably losses in terms of specificity. But it is to propose that the differences between singing hymns in a cathedral and singing worship songs in a parish church may not be *theologically substantive*, and it would be unwise to assume they are without further examination. And, in any case, by suggesting that plugging in microphones is a part of music in worship, it would then be unusual to exempt choral music from the discussion. Both, I suggest, have a legitimate place in the answer to the question, *what can we say, theologically, about music in worship, if music is ‘an activity, something that people do?’*<sup>17</sup>

There is, however, much that I am not doing here. For a start, there is no score-based analysis in this thesis: it is not necessary to have any knowledge of western musical notation to engage with these ideas. In fact, I do not perform any analysis of pieces of music at all, whether J. S. Bach’s *B Minor Mass* or Julia Plaut’s ‘Thank you God for Snails’, from the album of the same name.<sup>18</sup> This is not to deny the validity of studying melodies, harmonies,

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<sup>16</sup> See Ingalls, *Singing the Congregation*, pp. 5-9 for a discussion of various issues of terminology.

<sup>17</sup> Small, *Musicking*, p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> E.g., J. S. Bach, *Mass in B Minor, BWV 232*, ed. by Uwe Wolfe (Bärenreiter, 2010), or J. S. Bach, *Mass in B minor, BWV 232*, ed. by Friedrich Smend (Edition Peters, 2001); Julia Plaut, ‘Thank You God for Snails’, from *Thank You God for Snails* (Integrity Music, 2000).

rhythms, and texts, nor of making theological claims about them; new musicology is often analytical, even if the analysis is structured differently from the musicology which preceded it. However, given the vastness of the subject area, there is not space for detailed reflection on individual pieces of music, and this would be likely to detract from a focused account of music as a series of activities. Virtually all of my examples, then, are of musical activities and events: particular instantiations of music in a specific time and place. These are drawn primarily from fieldwork which I conducted in 2022, and which is described in chapter 4. Where there are references to specific pieces of music in subsequent chapters, I have provided sample recordings (and, where relevant, sample scores) after the bibliography.<sup>19</sup> I have not given specific citations in the text unless I am referring directly to a particular recording or edition.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> See Musical Citations, pp. 381-86.

<sup>20</sup> As I will expand in chapter 2, pieces of music within the western art music canon are frequently understood as “works of art”, entities existing apart from specific scores, recordings, and performances. This means there is no definitive recording, or score, of Bach’s *B Minor Mass*, and – according to this line of thinking – it would be impossible for a score or recording to capture Bach’s *B Minor Mass* in its entirety. The same logic can be extended to jazz standards, or to folk songs. While this thesis challenges many of the claims made of “works of art”, and argues against making western art music an exceptional case, the reality remains that it is very difficult to reference Bach’s *B Minor Mass*, as it is understood by those who play, listen to, and write about Bach’s *B Minor Mass*, in any conventional sense. This is why I have not included citations to specific scores and recordings – which would be an act of misrepresentation – but, for interest, have included sample recordings and scores in the Musical Citations following the Bibliography. Many forms of popular music, however, are more closely defined by definitive recordings. If someone other than Julia Plaut recorded the song ‘Thank You God for Snails’, it would either be considered a cover version, or a violation of copyright. Therefore, when I refer to specific pieces of contemporary popular music, I operate under this assumption, too, and include citations to the definitive recording. This may give the unfortunate impression that pieces of western art music will be known to the reader, or that western art music is so different from popular music that it can legitimately be studied differently. I contest both these ideas by including a list of musical citations, and by describing in some detail in chapter 3 that, for all the different discourses surrounding different types of music, each can be understood according to one common ontological framework.

My concern here is also with a theological account *of* music in worship, rather than the theology *through* music that characterises Begbie's and Heaney's work.<sup>21</sup> I will acknowledge in some detail in the conclusion that it is very difficult to distinguish entirely between these two approaches; as Heaney suggests, 'in the first millennium of Christian life and well into the second, Christian thought developed alongside and in a symbiotic relationship with the music through which it prayed (*lex orandi, lex credendi*), which in turn helped express its identity and meaning.'<sup>22</sup> And, in chapter 7, I will examine the relationship between music in worship, meaning, and knowledge, where – while I express reservations about the idea that music is a good source for doctrinal theology – I propose that music can, nevertheless, teach its participants of God. However, as far as possible, I ask throughout this thesis the question of what we can say theologically about music, not the question of what music can say about theology.

This also means that my engagement with musicology is functional rather than dialogic. I am interested in musicological resources insofar as they illuminate, or contribute, towards a distinctly theological conversation: one concerned with the worship of the church and the place of music within it. I suggest that, since musicologists have studied music in greater depth than most theologians, it is unsurprising that there are useful resources in the discipline, even if they must be adapted in a theological context. I am not, however, concerned with the inverse: with the contribution resources drawn from theology might offer to musicologists – not because such insights do not exist, but simply because they lie outside the scope of this study. This functional approach means that I do not seek to define the relationship between theology and musicology, nor seek to reconcile the differences that I encounter. I assume that both disciplines are vast, varied, and porous, and that their

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<sup>21</sup> Jeremy Begbie, 'Introduction', in *Beholding the Glory: Incarnation through the Arts*, ed. by Jeremy Begbie (Baker Books, 2001), pp. xi-xv (p. xii); Jeremy S. Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 5; Heaney, *Suspended God*, pp. 3 and 119.

<sup>22</sup> Heaney, *Suspended God*, p. 68.

values, assumptions, and aims pull in different directions. None of this is to downplay the possibility of a more substantive dialogue: as I will suggest in the conclusion, the simple act of engaging with new musicological ideas goes some way to narrow the gaps between musicology and theology, and from here it is possible to identify potential areas of further dialogue – but this is a methodological by-product of the thesis, not its primary concern.

Although music in worship is a vast area, then, there are a number of avenues that will not be pursued in this thesis. Rather than performing musical analysis, or engaging in formal discussion of the interdisciplinary relationship between musicology and theology, I will instead focus on the complex practices and realities of music in worship, and then seek to give theological account of them. Chapters 2-4 will establish what I take music in worship to be, and how I suggest it is best studied; and chapters 5-7 will explore the theological implications of music in worship as it is practised, experienced, and understood.

## **Overview**

More specifically, chapter 2 is a survey of a range of approaches to the study of music, drawn from across the disciplines of musicology, theology, anthropology, and sociology. Here I will introduce some key new musicological claims around practice, experience, criticism, and interpretation, and set them against the backdrop of the musicological ideas which, for both theoretical and ethical reasons, they resist. I will also indicate how they have been developed by more contemporary musicologists, some of whom will be particularly significant to chapter 3. I will then examine theological approaches to the study of music, primarily through the work of Begbie, Brown, and Hopps, demonstrating that there is significant space in theology for new musicological claims. Finally, I will survey a range of approaches to music in worship, introducing some resources and ideas that will be of value to the discussion which follows. I suggest, here, that music in worship is often

described as a means of praise, but also formation, devotion, and sanctification. And, once again, I suggest in this section that such accounts would benefit from greater engagement with the musicological methods explored earlier in the chapter.

Chapter 3 is more theoretical, taking forward some of the musicological insights of the previous chapter to form an ontological framework for the study of music. It goes without saying that this is a huge area, and that the account given will be partial. However, the constructive work of this thesis relies upon a few claims about the nature of music, and these must be specified in advance of chapters 5-7. I will suggest here that music can be meaningfully understood as a mediation, as an assemblage, and as series of practices. I will also defend in this chapter the musicologically controversial idea that it makes sense to speak of “music” at all. As will become apparent in chapter 2, there are good reasons to resist the idea of a common ontology of music; however, I will suggest in chapter 3 that the benefits of doing so outweigh the risks.

If chapters 2 and 3 are more concerned with the ontological and ethical rationales for the project, chapter 4 engages with the practical. Here, I give account of fieldwork I conducted in three churches over the summer of 2022, comprising focus group discussions and an interview about experiences and understandings of music in worship. These accounts are in many ways the clearest articulation of the subject of this thesis, painting a vivid picture of what music in worship looks like in time and place. They also substantially echo new musicological ideas, confirming at the very least that these theories are consonant with everyday practice. In the constructive work which follows, I draw upon many of these accounts directly, and seek to address some of the theological questions which they raise. As I will elaborate in chapter 4, the discussions are not simply descriptive: they are full of normative claims about the nature and purpose of music in worship. And, while I may not agree with all these normative claims, I nonetheless take them seriously in the following

three chapters, and seek to write an account of music in worship that is recognisably related to the experiences and concerns of my participants.

I will then move to constructive work, focusing in chapters 5-7 on three new musicological claims: that music is practised, felt, and full of meaning. Chapter 5 engages with the idea that music is a series of practices, asking: what is music in worship? And what is it for? Here I take the key claims about music in worship made in the preceding chapters: that it is an assemblage, mediation, and series of practices, and that it is a means of praise, formation, devotion, and sanctification. My interest here is largely in the relationship between these claims, with how the ontology of music laid out in chapter 3 makes sense of, and provides valuable insight into, the theological claims made about music in worship in chapter 2. I propose three ways to reconcile these claims, advocating ultimately for a non-hierarchical approach as found in Ian Bogost's 'flat ontology'.<sup>23</sup> This allows me, drawing on Williams, to give an account of music in worship as fallible, finite, and susceptible to sin, but also, nonetheless, a gift.<sup>24</sup>

Chapter 6 examines the felt and affective realities of music in worship, and draws more specifically on questions raised in the fieldwork, asking: when is music music, and when is music worship? Can we distinguish between the two? And to what extent is it viable to draw upon affective experience to try? This chapter takes as its basis the observation that there are a vast number of different affective experiences associated with music, and – as confirmed by my fieldwork – a vast number of different affective experiences of music in worship: from joy to frustration, wonder to boredom, total absorption to apathy. In conversation with reflections on mysticism and glossolalia – particularly those concerned

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<sup>23</sup> Ian Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology, or What It's Like to Be a Thing* (University of Minnesota Press, 2012), p. 17.

<sup>24</sup> Williams, *Edge of Words*.

with discernment – I suggest that powerful absorptive experiences of music are not of first importance to the act of worship, and that all sorts of ordinary experiences of music may be significant to the worship of the church.

Chapter 7, then, explores the relationship between music in worship, meaning, and knowledge. Observing that music is imbued with memories, claims, and acts of sense-making, I ask, can music in worship also tell us something? And can it tell us something about God? Here I explore two approaches to these questions – one didactic and one analogical – as well as introducing three theories of musical meaning. I suggest that each of the didactic and analogical approaches are valuable, but that they are also partial, limited, and – particularly the analogical approach represented by Begbie – quite unusual. Instead, I advocate for a non-conceptual approach to the knowledge of God and point to some ways in which music in worship may, for some people, some of the time, offer an invitation into this knowledge: music forming imaginations; music shaping desires; and music inviting hospitality – as well as stating that music is, first and foremost, a creaturely good. I express concerns about the idea that music can advance positive doctrinal claims, but nonetheless tentatively suggest, with Mark Wynn and Williams, that music in worship may be involved in truth-telling.<sup>25</sup>

The driving questions of chapters 5-7 are very broad in scope – a breadth that stems from the new musicological ideas with which I engage. The claims that music is practised, felt, and full of meaning are not small nor specialised. Yet even though none of my conclusions are comprehensive – there are any manner of other claims to be made about music in worship – these partial answers should demonstrate the richness of the musicological resources from which I draw, and the many theological opportunities that they present. I

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<sup>25</sup> Mark Wynn, *Emotional Experience and Religious Understanding: Integrating Perception, Conception and Feeling* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 117; Williams, *Edge of Words*, p. 184.

will briefly indicate some of these opportunities in the conclusion to this thesis. Ultimately, though, my concerns here are not methodological. While I am interested in the theological possibilities to be found in new musicological theory, my fundamental interest is in the observation that, as part of their worship, every Sunday, and often midweek too, with guitars, organs, and CD players, in churches, schools, and festival tents, Christians make music. The task of this thesis is to articulate the theological significance of this act.

## 2 – Musical Discourse

Speaking of music may be necessary, but what makes it possible? *Is it possible?*  
What can, what should, we say?<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

It is not easy to talk about music. Between its reputation as ‘the most transient and evanescent of the arts’ and its elusive relationship with language, music does not conform straightforwardly to the spoken or written word.<sup>2</sup> Music may be talked about all the time – ‘in bars and on buses, on football terraces and in school yards, as people wait at the hairdresser or take lunch in the office cafeteria’ – but such discussion often seems partial and insufficient.<sup>3</sup> As Simon Frith notes: ‘Every music fan knows that moment of frustration when one can only sit the person down and say (or, rather, shout) despairingly, “But just *listen* to her!”’<sup>4</sup> However, it is theologically necessary to talk about music, not least because it forms part of Christian worship. In this chapter, I will detail some of the ways in which music is spoken about, drawing from resources across musicology, theology, anthropology, and sociology.

As I stated in the introduction, I am particularly interested in a series of claims known variously as ‘the cultural turn’, ‘critical musicology’, or ‘the new musicology’, and their import for theology.<sup>5</sup> While Susan McClary, Lawrence Kramer, and Small – among others – are not a school, they share key concerns around autonomy, practice, criticism,

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<sup>1</sup> Lawrence Kramer, *The Thought of Music* (University of California Press, 2016), p. 23, emphasis in original.

<sup>2</sup> Jeremy Begbie, ‘Play it Again: Music, Theology, and Divine Communication’, in *Creative Chords: Studies in Music, Theology, and Christian Formation*, ed. by Jeff Astley, Timothy Hone and Mark Savage (Gracewing, 2000), pp. 45-75 (p. 64). I will briefly consider the relationship between music and language on pp. 110-11.

<sup>3</sup> Simon Frith, *Performing Rites: Evaluating Popular Music* (Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Frith, *Performing Rites*, p. 4, emphasis my own.

<sup>5</sup> Kramer, *Thought of Music*, p. x.

experience, and interpretation: concerns which place theoretical and ethical demands on anyone who studies music. Their work can reasonably be described as having initiated a paradigm shift in the discipline of musicology, and will be explored in some detail in this chapter.<sup>6</sup> In order to best understand their ideas, however, it is first necessary to contextualise them, giving account of the approaches to the study of music which they resist and from which they draw. I will also examine here how their claims have been adopted and developed by contemporary musicologists, some of whom will be particularly significant for this thesis. While my account will not be comprehensive, it will nevertheless describe, contextualise, and advocate for a particular approach to the study of music, from which – I contend – theology can benefit.

The following section will then describe two of the most prominent theological approaches to music, represented by Begbie, and Brown with Hopps. Begbie advocates for an analogous relationship between musical theory and doctrinal theology; Brown and Hopps for an experience-based natural theology of music. Both projects are markedly different from my own: neither is particularly concerned with music in worship, and, as I noted in the previous chapter, both are more interested in a theology *through* music than a theology *of* music. Nevertheless, as key voices in the area of music and theology, it is worth exploring their ideas carefully. I will also explore in this chapter the work of Wolterstorff, Boyce-Tillman, and Heaney, each of whom has engaged positively and generatively with a practical account of music. As in the previous section, the account given here is necessarily selective. There are many other approaches to music and theology – such as *theomusicology*: ‘a musicological method for theologizing about the sacred, the secular, and the profane’.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Rose Rosengard Subotnik, *Deconstructive Variations: Music and Reason in Western Society* (University of Minnesota Press, 1995), p. xxiii.

<sup>7</sup> Spencer, *Theomusicology*, p. 3.

However, in the interest of space, my primary focus here is on *theological* approaches to music.

Finally, I will describe two approaches to the study of music in worship. The first is primarily theological, largely comprising accounts of music as one part of a broader account of liturgy and worship. The second is ethnographic, describing the practices of worshipping communities in particular times and places. Both, I suggest, have value for this thesis, although neither is sufficient to answer the question: *what can we say, theologically, about music in worship, if music is ‘an activity, something that people do?’*<sup>8</sup>

### **Musicological Approaches to Music**

While it is customary to begin theological accounts of music with Augustine, this account will begin instead in the nineteenth century, when the practices of musicology became formalised within western universities.<sup>9</sup> The term ‘musicology’ has an etymologic neutrality – the study of music – but the discipline it describes is heavily located. As Nicholas Cook and Nicola Dibben observe, ‘to speak of “musicology” before around 1800 is to court anachronism.’<sup>10</sup> Studies of music before this point largely take the form of ‘practical manuals’ and ‘speculative writings’, in contrast with the systematising, canon-forming, analysis-centred approaches associated with musicology, emphasising analysis of scores and accounts of musical works.<sup>11</sup> And musicology has not been concerned with all types of music, or with all types of music equally. It has been dominated by a few ideas

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<sup>8</sup> Small, *Musicking*, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Louis Harap, ‘On the Nature of Musicology’, *The Musical Quarterly* 23.1 (1937), pp. 18-25 (p. 18).

<sup>10</sup> Nicholas Cook and Nicola Dibben, ‘Emotion in Culture and History: Perspectives From Musicology’, in *Music and Emotion: Theory and Research*, ed. by Patrik N. Juslin and John A. Sloboda (Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 44-72 (p. 45).

<sup>11</sup> Cook and Dibben, ‘Emotion in Culture and History’, p. 45.

emerging from a small geographical area over a short period of time. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it has suffered from a profound ethnocentrism.

Here, I will describe the thought of four indicative thinkers – two primarily writing in the nineteenth century: E. T. A. Hoffmann and Eduard Hanslick; and two primarily in the twentieth: Heinrich Schenker and Arnold Schoenberg. Together, they map out two key musicological debates around meaning and nature – both of which will, in revised form, appear in chapter 7. The differences between Hoffmann and Hanslick, Schenker and Schoenberg, however, are less significant than the similarities. Each shares a common account of musical value, prioritising western art music, and a common account of this music’s perceived *autonomy*. These ideas will become significant in relation to new musicology – which resists them – and, later, to Begbie, Brown, and Hopps.

#### - E. T. A. Hoffmann and Eduard Hanslick

In 1810, Hoffmann wrote the following review of Ludwig van Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony:

When we speak of music as an independent art, we should properly refer only to instrumental music which, scorning the assistance and association of another art, namely poetry, expresses that peculiar property which can be found in music only. It is the most romantic of all the arts, one might say the only really romantic art, for its sole object is the expression of the infinite. The lyre of Orpheus opens the doors of Orkus. Music discloses to man an unknown kingdom, a world having nothing in common with the external sensual world which surrounds him and in which he leaves behind him all definite feelings in order to abandon himself to an inexpressible longing.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Arthur Ware Locke and E. T. A. Hoffmann, ‘Beethoven’s Instrumental Music: Translated from E. T. A. Hoffmann’s “*Kreisleriana*” with an Introductory Note’, *The Musical Quarterly* 3.1 (1917), pp. 123-33 (p. 127).

This review provides a window into nineteenth-century western understandings of music. While Hoffmann does not use the language of autonomy, this is the concept that undergirds his description. Music, here, is the supreme Romantic art. It rejects, or even scorns, other forms of art: those which leave too definite a depiction (the visual arts) or too rhetorical an idea (text). It transcends the concrete, sensual, material world, having no ‘reference to any occasion, any ritual, or any particular set of religious, political, or social beliefs.’<sup>13</sup> It exists only for ‘disinterested’, pure aesthetic appreciation.<sup>14</sup>

Hanslick, by contrast, recognises that music is associated with ‘feelings’ and ‘mental images’ – evocations of the material world.<sup>15</sup> Music is routinely thought about, felt, and related to personal experience. However, ‘our feelings and our mental images are frequently misled’; the context in which we listen affects our experience, leading us to ‘ascribe to the music itself’ all manner of subjective meanings.<sup>16</sup> He suggests, ‘instead of clinging to secondary and vague feeling-effects of musical phenomena, we would do better to penetrate to the inner nature of the works and try, from the principles of their own structure, to account for the unique efficacy of the impressions we receive from them.’<sup>17</sup> Hanslick is confident that we can learn of ‘the objective nature of music’, leaving behind ‘the dubious authority of feeling’.<sup>18</sup> The study of music is a rational, rigorous discipline; it can be analysed and understood, categorised and systematised.

What these two thinkers articulate are two very different ways of approaching, speaking about, and studying music. Hoffmann articulates the first of the ‘two shibboleths’ that,

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<sup>13</sup> Small, *Musicking*, p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> Small, *Musicking*, p. 135.

<sup>15</sup> Eduard Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful: A Contribution towards the Revision of the Aesthetics of Music* (Hackett Pub. Co, 1986), trans. by Geoffrey Payzant, p. 6.

<sup>16</sup> Hanslick, *Musically Beautiful*, p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> Hanslick, *Musically Beautiful*, p. 6.

<sup>18</sup> Hanslick, *Musically Beautiful*, p. 1.

according to Kramer, beset the act of '[s]peaking of music': '[t]he shibboleth of ineffability'.<sup>19</sup> Music cannot be rationalised, cannot be understood, and therefore cannot be spoken about. Hanslick addresses the second: 'the myth of a private language, or at any rate a coterie language that excludes most people from speaking about music'.<sup>20</sup> Speaking about music is a rigorously academic and technical pursuit. Of course, people speak about music all the time – in churches, on dates, or at the dentist. But, for Hanslick, they are not speaking of the "music itself" unless they are speaking formally or analytically.

And yet, for all their differences, both share a common understanding of the ontology of music. Like Hoffmann, Hanslick claims: 'only instrumental music is music purely and absolutely.'<sup>21</sup> Although in a different way, he is writing about 'absolute music' (as it was later termed by Richard Wagner) too – music, so perceived, in its most 'pure and autonomous' form.<sup>22</sup> Both Hoffmann and Hanslick articulate music as 'a quasi-syntactical structure of sound understandable solely in musical terms and having no semantic or representational content, no meaning, making reference to nothing beyond itself.'<sup>23</sup> Either it transports its listeners beyond material concerns, or it is correctly viewed apart from the material concerns with which it is associated. Music may be accompanied by text, drama, image, and social context, and it may produce images and feelings, but, in and of itself, it means nothing. As music philosopher Peter Kivy asserts: 'It is not about the world, or about anything else, except, perhaps, itself.'<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Kramer, *Thought of Music*, pp. 24 and 26.

<sup>20</sup> Kramer, *Thought of Music*, p. 25.

<sup>21</sup> Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful*, p. 15.

<sup>22</sup> Daniel K. L. Chua, *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. i.

<sup>23</sup> Peter Kivy, *Music Alone: Philosophical Reflections on the Purely Musical Experience* (Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 202.

<sup>24</sup> Kivy, *Music Alone*, p. 67.

This theory is inextricably linked to what Goehr calls the ‘work-concept’ – according to which there are a series of works of music which, as commonly characterised, ‘do not exist as concrete, physical objects’; ‘do not exist as private ideas existing in the mind of a composer, a performer, or a listener’; and ‘neither do they exist in the eternally existing world of ideal, uncreated forms’.<sup>25</sup> And yet, in spite of all the ways in which these works do not exist, ‘if all the copies of the score of a Beethoven Symphony are destroyed, the symphony itself does not thereby cease to exist’.<sup>26</sup> This idea became regulative in Europe around the turn of the nineteenth century, and took on an almost hegemonic status in much musicology before the 1980s, implicit in its historical and score-based methodologies.<sup>27</sup> It is also operative today: in many academic and non-academic contexts alike, when someone speaks of ‘Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony’ they are talking about a single object, distinguishable from, and refusing to be encapsulated by, any and all performances or scores of itself.

I will return to this idea in chapter 3. But, for now, I want to observe four problems with this ontology of music: three theoretical and one practical. The first problem is that works ‘enjoy a very obscure mode of existence’; in fact, as Goehr’s close analysis of a range of prevailing explanations suggests, it is very difficult to demonstrate the way in which they exist at all, unless we are to make ‘explicit use [...] of history.’<sup>28</sup> The second problem is that, while the language of transcendence is familiar to Christian theology, this does not necessarily make it straightforward to integrate either Hoffmann or Hanslick’s claims

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<sup>25</sup> Goehr, *Imaginary Museum*, pp. 2-3. There are Platonic accounts of musical works, but these are accepted by many fewer musicologists than the work-concept: Kivy, for example, describes his advocacy for composition as a form of discovery as a ‘seemingly impossible task’ against prevailing musicological attitudes. See Peter Kivy, *The Fine Art of Repetition: Essays in the Philosophy of Music* (Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>26</sup> Goehr, *Imaginary Museum*, pp. 4 and 3.

<sup>27</sup> Goehr, *Imaginary Museum*, pp. 4 and 89.

<sup>28</sup> Goehr, *Imaginary Museum*, pp. 2 and 89.

within a theological account of the concept. Clearly, there is a profound difference between positing the absolute otherness of God and suggesting that *music* can evade finitude, contingency, and materiality.

The third problem is that these ideas are historically and culturally specific. Many of the ideas that develop from and constitute the idea of “the music itself” – those of the work of art, the genius composer, *Werktreue* (‘being true or faithful to a work’) – ‘began to regulate [western musical] practice at a particular point in time.’<sup>29</sup> They are deeply historically contingent: ideas informing practice; practice informing ideas. However:

Absolute music should not have a history. Although the idea came into being at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was not a birth but an *emancipation* of music simply to be itself; it was the discovery of an *a*-historical condition, a truth that has always been there like a mathematic equation. And that truth is a tautology: music is music. It is essence itself. [...]

You might believe in absolute music. But the fact that I am giving this music a history may indicate that it is not as unconditional as we would like to think it is and its meaning not as meaningless – or ineffable – as we might assume.<sup>30</sup>

As Daniel Chua and Goehr demonstrate, the idea of absolute music came to be regulative because *this is how certain types of music were talked about*, by Hoffmann and Hanslick among others, at a specific time, and in a specific place. In this way, ‘absolute music is an extra-musical idea.’<sup>31</sup> And while this observation does not mean that the conceptual landscape of absolute music must be disregarded *per se* – that the ideas of musical autonomy or the work-concept emerged in a time and place does not in and of itself negate their enduring significance or truthfulness – it should prompt critical reflection. Given the

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<sup>29</sup> Goehr, *Imaginary Museum*, pp. 1 and 89.

<sup>30</sup> Daniel K. L. Chua, ‘Absolute Music/Absolute Worship’, in *God’s Song and Music’s Meanings*, ed. by James Hawkey, Ben Quash and Vernon White, pp. 163-81 (p. 163), emphasis in original.

<sup>31</sup> Chua, *Absolute Music*, p. 6.

ontological difficulty of the work-concept, the complexities of integrating musical autonomy theologically, and the fact that music has been approached in other ways in other times and places, we need not *assume* the legitimacy of these ideas. With Chua, and others, we can (and indeed should) ask: ‘why should absolute music set the conditions for its critique? Must musicology always perpetuate its ideological claims?’<sup>32</sup>

- **Heinrich Schenker and Arnold Schoenberg**

The practical problem is that these claims (while suggesting that music is divorced from its social conditions) have been connected to concerning social realities. If we look more closely at the interplay between practice and idea that underpins absolute music, it becomes clear that this theory is not just ontologically suspect, but ethically fraught. This is because the concept of absolute music is both ontological and descriptive; it involves a claim about the nature of *music itself* – music in its purest form – but it also identifies this pure form in a particular expression of music: western, instrumental, concert hall music. And it therefore logically follows that the music of the west, and the music of the elite, is purer, freer, and superior to non-western and popular musics. This view is articulated clearly through two indicative twentieth-century thinkers: Schenker and Schoenberg. Despite their differences, both show how musical autonomy is wrapped up in very concrete, and troubling, ideas about the world that certain types of music supposedly transcend.

Schenker is associated with a system of musical analysis which seeks to separate the ‘foreground’, ‘middleground’ and ‘background’ of a musical work, and to demonstrate

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<sup>32</sup> Chua, *Absolute Music*, p. 6.

their relatedness, or ‘organic coherence’.<sup>33</sup> This analytical system had a particularly significant impact on American musicology in the 1940s-70s, and is regarded by some contemporary musicologists as a useful analytical tool for mapping musical structures.<sup>34</sup> The method takes as its basis the observation that virtually all western tonal music from Bach to around the late nineteenth century shares a fundamental harmonic structure. In this structure, the music starts in one harmonic area, based around a chord called the ‘tonic’, comprising the first and third notes of a western scale (with a harmonically optional note five); moves to another harmonic area, based around a chord called the ‘dominant’, comprising the fifth and seventh notes of a western scale (with a harmonically optional note two); and returns to the tonic.<sup>35</sup> Put simply, western tonal music is based on one broad harmonic pattern. This allows Schenker to suggest, ‘Whatever the manner in which the foreground unfolds, the fundamental structure of the background and the transformational levels of the middleground guarantees its organic life.’<sup>36</sup> In this way, the ‘fundamental structure’ of western art music represents ‘the resolution of all diversity into ultimate wholeness.’<sup>37</sup>

While modern analysts may use Schenkerian methods to examine micro and macro musical structures and the relationship between the two, Schenker’s own writings around the method contain deeply troubling ideas. Against the backdrop of musical autonomy – Schenker writes of the ‘absoluteness of art’ and the nature of ‘genius’ as that which

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<sup>33</sup> Felix Salzer, ‘Introduction to Heinrich Schenker’, in Heinrich Schenker, *Five Graphic Music Analyses*, trans. by Felix Salzer (Dover Publications, 1969), pp. 13-21 (p. 14), emphasis removed from original.

<sup>34</sup> Leon Botstein, ‘Schenker the Regressive: Observations on the Historical Schenker’, *The Musical Quarterly* 86.2 (2002), pp. 239-47 (p. 240), doi:10.1093/musqtl/gdg050. It is worth noting that, while ‘musicology’ has in British universities often been taken according to the broad definition of ‘the study of and knowledge about all aspects of music’, in American universities its usage has been much narrower and more focused on analysis. See Cook and Dibben, ‘Emotion in Culture and History’, p. 45.

<sup>35</sup> Further explanation of these terms is given in the glossary, pp. 7-13.

<sup>36</sup> Heinrich Schenker, *Free Composition: Volume III of New Musical Theories and Fantasies*, trans. by Ernst Oster (Pendragon Press, 2001), p. 5.

<sup>37</sup> Schenker, *Free Composition*, p. 5.

transcends time – he draws a close relationship between the structure of western art music, the created order, and the nature of God, suggesting:

The whole of the foreground, which men call chaos, God derives from His cosmos, the background. The eternal harmony of His eternal Being is grounded in this relationship.<sup>38</sup>

This plays into a common belief that western tonal harmony is the product of natural overtones, found in creation, and given by God; that western composition involves ‘spinning out tonal lines [...] to the realm of the divine’.<sup>39</sup> And while the naturalness and givenness of western harmony may seem innocuous, it is a misconception with a fraught history. As Raja Marjeh and others, note, ‘The traditional belief, supported by centuries of Western music theory and psychological studies, is that consonance derives from simple (harmonic) frequency ratios between tones’ – for example, that there is a 2:3 ratio between the frequencies of notes 1 and 5 in the western major scale.<sup>40</sup> However, a series of recent behavioural experiments across a range of cultural backgrounds have noted preferences ‘for slight inharmonicity’ over whole-number ratios.<sup>41</sup> This theory of consonance is also renowned for not being able to give account of minor chords.<sup>42</sup> And, critically, these ratios are not commonly used anyway – ‘the common system of tonality used now in pop, jazz, classical, and other styles’ is known as ‘equal temperament’, and is a system of musical tuning that relies not on the strict mathematical ratios of resonance, but rather on even

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<sup>38</sup> Schenker, *Free Composition*, p. xxiii.

<sup>39</sup> Heinrich Schenker, *Der Tonwille: Pamphlets in Witness of the Immutable Laws of Music: Offered to a New Generation of Youth*, trans. by William Drabkin (Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 45.

<sup>40</sup> Raja Marjeh and others, ‘Timbral Effects on Consonance Disentangle Psychoacoustic Mechanisms and Suggest Perceptual Origins for Musical Scales’, *Nature Communications* 15.1 (2024), pp. 1-22 (p. 1), doi:10.1038/s41467-024-45813-z.

<sup>41</sup> Marjeh and others, ‘Timbral Effects’, p. 11.

<sup>42</sup> Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *Music and Discourse: Toward a Semiology of Music* (Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 202.

divisions of the octave.<sup>43</sup> This gap between natural resonances and the modern western tuning system is known as the ‘Pythagorean comma’, and it has been glossed over in any suggestion that western tonality is derived from nature in a straightforward manner.<sup>44</sup>

Furthermore, these resonances tell us little about the *movement* between chords that we find in western tonal music – about the harmony as a whole. Notes 1 and 5 exist on a ratio of 2:3, but this does not necessitate a movement between notes 1 to 5 to 1 – as we find in the movement between tonic to dominant to tonic. Even if there is a derived naturalness of resonances and chords, ‘There is nothing “natural” about tonal *harmony*’.<sup>45</sup> Small elaborates,

there is nothing in either the physical nature of sound or the physiology of hearing to suggest that the succession can cause arousal in a listener. Indeed, it seems to be unique to Western musical culture of this four-hundred-year period.<sup>46</sup>

Richard Goldman concurs:

the force of the dominant, that is, our sense that it requires resolution, or movement toward a tonic, is arbitrary. It rests on no law of acoustics, but is an acquired meaning.<sup>47</sup>

That western tonal music follows one harmonic pattern tells us much about western tonal music, but little about music more generally, and little directly about creation.

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<sup>43</sup> Robert J. McGarry, ‘Equal Temperament, Overtones, and the Ear’, *Music Educators Journal* 70.7 (1984), pp. 54-56 (pp. 55 and 54), doi:10.2307/3400850.

<sup>44</sup> Brown and Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, p. 86.

<sup>45</sup> Small, *Musicking*, p. 124, emphasis my own.

<sup>46</sup> Small, *Musicking*, p. 124.

<sup>47</sup> R. F. Goldman, *Harmony in Western Music* (Norton, 1965), p. 30.

More troublingly, this claim to naturalness is used by Schenker to denigrate other tuning systems – systems which do not resemble a movement from tonic to dominant to tonic. He describes the *Urlinie* – or fundamental line on which western harmony is built – as essential to ‘the process of music becoming Art’; a necessary component to music that is, for him, more advanced, pure, and free.<sup>48</sup> At his most explicit, while writing on the laws of music, Schenker proclaims:

It is time that Germans freed themselves from the illusion that all men and all nations are equal. This is no truer than to say that all ants, mushrooms, rocks, etc. are equal[.] [...] Let Germans be alive to the superior quality of their human propagating soil[.] [...] Germany as the nation of Luther, Leibniz, Goethe, Schiller, Kant, of Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms[.]<sup>49</sup>

The theory of musical autonomy is closely connected, here, to troubling social conditions.

Another theorist (and composer) of the time – Schoenberg – presents what at first appears to be a contrasting view of musical theory and harmony. His *Theory of Harmony* asserts that ‘tonality is no natural law of music, eternally valid’, and suggests that, while it is legitimate to look for the rules governing pieces and styles of music, it is a mistake to claim that we have found ‘eternal laws.’<sup>50</sup> This does not make him a voice of dissent from Schenker’s vision of musical superiority, however – he draws sharp distinctions between folk and art music, and writes on the extension of German genius through Bach.<sup>51</sup> He is also clear that some music is more advanced than others, reflecting on his own experience of composing:

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<sup>48</sup> Schenker, *Der Tonwille*, p. 21.

<sup>49</sup> Schenker, *Der Tonwille*, p. 17.

<sup>50</sup> Arnold Schoenberg, *Theory of Harmony*, trans. by Roy E. Carter (Faber and Faber Limited, 1978), pp. 9 and 8, emphasis in original.

<sup>51</sup> Arnold Schoenberg, *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, ed. by Leonard Stein, trans. by Leo Black (Faber, 1975), pp. 168-9 and 170. As a critique of this idea, see Antoine Hennion, ‘Music and Mediation: Toward a New Sociology of Music’, in *The Cultural Study of Music: A Critical Introduction*, ed. by Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert and Richard Middleton, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Routledge, 2012), pp. 249-60 (p. 254).

‘I had to express what was necessary to be expressed, and I knew I had the duty of developing my ideas for the sake of progress in music, whether I liked it or not’.<sup>52</sup> Composing, here, is a vocation (some are called to serve music), and composing, here, is a facilitation of music’s inevitable progress, or advancement. The extension of this line of thinking is that some music is more developed than others. It is little wonder that Rob Wegman asserts: ‘there are many things for which we cannot forgive traditional musicology’, citing ‘Western hegemony, positivism, objectivism, modernism, metaphysics, essentialism, reification’ to name a few.<sup>53</sup>

While it could be argued that the work of Schenker and Schoenberg must be viewed in historical context, it is worth noting that their ideas are not absent in recent scholarship and musical discourse. Take Kivy, writing contemporaneously with many new musicologists. He recognises that there are different types of music, which he characterises thus:

in every culture, including our own, music has played various roles in our ritual and social activities: in our work, our dance, our religious rites, our public spectacles. And in all the instances in which music played a role in ritualistic activities, our relation to the music was not passive. In our work we moved to the music; in religious rites we sang; in social contexts we danced; in public events we marched.

This is in sharp contrast to music in the concert hall[.] [...] Concert going is a spectator sport. And the concert hall is the musical equivalent of the museum[.] [...] We go to the museum to gaze, and to the concert hall to gaze with our ears.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Schoenberg, *Style and Idea*, p. 53.

<sup>53</sup> Rob C. Wegman, ‘Historical Musicology: Is it Still Possible?’, in *Cultural Study of Music*, ed. by Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert and Richard Middleton, pp. 40-48 (p. 45).

<sup>54</sup> Kivy, *Fine Art*, p. 25.

So, Kivy suggests, there is (or *was*) ritual music and now there is spectator music, or, as he puts it, ‘music alone’; ‘meaningless [...] strings of sounds.’<sup>55</sup> He is clear that they are related to one another:

The music we listen to in the concert hall is, however, related to the music of our rituals. It grew out of those musics, and is, as it were, an aesthetic distillation. It contains, in stylized form, evocations of them: the dance, the march, the hymn, the dirge, and so on. As such, it has very deep reverberations in us.<sup>56</sup>

But he is also clear that one replaces the other: the discussion of ritual and social music is in the past tense, and the notion of ‘aesthetic distillation’ suggests that concert hall music is its purer and more refined successor. For Kivy:

Perhaps pure instrumental music is caviar to the general. I guess I really think it is.<sup>57</sup>

Such a view raises significant questions about musical traditions which are not designed with the concert hall in mind – such as hymns sung in residential care homes, or songs sung at Christian festivals. In spite of the general implausibility that music would reach its apotheosis in a small collection of countries over the course of a few hundred years, at the expense of all other expressions of music that have happened elsewhere, or before, or since, the line Kivy is propagating is clear: ‘absolute music’ is the pinnacle of all musical expression, distinguished from, and aesthetically superior to, other, ritualistic, social expressions of music.

These ideas also emerge more subtly in non-academic musical discourse, sometimes even making claims to justice and accessibility. James MacMillan reflects:

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<sup>55</sup> Kivy, *Music Alone*, p. 12.

<sup>56</sup> Kivy, *Fine Art*, pp. 25-26.

<sup>57</sup> Kivy, *Music Alone*, p. 12.

As a classical composer who is fundamentally interested in the serious western tradition, and as someone from a background which normally had no access to the tradition – from the industrial or post-industrial working class – I see that, regardless of class, people should have access to the best music.<sup>58</sup>

In an echo of Theodor Adorno, discussed in the following section, MacMillan defines ‘the best music’ specifically against ‘pop culture’: ‘that easy, facile, candy-floss culture flung at people the world over.’<sup>59</sup> Or, more recently still, on the question of elitism in the world of western classical music, Leo Samama asserts:

It is precisely the task of art as a cultural product to reach as many people as possible and take them along on this upward journey. There can be no concession or compromise.<sup>60</sup>

It is one thing to suggest that people should have access to a wide range of music, for enjoyment, appreciation, or reflection. It is another to suggest that some music is inherently superior. And it is worth being critical about why MacMillan and Samama feel able to articulate this as a common understanding of western classical music, and about how such a common understanding has been perpetuated.

It is worth acknowledging that there is not an inevitable link between the idea of musical autonomy and the troubling ideas of Schenker, Schoenberg, and Kivy. Even Subotnik – a significant figure in new musicology – claims it is ‘wrong simply to discard old paradigms of musical autonomy and artistic value’ because of their fraught history.<sup>61</sup> She suggests that there is space to consider music as both a ‘freestanding structure’ and as ‘sound separable

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<sup>58</sup> Jeff Astley, Timothy Hone and Mark Savage, ‘Creation and the Composer: An Interview with James MacMillan’, in *Creative Chords*, pp. 3-19 (p. 12).

<sup>59</sup> Astley, Hone and Savage, ‘Interview with MacMillan’, p. 12.

<sup>60</sup> Leo Samama, *The Meaning of Music* (Amsterdam University Press, 2016), p. 13.

<sup>61</sup> Subotnik, *Deconstructive Variations*, p. xlii.

from environment.’<sup>62</sup> David Clarke, too, suggests that ‘the social and cultural mediations acquired by autonomous classical music in the grand sweep of history may be open to redefinition and revaluation’.<sup>63</sup> He claims that musical autonomy, or ‘the autonomous moment available to music’ might be ‘a modern concept that may still have important critical currency within a postmodern cultural landscape.’<sup>64</sup> Similarly, J. P. E. Harper-Scott suggests a piece of music may be ‘simultaneously imbued with the history of its own time and also minimally separated from it as a partially autonomous object.’<sup>65</sup> He claims that the music might either confirm existing structures or critique them, and so we must look to ‘[w]hat actually transpires in the music itself’ before we reach a judgement.<sup>66</sup> The idea of autonomy could, in other words be separated from the problems identified above and put to positive use.

However, given the deep entanglement between autonomy and western exceptionalism, it is necessarily to be rigorously critical about the idea that music can be pure, unconditioned, or in some way transcendent of its social conditions. This idea may be adapted to some other repertoires, with a great deal of careful, thoughtful labour, but it is not easily transferable to all: Electronic Dance Music, say, or national anthems, or indeed much of the music used in worship. And while, with a great deal of careful, thoughtful labour, it might be possible to separate out practice and idea, or redeem aspects of autonomy, or to apply these theories to new repertoires, I am unsure why we would want to. As will become apparent in the discussion of new musicology, and in chapter 3, there are many good reasons to abandon the idea of autonomy completely, in favour of an alternative that stands

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<sup>62</sup> Subotnik, *Deconstructive Variations*, p. xxx.

<sup>63</sup> David Clarke, ‘Music Autonomy Revisited’, in *Cultural Study of Music*, ed. by Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert and Richard Middleton, pp. 172-83 (p. 173).

<sup>64</sup> Clarke, ‘Autonomy Revisited’, pp. 182 and 174.

<sup>65</sup> J. P. E. Harper-Scott, ‘Why I Left Academia’ <<https://jpehs.co.uk/why-i-left-academia/>> [accessed 10 February 2022].

<sup>66</sup> Harper-Scott, ‘Why I Left Academia’.

up to much greater ontological and ethical scrutiny. As Goehr suggests, it is easy to think that ‘the concept only provides us with a way of thinking about music’, one which might in some settings seem convenient or useful or redeemable.<sup>67</sup> However, ‘thinking is never as pure or innocent as some would like it to be’.<sup>68</sup>

#### - **Alternative Approaches to the Study of Music**

If these are some of the musicological claims that new musicology defines itself against, there are other approaches to the study of music from which it has drawn: those associated with ethnomusicology, cultural studies, and cultural analysis. While some of these approaches come with troubled histories of their own, they present a different set of resources for the study of music – resources in which context, culture, and performance take precedence over formalism, transcendence, and autonomy.

Since the turn of the twentieth century, ethnomusicology has represented an alternative to the methods of Hoffmann, Hanslick, Schenker, and Schoenberg – if not always an alternative to their worldview. Often understood as ‘the study of music “in context”’, ethnomusicology has expressed ‘a fascination with, and a desire to absorb and understand, the world’s cultural diversity’, and its methods have emphasised context, sociality, and concrete experience.<sup>69</sup> It has its own fraught history: as Alexander Ringer suggests, much of the impetus for early ethnomusicology came from those hoping to demonstrate ‘the uniqueness, if not outright superiority, of the European written tradition.’<sup>70</sup> In fact, to

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<sup>67</sup> Goehr, *Imaginary Museum*, p. 9.

<sup>68</sup> Goehr, *Imaginary Museum*, p. 9.

<sup>69</sup> Christopher A. Waterman, ‘The Uneven Development of Africanist Ethnomusicology: Three Issues and a Critique’, in *Comparative Musicology and Anthropology of Music: Essays on the History of Ethnomusicology*, ed. by Bruno Nettl and Philip V. Bohlman (University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 169-86 (p. 179).

<sup>70</sup> Alexander A. Ringer, ‘One World or None? Untimely Reflections on a Timely Musicological Question’, in *Comparative Musicology and Anthropology*, pp. 187-98 (p. 198).

describe this as ethnomusicology at all is anachronistic – many early studies of music in practice were described as ‘Comparative musicology’, and sought to understand how different musics related to one another.<sup>71</sup> These studies are associated with exoticism, narratives of progress, and a bifurcation of art music and functional music, with all the concomitant ideologies of such a distinction.<sup>72</sup> Closely linked to this interest in the music of other cultures is an interest in folk music from one’s own, such as Béla Bartók’s and Zoltán Kodály’s publication of Hungarian folksong settings.<sup>73</sup> Here the concerns are in some ways different from comparative musicology – the objective is to promote one’s own music, not to study the music of another. Yet the reality is that such an exercise still betrays ‘a typical nationalist agenda’, one which exoticises music not designed for the concert hall.<sup>74</sup> Unsurprisingly, ethnomusicology claims to have ‘superseded’ comparative musicology, emphasising instead ‘anthropological methodologies and mistrust of grand comparative schemes.’<sup>75</sup> The contemporary discipline represents an alternative to Hoffman and Hanslick, Schoenberg and Schenker, and an alternative to comparative musicology, in its focus on music in practice, and in its reluctance to make comparisons. As I will discuss in the following chapter, there are limitations to such reluctance. Nonetheless, there are valuable resources here for studying music concretely and contextually – resources that can be adapted for the study of all types of music.

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<sup>71</sup> Martin Clayton, ‘Comparing Music, Comparing Musicology’, in *Cultural Study of Music*, ed. by Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert and Richard Middleton, pp. 86-95 (p. 94).

<sup>72</sup> Philip V. Bohlman, ‘Representation and Cultural Critique in the History of Ethnomusicology’, in *Comparative Musicology and Anthropology*, ed. by Bruno Nettl and Philip V. Bohlman, pp. 131-51 (p. 132); Carol Babiracki, ‘Tribal Music in the Study of Great and Little Traditions of Indian Music’, in *Comparative Musicology and Anthropology*, pp. 69-90 (p. 78).

<sup>73</sup> Vera Lampert proposes a number of motivations at play in this endeavour: ‘They aim to express nationalist feelings, to provide exotic entertainment, to fulfill commissions, to serve pedagogical objectives, or as personal mementos and means to reach out to the less than savvy public.’ Vera Lampert, ‘Nationalism, Exoticism, or Concessions to the Audience? Motivations behind Bartók’s Folksong Settings’, *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 47.3/4 (2006), pp. 337-43 (p. 343), doi:10.1556.SMus.47.2006.3-49.

<sup>74</sup> Lampert, ‘Nationalism, Exoticism, Concessions’, p. 340.

<sup>75</sup> Bohlman, ‘Representation and Critique’, p. 94.

Another alternative approach comes from the influential work of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, established in the 1960s. Concerned with ‘ideology, language, feminism, post-Marxism, postmodernism and race and ethnicity’, cultural studies interrogates the relationship between culture, ideology, and material reality.<sup>76</sup> One pertinent example of the work of the CCCS is the edited collected *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Postwar Britain*, first published in 1975, which examines the interaction of music, sound, race, aesthetics, and politics. Dick Hebdige’s chapter, for example – a study of reggae in Jamaica and London – pays close attention to the sonic aspects of reggae, the ‘overlay of salvaged African rhythms’, as well as its background in Rastafarianism.<sup>77</sup> This enables him to theorise why reggae was received in the UK as a type of music which ‘militated against any permanently close contact between black and white youth cultures.’<sup>78</sup> In this investigation of the way in which the social and sonic interact, Hebdige demonstrates another possibility for studying music in context. He also gives here an account of musical meaning that resists a simple bifurcation between material culture and discursive construction, which will become particularly significant in chapter 7.

Finally, it is important to note the cultural analysis of the Frankfurt school, and particularly the work of Adorno. In many ways, Adorno does not represent a substantial alternative to the hierarchies of Hoffmann and Hanslick, Schoenberg and Schenker. On the one hand, he writes extensively about the mechanisms surrounding popular music and the ‘passivity of the masses’ being borne out and reinforced by the ‘regression of listening’; popular music is a way of reinforcing social processes through a numbing of taste and the obviation

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<sup>76</sup> Peter Brooker, ‘Stuart Hall (1932–2014): A Personal Tribute’, *A Journal of Cultural Materialism*, 12 (2014), pp. 137-39 (p. 138).

<sup>77</sup> Dick Hebdige, ‘Reggae, Rastas & Rudies’, in *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, ed. by Tony Jefferson (Taylor Francis Group, 1991), pp. 135-53 (p. 140).

<sup>78</sup> Hebdige, ‘Reggae, Rastas & Rudies’, p. 150.

of difference.<sup>79</sup> On the other hand, when writing about western art music, he advocates for ‘structural listening’ – a method of discerning and interpreting musical form.<sup>80</sup> For Adorno, popular and art music can legitimately be studied differently, and can be distinguished from one another as that which ‘orients itself according to the demands of the market and that which in principle does not accept the demands of the market.’<sup>81</sup> This notion – that western art music is closer to existing outside of social realities – is, once, again, undergirded by the theory of autonomy. It is also hard to argue that there is no prejudice at play here, given his deeply offensive description of jazz as ‘primitive’.<sup>82</sup> However, Adorno is also ‘the only major cultural theorist of the century whose primary medium was music’, and this makes him significant for new musicology.<sup>83</sup> What Adorno demonstrated, for a particular audience, was that it was at least *possible* to study the relationship between music and society, connecting social and musical analysis – even if his analysis is not evenly applied, and his conclusions are significantly affected by taste and prejudice. In practice, the work of the Adorno will not explicitly feature in the rest of this thesis, but it is still worth noting his influence on the study of music.

The work of ethnomusicologists, the CCCS, and the Frankfurt School, then, each represents an alternative approach to the study of music. These approaches are not without their problems, and in some cases do little to challenge the dominant themes explored above. However, they represent a series of ways of talking about music as concrete, grounded, and social. Having now outlined the theories of music to which new musicology

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<sup>79</sup> Theodor Adorno W., ‘On the Fetish-Character of Music and the Regression of Listening’, in *Essays on Music*, ed. by Richard Leppert, trans. by Susan H. Gillespie (University of California Press, 2002), pp. 288-317 (p. 292).

<sup>80</sup> Adorno, ‘Regression of Listening’, p. 303.

<sup>81</sup> Adorno, ‘Regression of Listening’, p. 395.

<sup>82</sup> Adorno, ‘On the Social Situation of Music’, in *Essays on Music*, pp. 391-436 (p. 430).

<sup>83</sup> Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 28.

objects, and some of the ideas from which it draws, it is possible to examine new musicological ideas themselves.

### - **The New Musicology**

In 1995, Subotnik wrote that ‘the academic paradigm of music is moving away from autonomy.’<sup>84</sup> Efforts to describe, label, or demarcate this paradigm shift have not been straightforward. The ‘new musicology’ (or ‘the cultural turn’) comprises a wide range of approaches and ideas emerging in the relation to the study of music, and has often been defined through opposition: as McClary notes, ‘all of us [are] now lumped together as “new musicologists” by those still wary of such methods’.<sup>85</sup> Nonetheless, this heterogeneous set of ideas represents a sharp shift from the musical ontology proposed by Hoffmann and Hanslick, Schoenberg and Schenker.<sup>86</sup>

One significant text in this area is McClary’s *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*. Here, McClary examines ‘musical constructions of gender and sexuality’, ‘gendered aspects of traditional music theory’, ‘gender and sexuality in musical narrative’, ‘music as a gendered discourse’ and ‘discursive strategies of women musicians.’<sup>87</sup> As she notes, criticism of this kind had become so common to other disciplines that it was already ‘passé’ by 1991.<sup>88</sup> In a preface to a later edition, she attributes the resistance to such approaches in musicology specifically to autonomy, as the principle that secured ‘music’s exemption from cultural criticism.’<sup>89</sup> As she notes, while ‘a handful of musicologists – most notably Joseph

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<sup>84</sup> Subotnik, *Deconstructive Variations*, p. xxiii.

<sup>85</sup> McClary, *Feminine Endings*, p. xiii.

<sup>86</sup> Kramer, *Thought of Music*, p. x.

<sup>87</sup> McClary, *Feminine Endings*, pp. 7, 9, 12, 17 and 18, emphasis removed from original.

<sup>88</sup> McClary, *Feminine Endings*, p. 5.

<sup>89</sup> McClary, *Feminine Endings*, p. x.

Kerman, Leonard B. Meyer, Charles Rosen, and Edward T. Cone – had practised music criticism since the 1960s’, they were working outside the mainstream.<sup>90</sup> She also notes a lack of interest in experience, even though ‘If music were not able [...] to move us, the human race would not have bothered creating any of it for formalists to dissect, for musicologists to catalogue, or for sociologists to classify.’<sup>91</sup>

One of the important contributions of *Feminine Endings* is McClary’s inclusion of multiple repertoires in one volume, including essays on ‘early music, the standard classical repertory, postmodern performance art, and popular song’.<sup>92</sup> While she opens with feminist readings of pieces of western classical music, she finishes with a chapter on Madonna. There is still both a western focus here and an imbalance between different repertoires. However, *Feminine Endings* does at least treat western art music alongside other types of music, and treat it consistently – McClary refuses to exempt revered canonical works from criticism. One notorious example is her suggestion that ‘the point of recapitulation in the first movement of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony unleashes one of the most horrifyingly violent episodes in the history of music’, juxtaposing ‘desire and unspeakable violence’, which ‘fuels most of the remainder of the symphony.’<sup>93</sup> Her intention is not, she specifies, to depict ‘Beethoven as exceptionally monstrous’, but rather to note the way his Ninth Symphony articulates ‘the contradictory impulses that have organized patriarchal culture since the Enlightenment.’<sup>94</sup> This symphony represents one of many examples of ‘male sexual aggression’ in music.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> McClary, *Feminine Endings*, p. xiii.

<sup>91</sup> McClary, *Feminine Endings*, p. 23.

<sup>92</sup> McClary, *Feminine Endings*, p. xi.

<sup>93</sup> McClary, *Feminine Endings*, p. 128.

<sup>94</sup> McClary, *Feminine Endings*, p. 129.

<sup>95</sup> McClary, *Feminine Endings*, p. 130.

By articulating a relationship between music and sexual violence, McClary's work rejects wholesale the theory of musical autonomy; music does not transcend the brutalities of the world. It is worth noting the backlash she has received: Schenkerian analyst Pieter van Den Toorn describes this account – and her reading of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony – as 'controlling', 'manipulative' and 'invasive'.<sup>96</sup> As Ruth Solie notes, 'there unquestionably are a number of important issues yet to be debated about the nature of feminist music criticism', but it is reasonable to be troubled by 'the exactitude with which his rhetoric enacts the very rage and aggression' McClary identifies in Beethoven's music.<sup>97</sup> I will explore some more restrained criticisms of new musicology later, but this 'immoderate and global attack' is significant, too: it demonstrates the depth of feeling associated with canonical works and challenges to their perceived autonomy.<sup>98</sup>

Small also rejects autonomy, but through an emphasis on musical practice. In *Musicking: The Meanings of Performance and Listening*, he asserts:

Music is not a thing at all but an activity, something that people do. The apparent thing "music" is a figment, an abstraction of the action, whose reality vanishes as soon as we examine it at all closely.<sup>99</sup>

*Musicking* reads ethnomusicologically: it begins with a description of a generalised musical event, and this description prompts sonic and social analysis. The event, though, is a western classical concert. Small starts by examining the architecture of a concert hall, describing the foyer as 'a place to eat and drink and socialize, to see and be seen' and the

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<sup>96</sup> Pieter C. van Den Toorn, 'Letter from Pieter C. van Den Toorn', *Music Theory Spectrum* 20.1 (1998), pp. 160-67 (p. 161), doi:10.2307/746163.

<sup>97</sup> Ruth A. Solie, 'What Do Feminists Want? A Reply to Pieter van Den Toorn', *The Journal of Musicology* 9.4 (1991), pp. 399-410 (pp. 407 and 408), doi: 10.1525/jm.1991.9.4.03a00010.

<sup>98</sup> Solie, 'What Do Feminists Want?', p. 399.

<sup>99</sup> Small, *Musicking*, p. 2.

auditorium as designed to convey ‘an impression of opulence, even sumptuousness.’<sup>100</sup> These architectural elements, Small suggests, are central to how western classical music is received and understood. The way that performers and audiences are strictly divided into separate spaces, for example, reinforces the idea that the music is a ‘one-way communication, from composer to listener through the medium of performers.’<sup>101</sup> He goes on to examine personnel – ‘accountants, lawyers and clerks; secretaries and computer operators; ticket collectors and ushers; program sellers, electricians, sound men, piano tuners, and other technicians [...] not to mention the cleaners’ – the expected behaviour of the audience, performer dress, the role of the conductor, the place of the composer, and the significance of the score.<sup>102</sup> This is interspersed with, and followed by, significant theoretical reflection, which there is not space to examine here. Much of chapter 4 will, however, take its cue from Small’s claim that music is an activity.

In these ways, *Musicking* dissects the notion of autonomy twice over. First, Small demonstrates that western art music is thoroughly social: it is held together by accountants and cleaners, by buildings and coded behaviours. The concert hall is not a neutral location for the playing of certain pieces of music; it is a designated place ‘where middle-class white people can feel safe together.’<sup>103</sup> Secondly, Small demonstrates how these social factors construct and reinforce the notion of autonomy. The opulence of the building ‘tells us loudly and clearly that the performances that take place here are an important social activity in their own right, not just part of another ceremony or event’; the clothing of the performers ‘tells us, as do the dress and stylized gestures of a priest celebrating mass, that musicians, like priests, may come and go, but the music, like the liturgy, goes on forever.’<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Small, *Musicking*, pp. 23 and 25.

<sup>101</sup> Small, *Musicking*, p. 26.

<sup>102</sup> Small, *Musicking*, pp. 35, 43, 66, 83, 88 and 110.

<sup>103</sup> Small, *Musicking*, p. 36.

<sup>104</sup> Small, *Musicking*, pp. 21 and 66 .

As Small notes, ‘Concert life today [...] is dominated by the idea that musical works have a continuous reality that transcends any possible performance of them’.<sup>105</sup> But the autonomy of these musical works is communicated and reinforced by the stage, the curtains, and the sound technicians. Autonomy, then, is socially constructed.

The last book I will examine here is Kramer’s *Music as Cultural Practice, 1800-1900*, which approaches the question of autonomy through musical hermeneutics. Kramer is interested in ‘the much-disputed idea that music means something, or better yet, something we can talk about.’<sup>106</sup> Unsurprisingly, he takes music to be ‘a form of activity’ or ‘a practice’ and advocates for ‘the same kinds of rigorous interpretations that we customarily apply to other practices’ – connecting his ideas to those of Small and McClary.<sup>107</sup> His four primary claims are: ‘that works of music have discursive meanings’; ‘that these meanings are definite enough to support critical interpretations comparable in depth, exactness, and density of connection to interpretations of literary texts and cultural practices’; ‘that these meanings are not “extramusical,” but on the contrary are inextricably bound up with the formal processes and stylistic articulation of musical works’; and finally, ‘that these meanings are produced as part of the general circulation of regulated practices and valuations – part, in other words, of the continuous production and reproduction of culture.’<sup>108</sup> Meaning is not “extra-musical” but an inherent part of music.

Kramer is clear that musical meaning is unavoidable, but also fraught with difficulty. He recognises that ‘music does have a referential power’: music reminds us of people, places, events, or of other pieces of music.<sup>109</sup> And music also seems to have a fittingness – some

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<sup>105</sup> Small, *Musicking*, p. 113.

<sup>106</sup> Lawrence Kramer, *Music as Cultural Practice, 1800-1900* (University of California Press, 1990), p. xi.

<sup>107</sup> Kramer, *Music as Cultural Practice*, p. xii.

<sup>108</sup> Kramer, *Music as Cultural Practice*, p. 1.

<sup>109</sup> Kramer, *Music as Cultural Practice*, p. 9.

types of music seem appropriate for a funeral, others for a carnival. As I alluded to in relation to the CCCS, it is difficult to pin down how much of this perceived suitability is sonic or social. But, either way, compared to language, music is ‘in thoroughly poor shape, conceptually indefinite and semantically impoverished.’<sup>110</sup> Music cannot make a ‘truth claim’, and while ‘Music may seduce us’, ‘it never makes propositions.’<sup>111</sup> For Kramer, meaning is not an optional addition to an autonomous musical object. However, it is relentlessly difficult to work with. I will draw upon these ideas – and Kramer’s work more broadly – in chapter 7.

It is worth acknowledging that Kramer’s account of musical meaning stems from postmodernist commitments that are at least implicit in much new musicology. He describes his approach in *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge* as a ‘revival’ of earlier methods of studying music swept away by modernist instincts.<sup>112</sup> But equally, his work can be summarised as ‘simply a demand for human interest’, a recognition of the role that music plays in human lives, in our ordinary acts of meaning-making, and in how we make sense of the world around us.<sup>113</sup> Indeed, ‘simply a demand for human interest’ serves as an effective summary of each of the three new musicologists I have examined here, and their emphasis on criticism, experience, practice, and interpretation.

### - **Contemporary Musicology**

This project is not, however, an interdisciplinary study between theology and new musicology. This is in part because new musicology is no longer distinct: ‘Cultural musicology is mainstream’, and McClary, Small, and Kramer’s ideas about criticism,

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<sup>110</sup> Kramer, *Music as Cultural Practice*, p. 3.

<sup>111</sup> Kramer, *Music as Cultural Practice*, p. 5.

<sup>112</sup> Lawrence Kramer, *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge* (University of California Press, 1995), p. 3.

<sup>113</sup> Kramer, *Postmodern Knowledge*, p. 1.

experience, practice, and interpretation are commonplace within contemporary musicology.<sup>114</sup> As Richard Middleton asks, ‘aren’t we all, to a greater or lesser extent, culturalists now?’<sup>115</sup> I will engage with a range of musicological resources in this thesis, some of which are part of the new musicology, but many of which are simply within the mainstream of the contemporary discipline. I also want to explore some other musicological resources at this stage, however, because McClary, Small, and Kramer’s ideas are generally more concerned with studying western classical music *differently* than with studying *different types of music*, even if the tools they use can be adapted for this purpose. For both these reasons, it is important to engage not only with new musicological ideas, but also with the contemporary musicological thought that extends them.

One relevant stream of contemporary musicology is interested in ‘the listening that fills our days’.<sup>116</sup> Drawing on Joseph Lanza’s *Elevator Music: A Surreal History of Muzak, Easy-Listening, and Other Moodsong*, Anahid Kassabian’s *Ubiquitous Listening: Affect, Attention, and Distributed Subjectivity* observes the prevalence of ‘programmed music, background music, environmental music, business music, functional music’ in contemporary life, particularly in the contexts of western Europe, the US, and Canada.<sup>117</sup> She notes:

Whereas we are accustomed to thinking of most musics, and most cultural products, in terms of authorship and location, this music comes from the plants and the walls and, potentially, our clothes. It comes from everywhere and nowhere. Its projection looks to erase its production as much as possible, posing instead as a quality of the environment.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Richard Middleton, ‘Introduction: Music Studies and the Idea of Culture’, in *Cultural Study of Music*, ed. by Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert and Richard Middleton, pp. 1-14 (p. 5).

<sup>115</sup> Middleton, ‘Introduction’, in *Cultural Study of Music*, p. 5.

<sup>116</sup> Anahid Kassabian, *Ubiquitous Listening: Affect, Attention, and Distributed Subjectivity* (University of California Press, 2013), p. 11. See Joseph Lanza, *Elevator Music: A Surreal History of Muzak, Easy-Listening, and Other Moodsong* (St Martin’s Press, 1994).

<sup>117</sup> Kassabian, *Ubiquitous Listening*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>118</sup> Kassabian, *Ubiquitous Listening*, p. 39.

And while this music may seem inconsequential – providing nothing more than an ambient backdrop to more important activities – it is doing social, personal, and affective work. Music may be used for the purposes of ‘alleviating boredom and increasing productivity’, for example, or as a form of ‘sonic branding’.<sup>119</sup> Music is involved in shaping, influencing, and directing those who listen to it. Kassabian also suggests that the ‘constant, grounding’ presence of music flattens the distinction between hearing (connoting passivity) and listening (connoting focus): ‘We are so used to music as an accompaniment to other activities that we forget we are listening.’<sup>120</sup> Ordinary music – even the music of which we are scarcely cognisant – has an impact on our social worlds and on the way in which we listen.

Similar themes are explored in Tia DeNora’s *Music in Everyday Life*. As a sociologist of music, DeNora is interested in musical affect, music ‘as a technology of the self’, ‘music’s role as a device of collective ordering’ and music’s ‘social “powers”’ – contending that music is a socially significant agent and tool, but that ‘it is probably impossible to speak of music’s “powers” abstracted from their contexts of use’.<sup>121</sup> She studies, for example, music in neonatal units and exercise classes.<sup>122</sup> It is easy to think that Small’s account of music is utilitarian, at least compared to the visionary claims of Hoffmann. But what DeNora demonstrates is that music is powerful in a much greater range of contexts and locations than is often acknowledged. This is something she develops further in *Music Asylums: Wellbeing through Music in Everyday Life*, which explores the way in which music can make space or provide asylum, through both ‘refurnishing’ and ‘removal’.<sup>123</sup> Here, she concurs with Harry Witchel, that music can ‘establish and reinforce social territory’, helping to

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<sup>119</sup> Kassabian, *Ubiquitous Listening*, pp. 38, 114 and 109.

<sup>120</sup> Kassabian, *Ubiquitous Listening*, pp. 39 and 109.

<sup>121</sup> Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 46, 77, 109, 151 and x.

<sup>122</sup> DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life*, pp. 79 and 93.

<sup>123</sup> Tia DeNora, *Music Asylums: Wellbeing through Music in Everyday Life* (Ashgate, 2013), p. 55.

construct some social worlds and provide relief from others.<sup>124</sup> Whether this space-making is used to good effect or not, Kassabian, DeNora, and Witchel are clear: even the most ordinary music, as it is played, experienced, and discussed, may be doing profound work in human lives and in communities. It is only a small extension of their work to suggest that something significant might be going on when a congregation of fifteen stand up and sing a hymn.

Another relevant stream of contemporary musicology is concerned with musical mediation. One prominent figure in this area is Georgina Born, whose work will be explored more fully in chapter 3. Her core theoretical idea is that ‘Music is socially mediated’ and that ‘this social mediation occurs on a number of distinct and mutually modulating or intersecting planes.’<sup>125</sup> She examines four planes. The first and second ‘amount to socialities engendered by musical practice and experience’.<sup>126</sup> Born observes, first, that ‘music produces its own diverse socialities in the guise of the intimate microsocialities of musical performance and practice, the social relations enacted in musical ensembles, and the musical division of labor’, and second, that ‘music has the power to animate imagined communities, aggregating its listeners into virtual collectivities or publics’.<sup>127</sup> In the context of music in worship, the intimate microsocialities might be the interpersonal dynamics of a band or choir, and the virtual collectivities might be those who prefer contemporary music or those who advocate for traditional hymnody. The third and fourth planes ‘amount to social and institutional conditions that themselves afford

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<sup>124</sup> Harry Witchel, *You Are What You Hear: How Music and Territory Make Us Who We Are* (Algora Publishing, 2010), p. 5.

<sup>125</sup> Georgina Born, ‘Music and the Social’, in *Cultural Study of Music*, ed. by Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert and Richard Middleton, pp. 261-74 (p. 263). See also Georgina Born, ‘After Relational Aesthetics: Improvised Music, the Social, and (Re)Theorizing the Aesthetic’, in *Improvisation and Social Aesthetics*, ed. by Georgina Born, Eric Lewis and Will Straw (Duke University Press, 2017), pp. 33-58; Born, ‘Materialization of Identities’.

<sup>126</sup> Born, ‘Materialization of Identities’, p. 1.

<sup>127</sup> Born, ‘Music and the Social’, p. 266.

certain kinds of musical practice'.<sup>128</sup> Following the work of McClary, 'music refracts wider social identity formations – formations of class, race or ethnicity, gender or sexuality', and, following Small, 'music is entangled in the institutional forms that enable its production, reproduction, and transformation'.<sup>129</sup> Or, we might say, music in worship is not immune to power, history, or prejudice, and nor can it be separated from the material realities of hymn books, screens, or the market. To say, then, that music is a social or cultural form is not merely to suggest that a particular composer was influenced by their contemporary context. What Born is proposing is much more pervasive: it is that music is socially mediated in every direction. The concept she uses to examine these mediations collectively and separately – the assemblage – is central to the musical theory given in the following chapter and underpins the constructive work that follows.

Finally, while ideas of criticism, experience, practice, and interpretation are commonplace in contemporary musicology, they are not ubiquitous. James Currie, for example, suggests that new musicology has 'validated itself by means of a sometimes transhistorical set of assumptions' – inverting the critique that Goehr and Chua make of traditional musicology.<sup>130</sup> Currie takes issue with the narrative that, before the 'disastrous turn it took, particularly in Germanic lands', music was treated as a social practice; a narrative that he perceives to deny the historical and cultural specificity of new musicological ideas.<sup>131</sup> I am unconvinced that new musicological ideas *depend* upon this narrative; my account of musical ontology in chapter 3, for example, will not make any such claims to history. However, it is worth noting that, while I find new musicological ideas convincing, and the research methods they have enabled generative, I am not claiming they are absolute or beyond critique. Instead, I want to suggest that they place theoretical and ethical demands

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<sup>128</sup> Born, 'Materialization of Identities', p. 1.

<sup>129</sup> Born, 'Music and the Social', pp. 266-67.

<sup>130</sup> James R. Currie, *Music and the Politics of Negation* (Indiana University Press, 2012), p. ix.

<sup>131</sup> Currie, *Politics of Negation*, p. x.

on the study of music – demands of which theology should take notice – and that they are deeply consonant with theological writings on other activities with which humans engage and by which humans are formed: language, liturgy, and prayer. Even while they are imperfect, contingent, and historically located, these ideas may serve as useful tools as we approach music in a theological context.

## Theological Approaches to the Study of Music

### - Jeremy Begbie

Within contemporary theology, Begbie is the most prominent voice engaging with music. In many ways his work is characterised by breadth: among other things, he engages with Augustine, Boethius, John Calvin, Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Barth, Paul Tillich, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer; as well as with the doctrines of the Trinity, incarnation, and creation.<sup>132</sup> He is not interested in offering ‘a “systematic theology of music”, an account of music which situates it within a particular doctrinal environment’ but is rather concerned with a, seemingly more expansive, theology ‘through’ music.<sup>133</sup> And while he considers music in worship, he is wary of limiting theology and music to its discussion, as if the only music that is of theological interest happens in ecclesial settings.<sup>134</sup> These are some of the more obvious ways in which my thesis departs from Begbie’s work, not because I think music in worship is the only music to approach theologically, but because I think there is still much to be said in a theology of music *in worship*.

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<sup>132</sup> See Jeremy Begbie, *Resounding Truth (Engaging Culture): Christian Wisdom in the World of Music* (Baker Publishing Group, 2007), pp. 77-118 and 141-62; Begbie, *Music, Modernity, God*, pp. 10-40; Jeremy Begbie, *Voicing Creation’s Praise: Towards a Theology of the Arts* (T & T Clark, 1991), pp. 1-77.

<sup>133</sup> Begbie, *Theology, Music, Time*, p. 5; Begbie, ‘Introduction’, in *Beholding the Glory*, p. xiii.

<sup>134</sup> Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, p. 23.

In other ways, though, Begbie's work is characterised by narrowness. There are some striking oversights: as observed by Boyce-Tillman, his overview of 'Christian wisdom' on music 'stretching back many centuries and involving some of the finest minds the church has known' omits Hildegard of Bingen.<sup>135</sup> He can appear dismissive of music which does not align with his theological commitments – as in 'his negative reading of musical works that reflect the influence of other traditions, such as the Orthodoxy of [John] Tavener or the Catholicism of [Olivier] Messiaen'.<sup>136</sup> And he primarily approaches music through analysis, focusing on the western tonal (and, in practice, the western classical) tradition. Here, I will draw some of the contours of his simultaneously broad and narrow work, showing how his approach differs from the musicologists we have explored so far.

For Begbie, 'music can serve to enrich and advance theology', providing 'conceptual tools' which 'enable theology to do its job better.'<sup>137</sup> As one of the arts, it can 'reveal, disclose, open up a world we live in', and bear witness to doctrinal claims.<sup>138</sup> Crucially, 'This is not to say that the arts should necessarily replace more standard and well-tested ways of pursuing theology, only that they have a legitimate place alongside and in conversation with those more familiar methods.'<sup>139</sup> Music must cede to 'the primary testimony of Scripture and [...] the wealth of Christian tradition'; it cannot be 'the controlling truth criteria'.<sup>140</sup> However, it can 'illuminate' – 'not simply confirming what we already understand of God and God's ways', but opening up new, and sometimes unexpected, forms of understanding.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, p. 25; June Boyce-Tillman, *Women in Christian Music*, p. 264.

<sup>136</sup> Brown and Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, p. 204.

<sup>137</sup> Jeremy Begbie, *Theology, Music, Time*, pp. 3 and 271.

<sup>138</sup> Begbie, 'Introduction', in *Beholding the Glory*, p. xi, emphasis in original.

<sup>139</sup> Begbie, 'Introduction', in *Beholding the Glory*, p. xii.

<sup>140</sup> Begbie, 'Introduction', in *Beholding the Glory*, p. xiii; Jeremy Begbie, *A Peculiar Orthodoxy: Reflections on Theology and the Arts* (Baker Publishing Group, 2018), p. 13.

<sup>141</sup> Jeremy S. Begbie, 'Created Beauty: The Witness of J. S. Bach', in *Resonant Witness: Conversations between Music and Theology*, ed. by Jeremy S. Begbie and Steven R. Guthrie, pp. 83-108 (p. 96). See also Jeremy

There are any number of areas of illumination or ‘resonance’ between music and theology identified by Begbie.<sup>142</sup> In *Redeeming Transcendence in the Arts: Bearing Witness to the Triune God*, he observes: ‘Music [...] is generally made up [...] of lines of sound woven together in temporal patterns.’<sup>143</sup> One outworking of these lines of sound is variation: when a musical idea is ‘elaborated, extended, augmented, inverted, or reharmonized in such a way as to suggest boundless potential’.<sup>144</sup> While, Begbie notes, it is important to be aware of ‘misleading hyperbole’, he nonetheless suggests that variation has the capacity to evoke ‘a kind of infinity’, and thereby illuminate something of the divine.<sup>145</sup> Or, in *Resounding Truth (Engaging Culture): Christian Wisdom in the World of Music*, Begbie observes that there is a ‘dynamic of tension and resolution’ that pervades western tonal music.<sup>146</sup> The harmonic patterns that Schenker observed to be virtually ubiquitous in western tonal music can be understood as a movement from ‘equilibrium’ to ‘tension’ to ‘resolution’.<sup>147</sup> And this movement, for Begbie, maps onto the patterns of ‘creation-fall-redemption’ and ‘promised land-exile-return’.<sup>148</sup> In this way, some of the ‘qualities of [western] tonal music’ are suited’ to the task of ‘embodying some of the dynamics of the Christian gospel.’<sup>149</sup> It is worth saying that, for Begbie, these patterns are inherent in creation: he suggests, ‘because of the internal relatedness of tones to one another through the harmonic series, even single chords will have certain “attractions” toward and “gravitational pulls” from other tones and chords.’<sup>150</sup> As I suggested earlier, the perceived naturalness of tonal harmony is a

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Begbie, ‘Introduction’, in *Sounding the Depths: Theology Through the Arts*, ed. by Jeremy Begbie (SCM Press, 2002), pp. 1-13 (p. 3).

<sup>142</sup> Jeremy Begbie, ‘Through Music: Sound Mix’, in *Beholding the Glory*, pp. 138-54 (p. 147).

<sup>143</sup> Jeremy Begbie, *Redeeming Transcendence in the Arts: Bearing Witness to the Triune God* (SCM Press, 2018), p. 179.

<sup>144</sup> Begbie, *Redeeming Transcendence*, p. 179, emphasis in original.

<sup>145</sup> Begbie, *Redeeming Transcendence*, p. 181.

<sup>146</sup> Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, p. 278.

<sup>147</sup> Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, pp. 278 and 279.

<sup>148</sup> Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, p. 278.

<sup>149</sup> Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, p. 279.

<sup>150</sup> Begbie, *Peculiar Orthodoxy*, p. 167.

misconception, and has a fraught history.<sup>151</sup> Nonetheless, the point still stands even without the claim to naturalness: Begbie has identified a point of constructive intersection between a common musical pattern and a common biblical narrative, with music illuminating the primary testimony of the scriptures. Lastly, and perhaps most famously, Begbie suggests that we take music to be that which *'mixes sounds'*, since 'the majority of music we encounter in the West today involves at least two notes being played or sung at once.'<sup>152</sup> This mixing of sounds can help us to reimagine our 'essentially competitive way of thinking', allowing us to reenvision Chalcedonian Christology and the Trinity.<sup>153</sup> As Begbie asks, 'What could be more apt than to speak of the Trinity as a three-note-resonance of life, mutually indwelling, without mutual exclusion and yet without merger, each occupying the same "space", yet recognisably and irreducibly distinct, mutually enhancing and establishing each other?'<sup>154</sup> Here, music provides a conceptual landscape to help us envisage non-competitive relationships, allowing for patterns of thought that might be difficult to access by other means.

As I will suggest in chapter 7, these resonances can be effectively understood as analogies, and can furnish us with real doctrinal insight. However, there are limitations to Begbie's approach. His constructive output is disproportionately analytical, emphasising formal aspects of music such as harmony and variation over practice and experience. He also focuses exclusively on western tonal music, and almost exclusively on western classical music. While he suggests his concern is with the music of 'Beethoven and Bach, as well as the Spice Girls and Michael Jackson' – and some of these analytical claims about western harmony do indeed carry across all these musicians – it is worth noting that he studies the music of Bach in some depth (as 'a theological engagement with music that has probably

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<sup>151</sup> See pp. 40-42.

<sup>152</sup> Begbie, 'Sound Mix', p. 139, emphasis in original.

<sup>153</sup> Begbie, 'Sound Mix', p. 143.

<sup>154</sup> Begbie, 'Sound Mix', p. 147.

never been surpassed’) and does not specifically examine the music of the Spice Girls.<sup>155</sup> His focus on western tonal music also means that, even where he talks about practices such as improvisation, they are conceived through western classical composers such as Pierre Boulez and John Cage, rather than through traditions where improvisation is more common, extensive, and significant: such as jazz or folk music.<sup>156</sup> This is not to suggest that Begbie must write about all forms of music or be an expert in every musical tradition – it is unsurprising that he addresses the music with which he is familiar. However, I want to assert that his focus on the western classical tradition, and analysis of that tradition, betrays the way that Begbie thinks of music more broadly; that this way of thinking about music has been shown by new musicologists to be limited; and that these limitations bring with them some dangers.

These three assertions may, at first, seem surprising. Throughout his work, Begbie is clear that music is ‘a multiplicity of practices’, some ‘constructive’ and others ‘receptive’.<sup>157</sup> And he acknowledges that ‘Music-making and hearing are properly considered the foundational realities of music.’<sup>158</sup> These claims echo Small, and are also – so Begbie suggests – properly theological: ‘when Scripture alludes to music, it is to *music in action*.’<sup>159</sup> He also engages in critique, suggesting ‘we should not forget how Western [the] disjunction of art from the contingencies of history is, nor how recent.’<sup>160</sup> For Begbie, ‘Music always, to some extent, embodies social and cultural reality’.<sup>161</sup> And he recognises that new musicology has ‘at

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<sup>155</sup> Begbie, *Theology, Music, Time*, p. 7; Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, p. 122.

<sup>156</sup> Begbie, *Theology, Music, Time*, pp. 179-203.

<sup>157</sup> Begbie, *Theology, Music, Time*, p. 9; Begbie, *Redeeming Transcendence*, p. 128.

<sup>158</sup> Begbie, *Theology, Music, Time*, p. 9.

<sup>159</sup> Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, p. 90, emphasis in original.

<sup>160</sup> Begbie, *Voicing Creation’s Praise*, pp. 193-4.

<sup>161</sup> Begbie, *Theology, Music, Time*, p. 13.

least served to widen the playing field in music studies, opening up fresh kinds of questions, including those of directly theological import.’<sup>162</sup>

However, Begbie also suggests that new musicology has ‘been prone to reductionist cul-de-sacs’.<sup>163</sup> He elaborates with Stephen Guthrie:

it has become routine in many academic music departments to stress that musical practices and products are socially, culturally, and politically conditioned – against the notion that music can exist in an a-temporal, “other-worldly” sphere[.] [...] However, problems arise if it is suggested that music can be *exhaustively* accounted for in these terms. We can lose sight of the fact that the temporally organized sound-patterns of music have their own distinct integrity[.]<sup>164</sup>

Where this idea becomes especially reductive, according to Begbie, ‘is when we are told that music should not *in any way* be considered or interpreted as being grounded in realities that transcend the constructive interests of a particular social or cultural group: music is sociocultural “all the way down.”’<sup>165</sup> His concern is intuitive – a warning against a philosophical claim taken to a supposedly utilitarian extreme. But it is important to note the corollary: ‘To say that works of art are primarily instruments and objects of action is not to say that *no* attention should ever be paid to what they are in themselves’.<sup>166</sup> Music, for Begbie, may be practical, social, and cultural, but we can still study the music as at least a partially autonomous object – the music “in itself”.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Begbie, *Music, Modernity, God*, p. 3.

<sup>163</sup> Begbie, *Music, Modernity, God*, p. 3.

<sup>164</sup> Jeremy S. Begbie and Stephen R. Guthrie, ‘Introduction’, in *Resonant Witness*, pp. 1-24 (pp. 6-7), emphasis in original.

<sup>165</sup> Jeremy Begbie, *Abundantly More: The Theological Promise of the Arts in a Reductionist World* (Baker Publishing Group, 2023), p. 32, emphasis in original.

<sup>166</sup> Begbie, *Voicing Creation’s Praise*, p. 208, emphasis in original.

<sup>167</sup> I have put this term in quote marks to distinguish the idea of “the music itself” – a shorthand for the ideas of musical autonomy, or absolute music – from more commonplace references to ‘the music itself’ in other contexts. When McClary, for example, suggests she will focus on ‘the music itself’ in her discussion of the ‘spectrum of sexual identities only barely hidden within classical music’, she is not advocating for an account of musical autonomy, but rather suggesting that she is not concerned here with aligning her

Over the course of this thesis, I will show that treating music as sociocultural “all the way down” with Born, among others, is not reductionist or utilitarian, and points instead to the richness of creation. And, as I suggested in the previous section, I have a number of ontological and ethical objections to the idea of musical autonomy, particularly in conjunction with ideas such as the naturalness of western tonality. But rather than rehearse these, I want to point to a way in which this resistance to new musicology limits Begbie’s work. Namely, I want to suggest that by working primarily with analytical observations about music – such as variations, chords, and harmonic sequences – Begbie is able to make some undoubtedly theologically generative moves: he can draw significant analogies with doctrine, analogies that may help in the process of reenvisioning theological claims. But he is less able to talk about music as it is actually experienced and encountered: as a series of participative, immersive, affective, and sometimes fraught practices; as something lived and breathed and concrete; as something caught up in the social and cultural ways in which humans seek to praise their Creator. In the following chapter I will suggest that, in these ways, he is not really talking about music – in the full sense of the term – at all.<sup>168</sup>

This is not a universal picture; there are some places where Begbie considers the social and practical nature of music, one of which is in relation to worship. In *Resonant Witness*, he considers the nature of worship, as ‘truthful’, ‘uniting’, and ‘ex-centric’.<sup>169</sup> Worship, in this account, is social – ‘to be caught up in the life of the triune God entails being thrown out into the world as agents of transformation.’<sup>170</sup> And worship, here, is affective: he is particularly concerned with ‘emotional expressiveness’, and the way that music can

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readings with the intentions of composers, who ‘do not own the meanings that attach to their pieces’.  
Susan McClary, *Making Sense of Music* (Oxford University Press, 2025), p. 249.

<sup>168</sup> See pp. 104-05.

<sup>169</sup> Jeremy S. Begbie, ‘Faithful Feelings: Music and Emotion in Worship’, in *Resonant Witness*, ed. by Jeremy Begbie and Stephen R. Guthrie, pp. 323-54 (p. 337), emphasis in original.

<sup>170</sup> Begbie, ‘Faithful Feelings’, p. 349.

concentrate, compress, and focus emotions.<sup>171</sup> Begbie is clear that there is no need to underplay the fact that ‘music’s emotional capacities are so closely linked with the body’ since ‘bodily renewal is part of God’s intention for humanity’.<sup>172</sup> But, given the lack of space, there are many aspects of music in worship that remain insufficiently explored, such as the range of practices and meanings that are brought to bear on any act of congregational music-making. And, as I will demonstrate in chapter 6 – with the help of the concrete accounts of music in worship gathered from fieldwork – there are all manner of affective responses to music, to which Begbie’s generalised account does not do justice.

- **David Brown and Gavin Hopps**

Brown and Hopps’ *The Extravagance of Music*, by contrast, focuses on musical experience, adopting an approach that is ‘in important respects diametrically opposed’ to that of Begbie.<sup>173</sup> They do not completely reject his method, but rather insist that ‘there are all sorts of other things that music can do, be, affect or afford, in addition to providing illustrative correspondences for the theologically inclined’.<sup>174</sup> In particular, they suggest that ‘Begbie’s very premises appear to forestall consideration of music as a form of natural theology’, which in turn places undue restrictions on the sorts of theological claims he is able to make of music.<sup>175</sup> Or, as Frank Burch Brown succinctly summarises, Begbie’s work ‘is so intent on avoiding idolatry that it fails [...] to recognize how very generous is the gracious reality of God, not least in the realm of music.’<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Begbie, ‘Faithful Feelings’, p. 349.

<sup>172</sup> Begbie, ‘Faithful Feelings’, p. 352.

<sup>173</sup> Brown and Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, p. 188.

<sup>174</sup> Brown and Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, p. 188.

<sup>175</sup> Brown and Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, p. 226.

<sup>176</sup> Frank Burch Brown, ‘Foreword’, in Brown and Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, pp. v-xvii (p. xii).

*The Extravagance of Music* contends:

since the musical act of “jubilation” is naturally adopted as a way of conveying emotions that cannot be expressed by words, it is therefore *intrinsically* “befitted” for use in relation to “the ineffable God.” In other words, it seems, by virtue of its very nature, music can analogically reflect the divine.<sup>177</sup>

This idea can be set against Brown and Hopps’ broader projects. Hopps is interested in the ability of music – particularly popular music – to ‘expand our vision, to engender a sense of being opened, to awaken us to the mystery in which we ordinarily unwittingly stand, and perhaps even to mediate experiences of divine presence.’<sup>178</sup> Brown aims ‘to recover enchantment and so a holistic view of how God relates to human experience in its totality [...] through a reinvigorated sense of the sacramental.’<sup>179</sup> It is worth acknowledging that both broader projects, in their own way, point to new musicological themes. Hopps defines music as ‘a dynamic *event*, whose meaning doesn’t reside “immanently” within the work but is instead more widely distributed across a relational field of subjects and objects in a state of performatively constituted entanglement – which, according to Small, may even extend beyond the terrestrial sphere to include the supernatural.’<sup>180</sup> And, while Brown is clear that *God and Mystery in Words: Experience through Metaphor and Drama* is not an ‘exercise in aesthetics’, but rather uses the arts as ‘illustrative of a more fundamental thesis: that both natural and revealed theology are in crisis’, he is clear that the solution is ‘to give proper attention to the cultural embeddedness of both.’<sup>181</sup> He is interested in a relative range of music, too – in *God and Grace of Body: Sacrament in Ordinary*, he poses a ‘deliberate challenge to the reader’ by indicating ‘how God might be experienced through musical

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<sup>177</sup> Brown and Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, p. 12, emphasis in original.

<sup>178</sup> Gavin Hopps, ‘Theology, Imagination and Popular Music’, in *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Religion and Popular Music*, ed. by C. Partridge and M. Moberg (Bloomsbury, 2017), pp. 105-18 (p. 107).

<sup>179</sup> David Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place: Reclaiming Human Experience* (Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 5.

<sup>180</sup> Hopps, ‘Theology, Imagination, Popular Music’, pp. 105-06, emphasis in original.

<sup>181</sup> Brown, *Mystery in Words*, p. 269.

forms as varied as opera and jazz, [Franz] Schubert and Led Zeppelin.<sup>182</sup> *The Extravagance of Music* also commits to a relatively wide range of music, since ‘a religious viewpoint underwrites a radically *egalitarian* attitude towards aesthetic forms.’<sup>183</sup> It is worth acknowledging the other commonalities between their work and my project, too. Brown suggests, for example, that music in worship ‘can fulfil a great variety of [...] purposes’ other than ‘praise or worship itself’, including ‘the fostering of communal identity and the exposition of credal commitments.’<sup>184</sup> And Hopps is interested in theological evaluation, suggesting ‘against [...] Begbie, that it may be better to make [...] evaluations not on the basis of an “essentialized” system of correspondences between doctrinal criteria and aesthetic forms but rather, in an Augustinian manner, in terms of the music’s functions or affects – which is to say, their outworking in the listener’s life.’<sup>185</sup> This emphasis on the ‘fruits’ of musical experience chimes with many of my concerns in chapter 6.<sup>186</sup>

Despite these similarities, though, *The Extravagance of Music* take a relatively critical approach to some new musicology. The first objections of the book are not raised in relation to Begbie, but rather to Kramer, who is taken as ‘one of the most articulate and pioneering advocates of “new,” “postmodern”, or “critical” musicology’.<sup>187</sup> They suggest that he advocates for ‘an ideological privileging of *certain kinds* of “social utility” and contextual meanings along with an un-argued-for suppression of others’; that he rejects any ‘sense of transcendence or enchantment’ in experiences of music.<sup>188</sup> *The Extravagance of Music*, then, seeks to defend ‘the ability of music, for all its context-dependent character, to engender an awareness of something “other” (transcendent), which is at the same time

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<sup>182</sup> David Brown, *God and Grace of Body: Sacrament in Ordinary* (Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 3.

<sup>183</sup> Brown and Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, p. 174.

<sup>184</sup> Brown, *Mystery in Words*, p. 75.

<sup>185</sup> Hopps, ‘Theology, Imagination, Popular Music’, p. 17.

<sup>186</sup> Hopps, ‘Theology, Imagination, Popular Music’, p. 17.

<sup>187</sup> Brown and Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, p. 3.

<sup>188</sup> Brown and Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, p. 5, emphasis in original.

incapable of complete description (ineffable).<sup>189</sup> As Heidi Epstein notes, the fact Brown and Hopps do not engage with other new musicologists, such as Subotnik and McClary (who are just as articulate and pioneering), and the ‘[a]lternative ways of knowing and valuing through decolonial, feminist, womanist, queer, and disability perspectives’ which ‘now inform musicology and theology’, limits their work.<sup>190</sup> I also want to assert that presenting Kramer as the primary figurehead of new musicology substantively misrepresents the variety, complexity, and breadth of the movement.

It is also worth asking how much of this critique is really about Kramer, and how much about interdisciplinarity: in drawing upon the insights of a secular discipline, it is hardly surprising that some of its proponents are resistant to claims of transcendence, and that their ideas might need adapting in a theological context. And, while Hopps has later conceded that ‘critical musicology can and should be a theological ally’, it is difficult to see how this could be the case given the underlying philosophies of the book.<sup>191</sup> On one hand, they ask of Kramer, ‘surely it is possible for a listener to have “situated” *religious* experiences – even if these are experiences of transcendence – and for music’s “context-related meanings” to be inflected by faith or *theistic* concerns?’<sup>192</sup> They suggest, ‘it seems possible to hold, against Kramer’s critique, that music may have an ineffable dimension, without banishing it to a sequestered autonomy, without condemning its listener to absolute silence, without denying its social construction and also without suppressing its “human interest.”’<sup>193</sup> Yet on the other hand, they suggest that ‘the art-form itself retains a

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<sup>189</sup> Brown and Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>190</sup> Heidi Epstein, ‘Hypo-Allergenic Musicologies: Brown and Hopps’ *Unsung, Liberationist Allies*, *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 20.1 (2020), pp. 23-37 (p. 24), doi:10.1080/1474225X.2020.1725990.

<sup>191</sup> Gavin Hopps, ‘Negative Capability and Religious Experience’, *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 20.1 (2020), pp. 79-94 (p. 89), doi:10.1080/1474225X.2020.1726262.

<sup>192</sup> Brown and Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, p. 4, emphasis in original.

<sup>193</sup> Brown and Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, p. 9.

transcendent otherness’, thereby implying that the arts can be meaningfully understood “in themselves”, apart from their social construction.<sup>194</sup> Conceived this way, it is not just musical experiences that can engender a sense of otherness or transcendence – an idea I will address in chapter 6 – but *music* which possesses this otherness and transcendence; *music* which in some way evades its social conditions. Such claims would be difficult to reconcile with a new musicological account. As I will also go on to suggest, *The Extravagance of Music* also fails to deliver on its claims about exploring a wide range of music, and thereby fails to substantively engage with music’s human interest.

The first part of the book, written by Brown, is concerned directly with questions of experience and transcendence. It is here that Brown elaborates on the methodology of the book, providing a typology of the ‘sorts of experience that supervene on aesthetic appreciation’.<sup>195</sup> This typology stems from the conviction that ‘there seem [...] no good grounds for excluding the possibility of religious experience through music as yet another way in which religious faith might be informed and developed.’<sup>196</sup> Brown’s typology of experiences comprises: ‘those generated by the strong sense of order to be found in certain types of music’; ‘those which evoke a feeling of transcendent otherness’; ‘those that seem to speak of the divine as immanent within this earthly reality’; ‘those that in some sense allow incorporation into an alternative “divine” world’; and ‘music that appears to generate specific perceptions’.<sup>197</sup> He cites here John Coltrane on generosity; Schubert on suffering; and Jules Massenet on suicide.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Hopps, ‘Negative Capability’, p. 89; Brown and Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, p. 147.

<sup>195</sup> Brown and Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, p. 32.

<sup>196</sup> Brown and Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, p. 39.

<sup>197</sup> Brown and Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, pp. 82-3.

<sup>198</sup> Brown and Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, pp. 127-31.

It is worth briefly comparing these claims to those of Begbie. We can move beyond resonances between music and theology, and beyond simply aesthetic experience – so Brown suggests – according to a framework derived from ‘what used to be called natural, as distinct from revealed, religion.’<sup>199</sup> But, for Brown, ‘any further religious experience can only take an explicitly Christian form when aided by words in that direction.’<sup>200</sup> In other words, music has an expansive and generous function: it may convey, invoke, or incorporate us into, divine presence. Conversely, Christian doctrine for Brown emerges only through words.

Part two is written by Hopps and moves towards discussion of popular music. Much of this portion of the book is laying the groundwork for the legitimacy of studying popular music theologically at all, with particular objection taken to the work of Roger Scruton.<sup>201</sup> This means Hopps is only able to spend one chapter looking at musical examples, which he does in dialogue with new musicological ideas – starting with the premise that ‘we should cease to conceptualize music “nominally” as a self-contained autonomous object and should think about it “verbally” as an activity’.<sup>202</sup> In this chapter, he provides a range of examples of music and how they afford religious experiences. The music of Fleet Foxes, say, evokes ‘a “something more” – a glow, a shadow, a sense of enchantment’ – and ambient music ‘may help us to *experience* the divine.’<sup>203</sup> Or, The Divine Comedy’s ‘The Eye of the Needle’, and its ‘pastiche’ of the most exquisitely mournful communion music’, ‘invites the agnostic listener to enter into a stance of wondering’.<sup>204</sup> But there are also many ideas left largely unaddressed. While he points to the fact that ‘a lot hinges on how one defines

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<sup>199</sup> Brown and Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, p. 65.

<sup>200</sup> Brown and Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, p. 65.

<sup>201</sup> Brown and Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, pp. 168-69.

<sup>202</sup> Brown and Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, p. 232.

<sup>203</sup> Brown and Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, pp. 259 and 282, emphasis in original.

<sup>204</sup> Brown and Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, pp. 252-53. See The Divine Comedy, ‘The Eye of the Needle’, *Regeneration* (Parlophone/EMI, 2001).

the key terms of these claims – in particular, “epiphanic,” “transcendence” and “revelation,” he notes that they ‘cannot be explored in any detail’.<sup>205</sup> This is in part because he is primarily concerned with ‘experiences of general revelation, which are *by their very nature* underdetermined’, but it also seems likely that he is limited by the relative space given to constructive work.<sup>206</sup> In comparison to the first section, at least, Hopps’ section leaves much more theoretical work to be done about the nature of music, experience, and God.

This is not only a missed opportunity; it also presents problems for the argument of the book as a whole. This is because, for the emphasis on an egalitarian approach to music – and on music’s human interest – *The Extravagance of Music* still echoes the hierarchies associated with traditional musicology and affords an exceptional status to western classical music. In the conclusion, for example, Brown suggests he is ‘less convinced that classical music can be put quite so easily on a par with the popular’, displaying a ‘greater reticence’ than Hopps.<sup>207</sup> This is consonant with Brown’s other work, where – although he ranges ‘from Bach to Schoenberg, from Bob Dylan to Led Zeppelin, from *Don Giovanni* to *Jerry Springer – The Opera*’, he suggests, ‘I am under no delusion that everything I discuss is of equal value.’<sup>208</sup> Although he recognises that ‘classical music is now a serious interest only among a declining minority; even so it is a significant minority, and the quality of the music can scarcely be denied.’<sup>209</sup> While *The Extravagance of Music* considers popular music, the authors clearly significantly diverge on questions of musical value, with Brown reiterating the hierarchical approach to music associated with Hoffmann and Hanslick, Schoenberg and Schenker. And, critically, because Hopps spends more time justifying his

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<sup>205</sup> Brown and Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, p. 292.

<sup>206</sup> Hopps, ‘Negative Capability’, p. 81, emphasis in original.

<sup>207</sup> Brown and Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, pp. 302 and 306.

<sup>208</sup> Brown, *God and Grace of Body*, p. 220.

<sup>209</sup> Brown, *God and Grace of Body*, p. 224.

project, the majority of the constructive work is written by Brown and influenced by his claims about which music is best.

There are also problems with their interrogation of music's 'human interest'. When Brown suggests that he thinks it unlikely that people routinely have transcendent and immanent experiences at the same time, it is unclear whose experiences he is drawing upon.<sup>210</sup> When Hopps discusses The Divine Comedy's 'The Eye of the Needle', we are invited into the world of 'the agnostic listener', but not into the world of anyone we could name, and not into a particular context for listening (the experience of a song will differ substantially if it is played in a hospital waiting room or in a friend's kitchen). As will be shown in chapter 4 and developed in chapter 6, there is a vast array of different experiences of music, which cannot be neatly summarised nor universalised. To suggest that any music – whether that of Anton Webern or Wham! – can afford certain types of religious experience is very hard to substantiate without reference to concrete examples. And yet there is very little attention given here to music as it emerges in time and place. What of the experience of listening to the person next to you in the pew quietly sing 'Bind us together, Lord'? What of the rich, and abundant interpretations and meanings people bring to hymns? What of the practical ways in which these experiences come into being? What of the experiences of real, named, ordinary people? If we are to suggest, contrary to Kramer, that music is both socially and culturally embedded *and* ineffable – that it is possible 'to have "situated" *religious* experiences' – it is necessary to examine music's social and cultural embeddedness, its situatedness.<sup>211</sup> If we do not – and if we still assert the transcendence of "the music itself" – we are left with a generalised account of musical ineffability, and the same implicit ontology and hierarchy as Begbie, as Hoffmann and Hanslick, and as Schoenberg and Schenker.

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<sup>210</sup> Brown and Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, p. 102.

<sup>211</sup> Brown and Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, p. 4, emphasis in original.

## - Shared Concerns

There is, however, a body of literature which rejects this ontology and hierarchy, recognising the theological generativity of new musicological ideas rather than their supposed reductionism. Wolterstorff, for example, observes:

If one believes that the arts come into their own when works of the arts are engaged as objects of disinterested attention, and if one further believes that works of the arts that reward that mode of engagement, and only such works, are socially other and transcendent, as are the activities of producing and contemplating such works, then one will not theorize philosophically about those other modes of engagement represented by memorial art, liturgical art, social protest art, work songs, and the like. To do would seem, well, like slumming it.<sup>212</sup>

This critique is directed at philosophers of art, who ‘have been highly articulate in theorizing about concerts of the sort that took place in Carnegie hall’, but ‘rarely have they theorized about the way of engaging music that took place in St Patrick’s Cathedral.’<sup>213</sup> But the problem extends further: ‘Those in our century who have tried to develop a Christian aesthetic have almost invariably taken for granted that art is for contemplation’, and this means all manner of other ways of engaging with music have been neglected.<sup>214</sup> Boyce-Tillman has similar objections and concerns: ‘Because of the musical taste of many leading European theologians [...] there is a tight interface between the Western classical music tradition and the Church, which offered employment to musicians for so much of its history.’<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art Rethought: The Social Practices of Art* (Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 33.

<sup>213</sup> Wolterstorff, *Art Rethought*, p. 2.

<sup>214</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action: Toward a Christian Aesthetic* (Eerdmans, 1997), p. 67.

<sup>215</sup> June Boyce-Tillman, *Experiencing Music - Restoring the Spiritual: Music as Well-being* (Peter Lang, 2016), p. 259.

Wolterstorff advocates for a study of music – among other arts – grounded in practice. He contends ‘that works of art are objects and instruments of action [...] inextricably embedded in the fabric of human intention.’<sup>216</sup> This leads to an expansive account of the arts: ‘The purposes of art are the purposes of life.’<sup>217</sup> And it leads to liturgical insight: ‘When we begin to think of art as instrument and object of action and to hold before our eyes the full sweep of the multitude and diversity of those actions, thus lifting ourselves above the parochialism of our institution of high art, we are also freed to consider afresh and without distortion the role of art in the liturgy of the church.’<sup>218</sup> For Wolterstorff:

the Christian must resist the claims of ultimacy which repeatedly erupt from our institution of high art. Art does not provide us with the meaning of human existence. The gospel of Jesus Christ does that. Art is not a way of rising toward God. It is meant instead to be in service of God. Art is not man’s glory. It displays man’s degradation as well as his dignity. The community of artists is not the new humanity. The community of Christ’s disciples is that. Art is not man’s liberating savior. Jesus Christ is that.<sup>219</sup>

This is not a purely theoretical point; it is ‘a call for justice.’<sup>220</sup>

My thesis in many ways extends Wolterstorff’s concerns, considering the role of music explicitly within the worship of the church, and making no apology for its practical nature. Our concerns are not entirely the same: Wolterstorff is more interested than I am in the work-concept, in describing how objects that come to be described as works of art still function as examples of practice.<sup>221</sup> Nonetheless, in providing such an extensive critique of

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<sup>216</sup> Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, p. 3.

<sup>217</sup> Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, p. 4.

<sup>218</sup> Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, pp. 183-84.

<sup>219</sup> Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, p. 196.

<sup>220</sup> Wolterstorff, *Art Rethought*, p. 323.

<sup>221</sup> See Nicholas Wolterstorff, ‘Toward an Ontology of Art Works’, *Noûs* 9.2 (1975), pp. 115–42, doi:10.2307/2214597.

the ‘*grand narrative*’ associated with the western ‘institution of high art’, Wolterstorff makes space for a project such as my own.<sup>222</sup>

Though markedly different from that of Wolterstorff, Boyce-Tillman and Heaney’s research also echoes new musicological claims. Boyce-Tillman displays an interest in ‘musical meaning’, ‘lived experience’, and ‘musicking activities’.<sup>223</sup> And Heaney contends that music is ‘a form of *theological* interpretation’, a means of doing theology.<sup>224</sup> She is clear: ‘Music is not a “transcendent language” above critical reasoning’; ‘We are all interpreting, in one way or another’.<sup>225</sup> Both approaches are, at least in part, autobiographical. Boyce-Tillman draws upon varied and extensive musical experiences in her account of music as a ‘tool for constructing meaning by asking questions, for remembering the past and setting up fresh imaginings of the future.’<sup>226</sup> Heaney’s primary interest is in the dialogue between theology and composition, drawing parallels between theologians (‘through the lens of *a question or a conundrum they dedicated their lives to unravelling*’) and ‘an original piece of music.’<sup>227</sup> Each chapter, in other words, is associated with one of Heaney’s compositions – it is necessary to both read and listen to her ideas.

There are many parallels between their research and my thesis, in their emphasis on practice, experience, and meaning. Boyce-Tillman, for example, observes the ‘multiple meanings that a single piece of music may have, that need to be respected and explored’, and notes that ‘musicking is a place of encounter, in which we can learn a great deal about group cohesion, risk taking, empathy and vulnerability.’<sup>228</sup> She is also interested in how

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<sup>222</sup> Wolterstorff, *Art Rethought*, p. 3, emphasis in original; Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, p. 24.

<sup>223</sup> Boyce-Tillman, *Experiencing Music*, p. 5.

<sup>224</sup> Heaney, *Suspended God*, p. 6, emphasis my own.

<sup>225</sup> Heaney, *Suspended God*, p. 8.

<sup>226</sup> Boyce-Tillman, *Experiencing Music*, p. 346.

<sup>227</sup> Heaney, *Suspended God*, p. 10, emphasis in original.

<sup>228</sup> Boyce-Tillman, *Experiencing Music*, pp. 169 and 178.

music can form communities which may be both spiritually significant and even ‘ecclesial’.<sup>229</sup> And Heaney suggests that songwriting may be theological, ‘In the measure that it objectifies, that is to say, exteriorizes, thematizes and makes present to the artist *and* those who listen to them the reality of religious conversion or other dimensions of our ongoing multiform conversion to the fullness of Christian living.’<sup>230</sup> While my interest is not primarily in composition, this claim could easily be applied to some of the other activities which comprise music in worship.

However, I have reservations about Boyce-Tillman’s approach to spirituality ‘as the ability to transport the audience to a different time/space dimension’.<sup>231</sup> While I wish to emphasise ‘the transformative possibilities of music in a variety of contexts’ (as seen in the work of Kassabian and DeNora) I am wary of connecting these possibilities with ‘the spiritual’ without much greater specificity and an emphasis on discernment – something that I expand upon in some detail in chapter 6.<sup>232</sup> My account of music and knowledge in chapter 7 also differs from that of Heaney, while the thesis as a whole focuses on a range of musical practices, very few of which are compositional. And, as a final difference, the experiences discussed in this thesis are rarely my own; rather, they are drawn primarily from fieldwork, in which I attended to the experiences of a range of other people.

In spite of these differences, however, both Boyce-Tillman and Heaney emphasise – with Wolterstorff – that it is both necessary and productive to study music practically in a theological context; that attention to granular musical practice can yield significant theological insight. Although it is easy to cede to practised and familiar ways of thinking about music, and to engage with theories that simplify the complexities of human music-

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<sup>229</sup> Boyce-Tillman, *Experiencing Music*, p. 334.

<sup>230</sup> Heaney, *Suspended God*, p. 112, emphasis in original.

<sup>231</sup> Boyce-Tillman, *Women in Christian Music*, p. 54.

<sup>232</sup> Boyce-Tillman, *Experiencing Music*, p. 346.

making, they show that there is much that we can say if we adopt a new musicological approach. I will expand on this approach in chapter 3, detailing an ontology of music derived from new musicological concerns. Before I do so, however, it is necessary to explore a few other ways of talking about music, and specifically music in worship.

## Approaches to Music in Worship

### - Music, Liturgy, Praise, and Worship

Music is often treated in broader accounts of liturgy and worship, and held up as an exemplar of praise. David Ford and Daniel Hardy assert that ‘At the heart of ordinary Christian life is a recognition of the love of God.’<sup>233</sup> They go on to suggest, ‘Praise is therefore an attempt to cope with the abundance of God’s love.’<sup>234</sup> While they are largely concerned with word and sacrament, they pay particular attention to singing:

Singing is worth special comment as an instrument of praise. What does it do with the crucial Christian medium of words? It does with them what praise aims to do with the whole of reality: it takes them up into a transformed, heightened expression, yet without at all taking away their ordinary meaning. Language itself is transcended and its delights and power are intensified, and at the same time those who join in are bound together more strongly. So singing is a model of the way praise can take up ordinary life and transpose it to a higher level without losing what is good in other levels. The social power of music in general (for good or ill) is well known, and it moves at levels and in ways that nothing else can. It can also combine discipline and precision with great liberation of body, feeling and imagination, beautifully exemplifying the “sober drunkenness” which the early Church saw as a true mark of being “in the Spirit”.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> David Ford and Daniel Hardy, *Living in Praise: Worshipping and Knowing God* (Baker Academic, 2005), p. 2.

<sup>234</sup> Ford and Hardy, *Living in Praise*, p. 2.

<sup>235</sup> Ford and Hardy, *Living in Praise*, p. 19.

There are questions to be asked about this definition – the assumption, say, that music operates at a ‘higher level’ than language; that music transcends language even. It is possible to acknowledge the particularities of music without placing it in a hierarchical relationship with other human practices. I will also suggest in chapter 5 that this is an idealised account of music in worship, one which does not recognise the complexities of the practice as it emerges in time and place.<sup>236</sup> However, the fundamental points given here – and the most significant for the purposes of this chapter – are that music is an ‘instrument’ of praise, grounded in material reality, powerfully affective, and possessing great social potential. Ford and Hardy make clear that ‘[Jesus] is our praise because he is himself to be praised and is identified with God in what he does and is; because he embodies the ultimate sacrifice of praise to God; and because he is ours, in solidarity and mutuality with us.’<sup>237</sup>

Other accounts place greater emphasis on the corporate, formative, and theological capacities of music in worship. Geoffrey Wainwright, for example, suggests:

Christian worship has always meant a participatory entrance into Christ’s self-offering to the Father and correlatively being filled with the divine life. The Christian liturgy appears once more as the symbolic focus of communion with God [...] Our communion with God moulds us into the persons God intends us to be in his eschatological purpose. It also clarifies our vision concerning the place of our world in God’s intention and so helps us to perform our everyday work upon the material creation comfortably within God’s purpose.<sup>238</sup>

This means ‘Singing is at home in the liturgy’ because it ‘allows the synchronization of mental and physical movement.’<sup>239</sup> Music in worship has a didactic function – clarifying its participants’ theological visions – and a participatory one, enabling congregants to

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<sup>236</sup> See pp. 175-76.

<sup>237</sup> Ford and Hardy, *Living in Praise*, p. 172.

<sup>238</sup> Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life: A Systematic Theology* (Epworth Press, 1980), pp. 23-26.

<sup>239</sup> Wainwright, *Doxology*, p. 199.

participate in the divine life. Music in worship is also, for Wainwright, inherently corporate and inclusive. He suggests that ‘hymns and music have often been the form in which ecclesiastical and cultural traditions have come to their most *popular* characteristic expression.’<sup>240</sup> And he claims that music both ‘readily unites [...] members of a single social community’ and is ‘a medium in which mutual borrowings easily take place across ecclesiastical and cultural frontiers.’<sup>241</sup> Music ‘has a strong thrust towards universality’, and is therefore peculiarly suited to building community.<sup>242</sup>

In a related move, music in worship is also identified as a means of sanctification – insofar as it bears the hallmarks of Tom Greggs’ definition: ‘the nonprioritization of the self (even the quest for the holy life) which is brought about by the salvific event of the Holy Spirit’s act: by the grace of God, in place of a life ordered towards the self comes a life ordered towards God and the world.’<sup>243</sup> Greggs’s ‘twofold horizontal and vertical dimensions of corporate priestly life’ – the mediation ‘between God and humanity’ and between ‘humanity and humanity-creation’ – are inseparable: it is ‘[b]y loving on the horizontal axis’ that ‘the creature participates in the divine loving of creation which accords with the constancy of the divine being.’<sup>244</sup> And singing is afforded particular prominence within this relationship, as ‘an expressive variation of an orientation on God (joining in the unending hymn of praise in heaven) and on the other around us (singing in harmony and variation with those others in the congregation).’<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Wainwright, *Doxology*, p. 215, emphasis in original.

<sup>241</sup> Wainwright, *Doxology*, p. 215.

<sup>242</sup> Wainwright, *Doxology*, p. 215.

<sup>243</sup> Tom Greggs, *Dogmatic Ecclesiology, Volume One: The Priestly Catholicity of the Church* (Baker Academic), p. 368.

<sup>244</sup> Greggs, *Dogmatic Ecclesiology*, p. 405.

<sup>245</sup> Greggs, *Dogmatic Ecclesiology*, p. 326, emphasis removed from original.

Brian Wren, writing in a more sustained manner on music in worship, also notes the close relationship between congregational singing and community. He suggests: ‘Congregational song is by nature corporate, corporeal, and inclusive’, and, ideally, it is also ‘creedal, ecclesial, inspirational, and evangelical.’<sup>246</sup> Wren is interested, too, in the relationship between music and text, and the way that music can help make texts more memorable: ‘the words of familiar songs help shape a congregation’s theology, and music summons them in time of need.’<sup>247</sup> Going further, he suggests:

besides giving memorable, liturgical expression to theological themes elaborated more systematically elsewhere, the best hymns act as worthy partners to other theological work by expressing Christian faith in metaphor, epigram, and descriptive imagery which combine impact with economy, and whose metaphors may sometimes be cognitive, expanding our knowledge in ways inaccessible to reasoned exposition.<sup>248</sup>

Hymns and songs, then, in some way *do theology*.

Don Saliers’ *Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine* has some shared concerns with the accounts above, but is less interested in hymn-singing and more interested in ‘the acoustic shape of liturgical action’, or in how ‘the liturgy is intrinsically musical.’<sup>249</sup> Music, in this account, is formational:

The acoustical properties and musical characteristics of prayers, readings, and other verbal forms are part of what the community is formed by. The sounds of worship often carry the emotional power and the memory of association when the actual words or texts cannot be remembered.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Brian A. Wren, *Praying Twice: The Music and Words of Congregational Song* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), p. 84.

<sup>247</sup> Wren, *Praying Twice*, p. 91.

<sup>248</sup> Wren, *Praying Twice*, p. 377.

<sup>249</sup> Don E. Saliers, *Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine* (Abingdon, 1994), pp. 160 and 161.

<sup>250</sup> Saliers, *Worship as Theology*, p. 161.

For this reason, ‘While sung theology is not intended as conceptual or analytic, it can nonetheless make profound contributions to our theological experience and understanding.’<sup>251</sup> Saliers is particularly interested in ‘the “aesthetics” of the liturgy’, since ‘human beings are formed religiously, liturgically, and aesthetically at the same time.’<sup>252</sup> He suggests that music has a particular aesthetic and theological function: it ‘can approach the inexpressible – awakening the deeper dimensions of what is most valuable and real, and opening the soul itself.’<sup>253</sup> This idea must be tempered by the work of Brown, who reminds us that aesthetics and formation are not always linearly related: ‘the need for enjoyment’ and ‘the need for discernment’ can be in conflict, rather than tandem.<sup>254</sup> However, it is clear that, for Saliers, music has both an experiential and formational function, and that the two are closely linked.

According to these accounts, music in worship is a means of praise and sanctification; it forms individuals and communities; and it does theological work. Many of these themes will emerge in my thesis. I will consider the relationship between music and community in chapter 5; affective experiences of music in worship in chapter 6; and the relationship between music in worship, formation, and theology in chapter 7. However, my account of each of these themes will look different from those of Ford and Hardy, Greggs, Wainwright, Wren, and Saliers. For a start, I am interested in a range of musical practices beyond singing, and a range of musical experiences beyond “sober drunkenness”. There are all manner of varied activities and complex experiences that comprise music in worship which are not acknowledged here, and of which I seek to give theological account. And, given the musicological ideas we have engaged with so far, I am concerned about Saliers’

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<sup>251</sup> Don E. Saliers, *Music and Theology* (Abingdon Press, 2010), p. 39.

<sup>252</sup> Saliers, *Worship as Theology*, pp. 194 and 195.

<sup>253</sup> Saliers, *Music and Theology*, p. 54.

<sup>254</sup> Frank Burch Brown, ‘Enjoyment and Discernment in the Music of Worship’, *Theology Today* 58.3 (2001), pp. 342-58 (p. 343), doi:10.1177/004057360105800306.

claim that ‘music is the language of the soul made audible’, or Wainwright’s suggestion that music ‘has a strong thrust towards universality’.<sup>255</sup> I am not advocating for complete cultural relativism, such that music in worship across different cultures cannot be in any way considered together – in fact, I will defend why it makes sense to speak of “music” in a unified sense in chapter 3. However, it is important to ask what is at stake when we describe certain practices as natural, instinctive, or universal. Mike Higton, commenting on the idea that we can hold ‘a universal gospel free from cultural particularity’, suggests: ‘That idea is only possible for someone who can think of his own ideas and assumptions as universal; it is, in other words, itself entangled with the colonial imagination.’<sup>256</sup> While Wainwright engages with the relationship between ‘cultural relativism’ and ‘common humanity’, there is space for much greater specificity in his account: how is it that music comes to be shared across cultures?<sup>257</sup> What mechanisms, assumptions, and power dynamics are at play? What sort of community is brought together by and enacted through music? These questions, I suggest in chapter 5, are not secondary to music in worship’s corporate, affective, and formational nature, but central to them.

Finally, if there are limitations in the work of Ford and Hardy, Greggs, Wainwright, Saliers, and Wren, there are more active problems in the work of Marva Dawn, Louis Weil, and Gordon Graham, each of whom draws an explicitly hierarchical relationship between different styles of music in worship. Dawn, for example, describes contemporary forms of music in worship as ‘candy’ which will not allow us ‘to grow strong and healthy’.<sup>258</sup> Weil’s theology of worship employs the same analogy, although this time aimed at music with

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<sup>255</sup> Don E. Saliers, ‘Sacred Sound’, in *God’s Grandeur: The Arts and Imagination in Theology*, ed. by David Robinson (Orbis Books, 2007), pp. 53-58 (p. 55), emphasis removed from original; Wainwright, *Doxology*, p. 215.

<sup>256</sup> Mike Higton, *The Life of Christian Doctrine* (Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2020), p. 34.

<sup>257</sup> Wainwright, *Doxology*, p. 358.

<sup>258</sup> Marva J. Dawn, *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for the Turn-of-the-Century Culture* (Eerdmans, 1995), p. 167.

‘sentimental’ harmonies.<sup>259</sup> He is clear: ‘inferior music is unworthy of Christian prayer.’<sup>260</sup> While Graham suggests that, in these debates, ‘The key issue is not musical style but ambition’, even this betrays a narrow account of which music is easy, and for whom.<sup>261</sup> While we cannot neatly map traditional western hymns onto western classical music, and modern songs onto popular music – in fact it is difficult to draw sharp lines between traditional and modern, or hymns and songs at all – it is worth noting the way in which this rhetoric matches that of Adorno and MacMillan. As articulated in the 1992 Church of England report into church music: ‘It would constitute a return to the worst of the Dark Ages if the cathedral musical tradition were lost.’<sup>262</sup> Implicit here is more than a desire to preserve a worshipping tradition; it is a claim about the relationship between western classical music, rationality, enlightenment, and reason. None of this is to suggest that comparison is always unacceptable, or that music cannot be meaningfully evaluated or assessed; much of chapter 6 is concerned with discernment. But it is to observe just how easily the troubling hierarchies of Hoffmann and Hanslick, Schenker and Schoenberg echo through the literature on music in worship.

## - Ethnography

Unsurprisingly, different emphases are found in ethnographic accounts of music in worship. These draw from a range of disciplinary perspectives and often sit between disciplinary boundaries. As Monique Ingalls comments, in the edited collection *The Spirit of Praise: Music and Worship in Global Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity*, ‘Theoretical

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<sup>259</sup> Louis Weil, *A Theology of Worship* (Cowley Publications, 2002), p. 90.

<sup>260</sup> Weil, *Theology of Worship*, p. 88.

<sup>261</sup> Gordon Graham, ‘The Worship of God and the Quest of the Spirit: “Contemporary” versus “Traditional” church music’, in *God’s Song and Music’s Meaning*, ed. by James Hawkey, Ben Quash and Vernon White, pp. 81-93 (p. 92).

<sup>262</sup> Church of England, *In Tune with Heaven: The Report of the Archbishop’s Commission on Church Music* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1992), p. 217.

models drawn from contemporary theology, cultural theory, media studies, and music studies each find a place here, as do methodological approaches including cultural history, media studies analysis, ethnographic participant observation, and theological reflection.<sup>263</sup> Conversely, Mark Porter observes that ‘the study of congregational music has, for various reasons, often been pushed towards the margins of the various disciplines that it inhabits.’<sup>264</sup> At least in part due to this variety and porousness, such studies contain valuable insights for a theological discussion of music in worship, and act as a useful antidote to some of the generalising, universalising, and hierarchising tendencies observed in the previous section.

Many ethnographic studies are concerned with the relationship between music and community, and often in ways that complexify the narratives encountered above. Barbara Rose Lange and Gordon Adnams, for example, examine the negotiation of style and repertoire in a Hungarian Pentecostal church and a Canadian Evangelical church respectively. Lange observes that ‘Many converts in Hungary [...] were attracted to the religion first by its songs’, but that work has been done to ‘accommodate [...] contrasting repertoires’ between Romani and Magyar believers.<sup>265</sup> She suggests that ‘[m]usical eclecticism’ has been a valuable – and ‘relatively straightforward’ – way for the Isten Gyülekezet to incorporate believers of a range of ages and ethnic backgrounds. For Adnams, however, who is also interested in a church which combines different repertoires, incorporation of different styles of music can be symptomatic of conflict, not eclecticism:

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<sup>263</sup> Monique M. Ingalls, ‘Introduction: Interconnection, Interface, and Identification in Pentecostal/Charismatic Music and Worship’, in *The Spirit of Praise: Music and Worship in Global Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity*, ed. by Monique M. Ingalls and Amos Yong (Penn State University Press, 2015), pp. 1-15 (p. 9).

<sup>264</sup> Mark Porter, ‘The Developing Field of Christian Congregational Music Studies’, *Ecclesial Practices* 1.2 (2014), pp. 149-66 (p. 150), doi: 10.1163/22144471-00102004.

<sup>265</sup> Barbara Rose Lange, *Holy Brotherhood: Romani Music in a Hungarian Pentecostal Church* (Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 150.

We can no longer assume that congregational singing is uniformly valued or is in practise a straightforward matter of singing our faith together. I have argued that, in a multigenerational church that produces a blended service, conflicting authenticities are encountered every Sunday.<sup>266</sup>

The relationship between music and community is also explored by Jacqueline DjeDje and Porter, whose research examines the complex interactions between leaders and congregants. DjeDje, for example, looks at ‘the change and differentiation in the adoption of gospel music and the impact it has made on three different Catholic churches in south central Los Angeles.’<sup>267</sup> She suggests, ‘Many attributed the initial decision to change to Vatican II’, while ‘Others believed that innovations have occurred because black people have been given positions of authority to make changes possible.’<sup>268</sup> She concludes: ‘The aesthetic preference of the audience appears to be the deciding factor as to what should and should not be included, thus giving rise to continuous change and differentiation or to the maintenance of tradition.’<sup>269</sup> Ingalls also suggests – although in a different context – that ‘scholars must not gloss over the agency of local individuals and contexts to shape the music for their own purposes.’<sup>270</sup>

Along similar lines, Porter’s *Contemporary Worship Music and Everyday Musical Lives* examines the relationship between the general ‘musical lives’ of congregants at St Aldates Church, Oxford, and their ‘experiences of church music’, allowing him to identify ‘a series of gaps between church discourse around music and lived experience.’<sup>271</sup> In this case,

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<sup>266</sup> Gordon Adnams, ‘The Experience of Congregational Singing: An Ethno-Phenomenological Approach’ (unpublished doctoral thesis: University of Alberta, 2008) <<https://doi.org/10.7939/r3-54x2-1135>> [accessed 21 June 2025], p. 229.

<sup>267</sup> J. Cogdell DjeDje, ‘Change and Differentiation: The Adoption of Black American Gospel Music in the Catholic Church’, *Ethnomusicology* 30.2 (1986), pp. 223-52 (p. 223), doi:10.2307/851995.

<sup>268</sup> DjeDje, ‘Change and Differentiation’, p. 236.

<sup>269</sup> DjeDje, ‘Change and Differentiation’, p. 244.

<sup>270</sup> Ingalls, *Singing the Congregation*, p. 218.

<sup>271</sup> Mark James Porter, *Contemporary Worship Music and Everyday Musical Lives* (Routledge, 2017), pp. 9 and 151.

theological assumptions about music in worship – assumptions espoused by those in positions of ecclesial leadership – are disrupted by attention to ordinary experience. This is consonant with Mary McGann’s broader claim: ‘Normative statements about the church’s worship – important as they are for the church’s sense of unity and the regulation of its practice – cannot carry the full burden of articulating the church’s liturgical encounter with the living God.’<sup>272</sup> To talk of music in worship as it is experienced, then, is to talk of something pluriform and variegated; it is to talk of how one person’s account might differ profoundly from that of the person next to them in the pew, and from that of the person behind the altar.

Gregory Barz and Deborah Berhó also complexify simplistic narratives around music and community as they examine the relationship between hymnody and colonialism. Among other insights, Barz’s study of Tanzanian *kwaya* music observes how musicians negotiate the legacy of colonial hymnody. He suggests, ‘Today, Tanzanian *kwaya* music, while continuing to embrace the music and texts of the original evangelical encounter, places gospel hymnody in a prominent, new socio-political context.’<sup>273</sup> Conversely, Berhó’s ‘Latino Protestant Congregational project’ – a study of Spanish-speaking Latino evangelical churches in Oregon – takes issue with the narrative that the music of these churches is ‘of foreign extraction, a form of neocolonialism’.<sup>274</sup> She concludes instead that, for the twenty-five churches in her study, ‘bi-musicality is the norm.’<sup>275</sup> It is worth noting Berhó’s textual focus.<sup>276</sup> As Glenn Packiam observes, song texts are not straightforward objects of analysis

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<sup>272</sup> Mary E. McGann, *A Precious Fountain: Music in the Worship of an African American Catholic Community* (Liturgical Press, 2004), p. xvi.

<sup>273</sup> Gregory Barz, *Performing Religion: Negotiating Past and Present in Kwaya Music of Tanzania* (Rodopi, 2003), p. 22.

<sup>274</sup> Deborah L. Berhó, ‘An “Echo in the Soul”: Worship Music in Evangelical Spanish-Language Latino Churches of Oregon’, *Ecclesial Practices* 7.2 (2020), pp. 203-25 (p. 204), doi:10.1163/22144471-BJA10019.

<sup>275</sup> Berhó, ‘Echo in the Soul’, pp. 213 and 203.

<sup>276</sup> Berhó, ‘Echo in the Soul’, p. 213.

– lyrics which are ‘poor in their eschatological quality’, for example, may nonetheless be implicated in profound ‘experiences of hope’.<sup>277</sup> There is good reason, then, to resist an emphasis on text in ethnographic studies of worshipping communities. Nonetheless, Berhó’s research is still insightful, emphasising that when we talk about community, we must talk, too, of power, of history, and of context.

I will come back to some of these themes later in the thesis – particularly the complexity and variegation of musical experience and meaning, as well as the relationship between music and colonialism. For now, however, it is possible to observe two uses of these studies. First, these studies act as a counterweight to the generalisations observed above, showing how the claim that music overcomes boundaries and builds community must be interrogated and qualified. Secondly, these studies may be an active conversation partner in a theological account of music in worship. The nature of this conversation is, of course, contested. For McGann, to describe the experience of prayer and praise is necessarily to speak theologically: the narrative portions of *A Precious Fountain: Music in the Worship of an African American Catholic Church*, she suggests, convey ‘the affective vocabulary of [...] discipleship and commitment’, which is itself ‘theological discourse’.<sup>278</sup> In an earlier book, she suggests that music can be meaningfully explored both ‘*as worship* and *as theology*’ – and she does so ‘through the focused study of music in the ritual performance of particular communities’.<sup>279</sup> For Packiam, however, drawing upon the methodology of Theological Action Research and ‘the four voices of theology’, it is ‘the normative and formal voices’ which ‘interrogate the espoused and operant voices’.<sup>280</sup> And Lester Ruth encourages greater

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<sup>277</sup> Glenn Packiam, *Worship and the World to Come: Exploring Christian Hope in Contemporary Worship* (IVP Academic, 2020), p. 177.

<sup>278</sup> McGann, *Precious Fountain*, p. 259.

<sup>279</sup> Mary E. McGann, *Exploring Music as Worship and Theology: Research in Liturgical Practice* (Liturgical Press, 2002), p. 11, emphasis in original.

<sup>280</sup> Helen Cameron, *Talking about God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology* (SCM Press, 2010), p. 2; Packiam, *Worship and the World to Come*, p. 24.

caution to the field as a whole, claiming that narratives about contemporary praise and worship music can be overly quick to ‘theologically assess’, moving too swiftly from particular instantiations of music to broader theological claims.<sup>281</sup> This is symptomatic of a broader problem in the field: ‘Many meta-level questions [...] have yet to be fully interrogated, with relatively little contestation having occurred up to this point over issues such as methodology.’<sup>282</sup> Nevertheless, for all the other claims to be made about ethnography and theology, the accounts I have explored in this chapter at the very least allow us to articulate with greater accuracy the object of our discussion – music in worship as it is instantiated and experienced – before we make theological claims about it.

Later in this thesis – in chapter 4 – I will describe my own fieldwork, its rationale, and the role I perceive it to play in a broader theological account of music in worship. I conducted fieldwork myself because the area has not been exhausted by these studies. Porter notes that ‘Research is relatively unevenly geographically distributed’ – betraying a bias towards American (as well as pentecostal/charismatic) church practice.<sup>283</sup> And, as I will expand in chapter 4, research sites are often chosen for their music, which necessarily foregrounds its significance in the life of the church. But, in conducting fieldwork, I also participate in this broad field of ethnographic research into music in worship and draw from many of its insights. While these accounts may not be methodologically sufficient in a theological account of music in worship, they take seriously questions of discourse, experience, and cultural context, and seek to closely examine what music in worship *is*, in real places and human lives. These accounts have much to offer, in conversation with musicology and

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<sup>281</sup> Lester Ruth, ‘Methodological Insights for the Historiography of Contemporary Praise & Worship’, in *Essays on the History of Contemporary Praise and Worship*, ed. by Lester Ruth (Pickwick Publications, 2020), pp. 176-92 (p. 190).

<sup>282</sup> Porter, ‘Developing Field’, p. 166.

<sup>283</sup> Porter, ‘Developing Field’, p. 166.

theology – and with the themes raised by Ford and Hardy, Greggs, Wainwright, Wren, and Saliers – to a discussion of the many activities that comprise music in worship.

## **Conclusion**

It is not easy to talk about music. In this chapter, I have sought not to downplay the difficulties of speaking about music, but instead to emphasise the manifold complexities of our attempts to do so. I have observed here not only the risks of universalism and generalisation, of value-judgements and comparisons, but also of common analytical methods and the implicit ontologies with which they are associated. I have problematised some of the most prominent theological voices on music, as well as some prevailing narratives surrounding music, worship, and liturgy. And, while I have pointed to some constructive opportunities, suggesting that attention to ordinary practice can yield significant insight and evade some of these risks, this suggestion in turn raises all manner of further methodological questions: which types of ordinary practice should we prioritise? What is methodologically appropriate or suitable as we relate ordinary practice to theological claims? How, if we pay attention to ordinary practice, can we speak of *music in worship* in any unified sense at all? It is to these questions that I will now turn, first detailing the ontology of music underpinning the constructive work that follows.

### 3 – Musical Theory

Do we really know what music is? Is the concept self-evident?<sup>1</sup>

#### Defining Music

Defining “music” may at first seem an ‘irrelevant’, ‘abstract’, or ‘arcane’ task.<sup>2</sup> Music is widely experienced – ‘our days are filled with listening’ – and discourse around music, meaning, pleasure, and taste abound in academic, social, and ecclesial settings.<sup>3</sup> However, as should have been made clear in the previous chapter, the ontology of music is highly contested. It is contested across disciplines: the disenchanting claims of many contemporary musicologists conflicting with theological accounts of music which move quickly to transcendence. It is contested within disciplines across time: the nineteenth and early twentieth-century account of western art music as the supreme Romantic art, autonomous and otherworldly, critiqued by the methodological claims of the new musicologists. And it is contested within disciplines across contemporaries: in the objections raised by Currie to new musicology, say, or in the polarised debates between Begbie, Brown, and Hopps. These contestations affirm Stephen Davies’ suggestion that, when it comes to music, it is ‘far from obvious that we all coincide in or should rely on our [...] intuitions [...] or that we are always aware of their implications.’<sup>4</sup> While we might think we already know what we mean when we talk of “music”, it is necessary to be specific in our usage of the term.

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<sup>1</sup> Nattiez, *Music and Discourse*, p. 41.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Davies, ‘Works of Music: Approaches to the Ontology of Music from Analytic Philosophy’, *Music Research Annual* 1.1 (2020) <<https://musicresearchannual.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/daviese28094works-of-music.pdf>> [accessed 8 September 2025], pp. 1-19 (p. 5).

<sup>3</sup> Kassabian, *Ubiquitous Listening*, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> Davies, ‘Works of Music’, p. 5.

This chapter draws on contributions from new musicology, ethnomusicology, and philosophy to define an ontological framework for music, from which it will be possible to explore its role in worship. I will state here the theoretical claims that underpin chapters 5-7, and demonstrate why such claims are incompatible with some of the theologically common ways of speaking about music that we have explored in chapter 2. This ontological work will be partial and limited – the claims I make here will seem abstruse without the rest of the thesis, where they will be expanded, deepened, and concretised. And it would obviously not be possible to give account of all understandings and experiences of music across time and place. However, it is necessary to stipulate some ontological claims, and set some theoretical parameters, before I can begin constructive work. The core ideas of this chapter are separated into three areas: music as mediation, music as assemblage, and music as practice.

### **Music and Musics**

First, however, it is necessary to defend the idea that we can, and even should, speak of “music” at all. This is to make the bold claim that the ontological principles I am giving in this chapter should apply to church music, club music, shopping centre music, folk music, classical music, popular music, improvised music, notated music, and to orally transmitted music. And, even more, these principles should apply *equally* to all these types of music. If they do not, then I will not really have given an account of music. This is not to suggest that music is a “universal language”, nor a hegemonic unity erasing all difference. It is not to reject wholesale McClary’s paradigmatic expression of new musicology: ‘I am no longer sure what MUSIC is.’<sup>5</sup> It is not to say that dealing with music in particularity might not be theoretically and practically important, both in this thesis and elsewhere. And it is not in

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<sup>5</sup> McClary, *Feminine Endings*, p. 19.

any sense to suggest that I will give a *full* account of music. It is rather to defend the suggestion that in some sense, and with a great deal of care, it is possible, and even in some sense necessary, to speak of “music”, and from there explore its place in worship.

This claim might seem either banal, or dangerously universalising. On one hand, ‘Music making appears to be a universal phenomenon’, even if it takes different forms in different contexts.<sup>6</sup> On the other, as Ian Cross notes, much ethnomusicological research ‘would replace music with musics, holding that musics are music only in their cultural contexts.’<sup>7</sup> Ethnomusicology ‘unveil[s] a multiplicity of musical ontologies, some or most of which may be mutually irreconcilable: hence a multiplicity of “musics.”’<sup>8</sup> This suggestion – that we should replace ‘music’ with ‘musics’ – is in many ways a reaction against comparative musicology, and a reaction against the idea that different expressions of music can be meaningfully examined as developments of one another. To speak of a common ontology, in this line of thinking, is to flatten difference and impose norms. And the effort to replace ‘music’ with ‘musics’ is also a recognition of the fact that ‘the word *music* does not occur in many [...] languages’, even if the presence of ‘organized sound with a (silent) choreographic supplement [...] is a defining feature of most human societies.’<sup>9</sup> As Jean-Jacques Nattiez asserts, ‘It is *we* – ethnomusicologists and musicologists – who by means of the concept “music” bind together facts that other cultures keep separate.’<sup>10</sup>

There are three reasons why, however, I am concerned with a common ontology of music. The first is that my interests are theological: ethnomusicologists do not have to contend

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<sup>6</sup> V. Kofi Agawu, *The African Imagination in Music* (Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 27.

<sup>7</sup> Ian Cross, ‘Music and Biocultural Evolution’, in *Cultural Study of Music*, ed. by Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert and Richard Middleton pp. 17-27 (p. 17).

<sup>8</sup> Cross, ‘Music and Biocultural Evolution’, p. 17.

<sup>9</sup> Agawu, *African Imagination in Music*, p. 27, emphasis in original. Agawu’s focus here is on indigenous African languages.

<sup>10</sup> Nattiez, *Music and Discourse*, p. 59, emphasis in original.

with the all-encompassing instruction of the first verse of Psalm 96, ‘O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord all the earth’, or with universal injunction of Psalm 150 to use instruments to praise the Lord, or with the idea that the body of Christ, across time and place, is engaged in a meaningfully common activity of worship. This is not to suggest that all singing, or playing instruments, is the same, emerges from the same practices, or occupies the same cultural meanings. It is rather to suggest that theology may have more at stake than ethnomusicology in asserting some commonality between practices of ‘organized sound with a (silent) choreographic supplement’, even if it is simply that they are all used in worship. The second reason is that a common ontology does not preclude discussion of music as concrete, grounded, human, and particular – so long as the common ontology takes this concreteness as its premise. The suggestion that music emerges in time and place is consonant with discussion of musical diversity. And the third reason will require greater explanation, a return to some of the interlocutors of chapter 2, and a closer examination of the history to which ethnomusicology responds. I hope to demonstrate here that talk of ‘musics’, however necessary and important in many contexts, can facilitate a form of ontological exceptionalism which is just as, if not more, dangerous than talk of ‘music’.

To explore the idea of ontological exceptionalism, it is worth returning to Kivy, and his account of ritual and concert hall music:

The music we listen to in the concert hall is, however, related to the music of our rituals. It grew out of those musics, and is, as it were, an aesthetic distillation. It contains, in stylized form, evocations of them: the dance, the march, the hymn, the dirge, and so on. As such, it has very deep reverberations in us.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Kivy, *Fine Art*, pp. 25-26.

As discussed in the previous chapter, for Kivy, concert hall music is purer, and more refined, than the ritual music from which it emerges and which it supersedes. In many ways, this sort of claim demonstrates the dangers of musical comparison: for Kivy, it is legitimate to compare different types of music, and it is legitimate, from there, to assert the superiority of western art music. It is natural to conclude that the only solution to this problematic, and entrenched, line of hierarchical thinking is to handle different musics individually.

But what is significant for this chapter is the question of musical ontology. This is because, while it is not immediately clear whether Kivy would suggest that ‘ritual music’ and ‘spectator music’ have a shared ontology – it would be possible to argue the point either way from the notion of ‘aesthetic distillation’ – in practice, he treats ‘spectator music’ as entirely ontologically distinct; ‘absolute music’ is a singular case. In *Music Alone*, for example, Kivy asserts that he is interested only in the ‘pure, instrumental music tradition in the West.’<sup>12</sup> His definition of this music is striking:

I cannot state, in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, or anything like that, what qualifies as a work of pure music or what I call music alone. But I can identify such works [...] by appealing to the core of the instrumental repertoire, agreed upon by the musical community at large to be the paradigms of contentless instrumental music[.]<sup>13</sup>

Putting to one side the suggestion that he speaks for the ‘musical community at large’, this is an acknowledgement that ‘pure music’ – as he terms it – is discursively formed and socially bounded. Yet with no external challenge, no other musical test cases, and no sense of music conceived more broadly, he has freedom to move within the internal contradictions of ‘absolute music’, and to deal with it as a singular case. This allows him,

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<sup>12</sup> Kivy, *Music Alone*, p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> Kivy, *Music Alone*, p. 29.

for example, to suggest that ‘some musical works are profound’ even while acknowledging that he cannot ‘provide any rational grounds for my thinking it’.<sup>14</sup> It allows him, in defence of Platonism in music, to suggest that Wagner’s music drama *Tristan und Isolde* might have been ‘discovered’ rather than created, with no concern for whether Ian Dury and the Blockheads’ ‘Don’t Ask Me’ has a Platonic archetype as well.<sup>15</sup> And it allows him, as I noted in chapter 2, to suggest that ‘absolute music’ is ‘caviar to the general’, without considering whether his claims could be applied to, or critiqued by, other expressions of music.<sup>16</sup> This is siloed thinking and ontological exceptionalism.

Such isolationism is presented more explicitly by Carl Dahlhaus, in his essay ‘Music – or Musics?’ – which specifically addresses the legitimacy of talking about music in the singular. He suggests that the distinction between “musical” and “extra-musical” is a largely European phenomenon, and this poses difficulties for meaningful discussion of music.<sup>17</sup> The two ‘unfortunate’ options to this problem are: ‘either to reinterpret and expand the European concept of music to the point of alienating it from its origins, or to exclude the sonic creations of a number of non-European cultures from the history of music.’<sup>18</sup> He concludes that the concept of music may still have currency, but only if it represents ‘the principle of respecting untranscendable difference’.<sup>19</sup> While this conclusion seems reasonable in the light of his two options, he is operating with a false dichotomy. His two options assume that a European conception of music, which ‘in a strict sense, dates only from the eighteenth century’, is immutable – that it would be impossible to challenge, or even expand upon, a historically located philosophy of music without irreparable

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<sup>14</sup> Kivy, *Music Alone*, p. 218.

<sup>15</sup> Ian Dury and the Blockheads, ‘Don’t Ask Me’, from *Do It Yourself* (Stiff Records, 1979).

<sup>16</sup> Kivy, *Music Alone*, p. 201.

<sup>17</sup> Carl Dahlhaus, ‘Music – or Musics?’, in *Source Readings in Music History*, revised edn., ed. by W. Oliver Strunk (Norton, 1998), pp. 1509-14 (p. 1511).

<sup>18</sup> Dahlhaus, ‘Music – or Musics?’, p. 1511.

<sup>19</sup> Dahlhaus, ‘Music – or Musics?’, p. 1514.

separation from the music it describes.<sup>20</sup> While Dahlhaus is rightly concerned about uncritically applying a western account of music to non-western musics – an act which ‘crudely distorts non-European musical reality’ – he assumes that diverse, and sometimes conflicting, ideas must result in alienation and exclusion, rather than dialogue and exchange.<sup>21</sup> Why could a different philosophy of music not help to shed further light on the origins of eighteenth-century European music? Why must this type of music be shielded not just from criticism, but also from the sheer fact of difference? Dahlhaus may be attempting to allow non-western musics to be understood and appreciated in their own right, but, in reality, he elevates a historically specific, European conception of music (and specifically western art music) beyond all critique.

In fact, as Kofi Agawu demonstrates, difference is not necessarily more ethically neutral than comparison. Differences are ‘propped up by other textual constructions and motivated in ways that are not (necessarily) immediately apparent.’<sup>22</sup> As he expands:

there is nothing self-evident about the categories used to distinguish African musics from Western music: functional as opposed to contemplative; communal rather than individualistic; spontaneous rather than calculated; rhythmically complex rather than simple; melodically unsophisticated rather than ornate; improvised rather than precomposed; and based in oral rather than written practices. These binarisms range from the possible to the irrational. Each subtends an asymmetrical relation in which one term is marked, the other unmarked. As ideology, these enduring characterizations speak to music as difference constructed by particular individuals for particular purposes.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Dahlhaus, ‘Music – or Musics?’, p. 1511.

<sup>21</sup> Dahlhaus, ‘Music – or Musics?’, p. 1511.

<sup>22</sup> Kofi Agawu, ‘Contesting Difference: A Critique of Africanist Ethnomusicology’, in *Cultural Study of Music*, ed. by Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert and Richard Middleton, pp. 117-26 (p. 121).

<sup>23</sup> Agawu, ‘Contesting Difference’, p. 122.

As he later suggests, ‘depending on how you choose to construct the world, any two objects (or musics) may be judged different or similar.’<sup>24</sup> It is necessary to be critical of the idea that European music and African music are fundamentally different – ‘couldn’t one just say that Boulez is too different from [Guillaume] Machaut[?]’<sup>25</sup>

Agawu also suggests that we should not draw overstated conclusions from the fact that not all languages have a word for “music”:

What the absence of a word for “music” suggests is not that African conceptions are radically different from Western ones, or that there is a significant discontinuity between semantic fields, or even that abstractions are missing from African talk about music; rather, it suggests that the semantic range of the convenient, all-encompassing, indeed all-purpose term music is distributed differently in some (African) languages.<sup>26</sup>

These points lead to his conclusion, that ‘Restoring a notional sameness to the work of ethnomusicology will go a long way toward achieving something that has hitherto remained only a theoretical possibility, namely, an ethical study of African music.’<sup>27</sup> A common ontology may have its complexities, in other words, but it may also yield profound theoretical and ethical possibilities.

This is why it is important, and even necessary, to speak of ‘music’. Unless we are happy to suggest that the music of Gustav Mahler is the ‘aesthetic distillation’ of the music of Taylor Swift (which would be chronologically as well as theoretically dubious), or we are happy to decide that Mahler’s music is so different from Swift’s music that they could never be brought into dialogue (with all the aforementioned theoretical and social consequences),

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<sup>24</sup> Kofi Agawu, *On African Music: Techniques, Influences, Scholarship* (Oxford University Press, 2023), p. 114.

<sup>25</sup> Agawu, *On African Music*, p. 115.

<sup>26</sup> Agawu, *African Imagination in Music*, p. 29.

<sup>27</sup> Agawu, ‘Contesting Difference’, p. 126.

then we will have to accept that both are music. There may be any number of things we want to say about the music of Swift and not Mahler, or the music of Mahler and not Swift, but both are music. And if this point seems like a musicological concern, far removed from the interests of theology, compare Douglas Hedley's suggestion that 'Music is the most immaterial and spiritual of the arts' with James Cone's claim that 'Black music is functional', 'directly related to the consciousness of the black community.'<sup>28</sup> Note which music is universalizable, and which music is specific; which music is otherworldly and which music is functional. Unless we wrestle with questions of functionality, meaning, and – ultimately – ontology, we are likely to be either endorsing ontological exceptionalism, or leaving it insufficiently critiqued.

This is not to underplay either the dangers of musical comparison, or the risks of universalising from individual experience. It is simply to observe that treating musics singularly can reinforce the same aesthetic hierarchies as treating them in comparison. To avoid these hierarchies and ontological exceptionalism, I contend, it is necessary to *broaden* rather than *narrow* our field of vision. Specifically, drawing upon some of the work introduced in chapter 2 – especially that of Small and Goehr – I will start with claims that have been made about “functional”, “popular”, and “ritual” music, rather than claims that have been made about western art music. And I will suggest that it is possible to analyse the latter in the same way as the former. It is in this way, with care and caution, that I will unfold some common ontological principles of music.

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<sup>28</sup> Douglas Hedley, *The Iconic Imagination* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), p. 236; James H. Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues: An Interpretation* (Orbis Books, 1991), p. 5.

## Music as a Mediation

So, what can we say about all the different expressions of music listed above? Of church music, club music, shopping centre music, folk music, classical music, improvised music, notated music, and orally transmitted music? First, music is often defined as ‘humanly organised sound.’<sup>29</sup> This is not a perfect definition – there are questions to be asked about artificial music and about silence. It is also clearly anthropocentric, unconcerned with the idea that music might be a means of worship in which humans participate, but which ultimately extends well beyond their activity. However, it is a useful starting point, emphasising the organisation of created material – namely, sound – and creaturely involvement. It is also equally applicable to Kenyan Afrofusion as it is Hindustani classical music, even while there are lots of other things we might want to say about both.

The second theoretical claim that can be made about music – emerging from this definition – is that it is always mediated, or, to be more specific, *music is a mediation*. There are two steps to this claim. The first is that we inescapably experience music as mediated – where mediation is conceived as ‘the reciprocal, local heterogenous relations between art and public through precise devices, places, institutions, objects, and human abilities, constructing identities, bodies, and subjectivities.’<sup>30</sup> Music is always experienced in time and place, and always emerges through material means, whether instruments, voices, or speakers. One note played by one cornet player on one cornet will sound different in a bandstand or a concert hall – music is not simply comprised of vibrations in air, but vibrations produced by specific people on specific instruments in the air of a specific location, at a specific temperature and density. In this way, music is both ‘inextricably

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<sup>29</sup> John Blacking, *How Musical Is Man?* (University of Washington Press, 1974), p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> Hennion, ‘Music and Mediation’, p. 250.

embedded in the fabric of human intention', and inextricably embedded in creation.<sup>31</sup> The second theoretical step, though, is both more controversial and more intractable, firmly and decisively putting an end to any idea of "the music itself". It is to say that we do not just experience music as mediated; rather, there is no music without such mediations. With 'no visible object to contest', nothing to examine apart from fleeting vibrations in the air, 'Music has nothing but mediations to show: instruments, musicians, scores, stages, records.'<sup>32</sup> It is not simply that, with Kivy, "the music itself" exists, somewhere, in pure autonomous form, and we cannot access it. It is rather that the thing we call music is *comprised* of mediations.

Take, for example, congregational singing. In any act of congregational singing there are likely to be a range of mediations: a group of people, perhaps one or more instrumentalists, a hymn book or a screen, a suitable venue, and associated discourses and shared understandings around composers, hymns, and the act of singing. If any of these mediations are taken away, what is left is unrecognisable as congregational singing. If we take away the people, the singing is imagined but not realised; if we take away the hymn book and venue it becomes a different type of music-making; if we take away the discourse and shared understanding – the corporate attempts to make sense of the nature of the practice – we are left only with sound. Each of these components is required for congregational singing and, without one of them, it ceases to be congregational singing. This logic can be extended to music more generally: without sound it is not music; without at least one actor it is not music; without meaning or intentionality it is not music; without movement and presence in time and space, it is not music. This is not to suggest that music does not exist. There is undeniably *something* which we recognise to be music, but this *something* is comprised by mediatory phenomena. Were it possible to strip some of these

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<sup>31</sup> Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> Hennion, 'Music and Mediation', p. 252.

phenomena away, there would be no pure, unified object underneath. In fact, were it possible to strip all these phenomena away, *there would be nothing left*. This is the full theoretical weight of Small's frequently quoted claim: 'Music is not a thing at all but an activity, something that people do', a collection of practices, whether playing, listening, instrument-making, or recording.<sup>33</sup> That which we call music is an 'abstraction of the action'.<sup>34</sup> Music is not a pure form mediated to us; music is the mediation.<sup>35</sup> There is no such thing as "the music itself".

This claim has important implications for what we mean when we speak of music. It is worth returning to Begbie, Brown, and Hopps to make the point. As I observed in chapter 2, each of these theologians has a complicated relationship with new musicology, wishing to emphasise the situatedness of music while preserving space for its autonomy. In the framework I am using here, Begbie, Brown, and Hopps recognise that music is mediated – it emerges in time and place. But they are unwilling to take the second theoretical step, recognising that music is *a mediation* – that there is no "music itself". For Begbie, Brown, and Hopps, social and cultural life might mediate, but it does not comprise – while music may emerge in time and place, there is still, somewhere, a pure, unified object beneath layers of mediation which can be studied in, and speak for, itself. For Brown and Hopps, music provokes experiences of order, transcendence, immanence, and incorporation, but such experiences are abstracted beyond the messy details of places, locations, objects, or subjectivities. Begbie, by contrast, largely writes of musical structure – patterns of resonance, sounds, chords, and movements. But this is a form of abstraction, too: music may be comprised of these elements, but none of these elements are music. Following the

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<sup>33</sup> Small, *Musicking*, p. 2.

<sup>34</sup> Small, *Musicking*, p. 2.

<sup>35</sup> See Hennion, 'Music and Mediation', p. 251.

logic of this chapter, what Begbie, Brown, and Hopps are writing about is an imagined, constructed, abstracted music. In some sense, they are not really writing about music at all.

It is worth saying that abstraction is not a problem in and of itself, and indeed it can be useful – there are a number of varied insights in the work of Begbie, Brown, and Hopps. Begbie himself acknowledges in *A Peculiar Orthodoxy: Reflections on Theology and the Arts* that his account of the western major triad relies on his ‘abstracting an experience of musical sound from what is always in practice a constellation of experiences, multisensual and multimedia, involving far more than hearing and far more than the musical sounds themselves; music is always experienced along with sights and smells, memories and hopes, passions and politics.’<sup>36</sup> In some cases, there may be good reason to consider the underlying mechanics of resonance which make music possible; to reflect on common patterns in creation; to consider how creation ‘affords’ music – through sound, movement and meaning.<sup>37</sup> And there may be good reason to construct a typology of experience, against which real, concrete experiences can be considered. But it remains important to remember that these are acts of abstraction. Whether we are looking at resonances or timbres, or music beyond the mess, we are not talking of *music*, and we cannot speak as if we are. This would be like giving an account of cathedral architecture and its effect on worshipping congregations, but exclusively discussing proportion, or the materials used to build the pillars. To talk about *music* – in any full sense of the term – we must talk seriously about mediation.

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<sup>36</sup> Begbie, *Peculiar Orthodoxy*, p. 219.

<sup>37</sup> See James Jerome Gibson, *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems* (Allen & Unwin, 1968).

## Music as Assemblage

The claim that music is a mediation, however, raises a number of questions: why do we talk about music as if it were an object, when, in any simple, unitive sense, it is not? Is it still possible to speak of a particular song, or artist, or genre? How can we talk of music without falling into abstraction? The claim can also seem counterintuitive. It might make theoretical sense to suggest there is no “music itself” under layers of mediation, but it is difficult to part with the idea that there are some sorts of musical wholes – whether David Bowie’s ‘Let’s Dance’, or Schubert’s setting of Psalm 23, or even ‘Happy Birthday’.<sup>38</sup> This is where Born’s work on musical assemblages becomes particularly useful.

Born is clear, as in the section above, that music is not secondary to mediatory phenomena, but is instead comprised of them. However, she is particularly interested in the interaction of these phenomena, and the ways they are brought together in the constitution of music. Music, she contends, is an aggregate, or ‘assemblage’, of mediatory phenomena.<sup>39</sup> She expands, ‘In Deleuzian thought an assemblage is defined as a multiplicity made up of heterogenous components, each having a certain autonomy’.<sup>40</sup> Or, as articulated in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, ‘There are only multiplicities of multiplicities forming a single *assemblage*’.<sup>41</sup> Assemblages are never static, always changing, developing, expanding, and increasing. As Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari suggest, ‘an assemblage is precisely this increase in the dimensions of a multiplicity that necessarily changes in nature as it expands its connections.’<sup>42</sup> And this – so Born demonstrates in detail

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<sup>38</sup> David Bowie, ‘Let’s Dance’, from *Let’s Dance* (EMI America Records, 1983).

<sup>39</sup> Born, ‘Materialization of Identities’, p. 376.

<sup>40</sup> Born, ‘Materialization of Identities’, p. 377.

<sup>41</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 34, emphasis in original.

<sup>42</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 8. For Deleuze, ‘multiplicity must not designate a combination of the many and the one, but rather an organisation belonging to the many as such, which

– is a useful way in which to understand music. It is not to deny that there is a thing called music to which we listen, that there are sounds formed into discernible orders to which we ascribe meaning. It is not to deny that there are particular pieces of music that can be replicated, bought, and sold; that there are particular genres with rich and distinct histories, discourses, and sound-worlds; that there are particular performances, sealed in memories, finite but real. There are, after all, a number of *some things* which we call music. These *some things* are not unified or singular objects – if we could strip away the heterogeneous components of which they are comprised, there would be nothing there. But they are, nonetheless, *some things*. And these *some things* can be understood as assemblages.

This one theoretical framework can be applied very broadly: to musical events, pieces of music, and indeed whole genres. Take August 11<sup>th</sup>, 1973, at 1520 Sedgwick Avenue: the party associated with the birth of hip-hop.<sup>43</sup> This event is marked by technical innovation – DJ Kool Herc’s use of two turntables – and aesthetic (as well as practical) preferences, namely that ‘the instrumental break of records [...] was the part of the record that dancers seemed to like the most.’<sup>44</sup> It is an event comprised by mediatory phenomena: individuals, machines, and cultural histories. And it is an event immortalised by discourse, repeated in the cultural imaginary. Yet it is still one event – an assemblage. The Sugarhill Gang’s ‘Rapper’s Delight’ can be described as an assemblage, too.<sup>45</sup> It is composed of artists and audience, sound and video, discourse and mass market. It also comprises events, constituted and reconstituted by one track being played, sampled, and talked about. Yet there is one ‘Rapper’s Delight’, comprising each of these phenomena. And finally, we

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has no need whatsoever of unity in order to form a system.’ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. by Paul Patton (Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), p. 240.

<sup>43</sup> David Browne, ‘Kool Herc and the History (and Mystery) of Hip-Hop’s First Day’, *Rolling Stone*, 11 (2023) <<https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/kool-herc-hip-hop-50-august-11-1973-1234802035/>> [accessed 14 July 2025].

<sup>44</sup> Justin Williams, ‘Historicizing the Breakbeat: Hip-Hop’s Origins and Authenticity’, *Lied Und Populäre Kultur/Song and Popular Culture* 56 (2011), pp. 133-167 (p. 138).

<sup>45</sup> The Sugarhill Gang, ‘Rapper’s Delight’, from *Sugarhill Gang* (Sugarhill Records, 1979).

might say that hip-hop is an assemblage, too, a series of practices, sounds, and cultural meanings encompassing many tracks and many events, many individuals and many discourses, but forming one recognisable genre. Each of these examples – though markedly different in some respects – is one whole consisting of mediatory phenomena. And they are linked; assemblages are never static, always changing, developing, expanding, and increasing. The assemblage of August 11<sup>th</sup>, 1973, is one part of the assemblage of hip-hop, one mediatory phenomena of another whole, as in turn hip-hop is one part of the assemblage that we describe as music.

What the theoretical step towards assemblages affords is legitimate discussion of musical objects, but without a hint of ontological exceptionalism – whereby some music is pure, absolute, contentless, or even discovered, and other music is human, concrete, and particular. For Born, all music is human, concrete, and particular; it has a common ontology. However, by exploring music as an assemblage, it becomes possible to talk of musical wholes as the sums of heterogeneous mediatory parts. This allows us to talk about K-pop as distinct from reggae, as two genres consisting of different mediatory phenomena, forging individual (although always interconnected) assemblages. It allows us to talk of songs and recordings within each of these genres as related to one another – sharing a great deal of mediatory phenomena – while being distinct from one another. It allows us to distinguish between Frank Sinatra's 'My Way' and Nina Simone's cover – as an assemblage comprised in part by covers, or as overlapping assemblages, or as both at the same time (if we take seriously the assemblage's multiplicities on multiplicities).<sup>46</sup> It allows us to recognise that a recording of a song is not the archetype of the song in live performance, or vice versa, but rather a musical whole comprising different mediations in different contexts. It allows us to suggest – with integrity – that a person singing in the shower is

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<sup>46</sup> Frank Sinatra, 'My Way', from *My Way* (Reprise, 1969); Nina Simone, 'My Way', from *Here Comes the Sun* (RCA Victor, 1971).

music just as much, and even in the same way, as John Coltrane's solos are music, while appropriately differentiating between them. It allows, in other words, a common ontology without a flattening of difference.

Assemblages are not neat, and nor are they objective. While there are some mediatory phenomena that are readily identifiable – time, place, human actors – there are a great deal that are not. Why is it, we might ask, that Bach appears so routinely in theological discussion, described as ‘the supreme religious composer’ who represents ‘a theological engagement with music that has probably never been surpassed’?<sup>47</sup> What are the mediatory phenomena at play that lead to this reception? Is it his use of harmony, or his reputation as a church music practitioner? Is it divine inspiration or is it discourse? Is it his handling of simplicity and complexity, or is it western exceptionalism? Is it a combination of a few, or most, or even all of these phenomena? There is not space to dwell on these questions here, although given the ontological account given so far, some of these answers are likely to seem more plausible than others. The point is that, even while holding that music is an assemblage of mediatory phenomena, there is still extensive room for debate about what these phenomena are. The concept of assemblages provides a way to talk about musical objects, or musical wholes; in fact, it suggests that *it makes sense to talk about music as such* – even while recognising that these wholes are comprised of mediations. The concept does not deny that sound matters, or that experiences matter, or that musical expressions are distinct.

The concept of the musical assemblage also recognises the importance of discourse. Among the many difficulties of speaking about music, the question of how to define genres is

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<sup>47</sup> Dawn, *Reaching Out*, p. 170; Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, p. 122. See also Wynn, *Emotional Experience*, p. 173; Michael S. Driscoll, ‘Musical Mystagogy: Catechising Through the Sacred Arts’, in *Music in Christian Worship: At the Service of the Liturgy*, ed. by Charlotte Kroeker (Liturgical Press, 2005), pp. 27-44 (p. 33) for other theological engagement with Bach.

particularly challenging. As Mark Gridley, Robert Maxham and Robert Hoff note, there are three main approaches to defining jazz: ‘a strict definition that requires improvisation and swing feeling’; an ‘approach [that] ties style together only by family resemblances’; and ‘an “essence approach” in which the relative presence of certain components determines the relative “jazziness” of a performance.’<sup>48</sup> Each approach has its benefits: while the first definition might appeal in its ‘simplicity’, the second ‘allows the public to continue calling “jazz” anything they ever thought was jazz’, and the third allows for the ‘changing nature of what is regarded as jazz from decade to decade’.<sup>49</sup> However, if we adopt the first definition, we are forced to omit some of Duke Ellington’s non-improvised music from our definition of jazz.<sup>50</sup> If we adopt the second, we have to wrestle with the reality that the music of Fats Waller and Cecil Taylor ‘are so dissimilar that they may demand separate categories.’<sup>51</sup> These limitations point toward the third option, which recognises that the task of defining jazz involves repeated patterns and techniques, forms of association, and ways of speaking and understanding: history, tradition, and discourse. It would, of course, be possible to suggest that the genre of jazz is entirely discursively constructed, or instead to argue (as I am doing here) that discourse is one part of a definition that also has recourse to sound and technique. But, either way, discourse is of great significance. And this is not unique to jazz. As we saw earlier in this chapter, for Kivy, ‘pure, instrumental music’ can be defined according to ‘the core of the instrumental repertoire, agreed upon by the musical community at large to be the paradigms of contentless instrumental music’.<sup>52</sup> In defining ‘pure music’, he too, turns to history, tradition, and discourse. Discourse, whether in relation to jazz or western art music, is *part of the musical assemblage*.

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<sup>48</sup> Mark Gridley, Robert Maxham and Robert Hoff, ‘Three Approaches to Defining Jazz’, *The Musical Quarterly* 73.4 (1989), pp. 513–31 (p. 516), doi:10.1093/mg/73.4.513.

<sup>49</sup> Gridley, Maxham and Hoff, ‘Defining Jazz’, pp. 530 and 531.

<sup>50</sup> Gridley, Maxham and Hoff, ‘Defining Jazz’, p. 520.

<sup>51</sup> Gridley, Maxham and Hoff, ‘Defining Jazz’, p. 526.

<sup>52</sup> Kivy, *Music Alone*, p. 29.

And in this way, among others, the assemblage can also be useful in discussions of the musical work of art – the concept that plagues theologians and music theorists such as Kivy alike. I am wary of writing extensively about western art music or making it an exceptional case. However, it is worth briefly and explicitly making the point that pieces of music referred to as works of art can be understood as assemblages, too. In fact, the assemblage provides a compelling answer to Goehr’s seemingly impossible question: ‘What kind of existence do works enjoy, given that they are (a) created, (b) performed many times in different places, (c) not exhaustively captured or fixed in notational forms, yet (d) intimately related to their performance and scores? [...] Just how then do they exist?’<sup>53</sup> From the concept of assemblages, we can say all the things commonly described as works of art exist. They are musical wholes consisting of (a) human intention, tradition, expertise; (b) performances, performers, instruments, audiences, spaces; (c) scores, notes, recordings (and the many other mediatory phenomena we could mention). And (d) these musical wholes are repeated and reconstituted, forming related musical wholes, or adding to the musical whole – or both. It is also worth saying that the fact Edward Elgar’s First Symphony is talked about as a musical whole is one of the mediatory phenomena that constitutes it as a musical whole. This is not to suggest that Elgar’s First Symphony is not real – only that particular forms of discourse are part of the assemblage that constitutes its existence.

None of this is to say that music is whatever we want it to be, let alone to permit the ontological claims made by Kivy because they are simply part of the constitution of the western art music assemblage – assemblages can still harm. To say that Elgar’s First Symphony exists is not to confirm any claims about musical autonomy, purity, or transcendence. It is not to validate the work-concept in any broader sense. It is rather to argue that those things called works of art are cobbled together aggregates of sound,

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<sup>53</sup> Goehr, *Imaginary Museum*, p. 3.

technique, practice, and tradition – just like all other music. And, for those raised in particular cultural contexts, the results may be beautiful, or moving, or difficult, or noteworthy, or theologically significant, in ways that they do not experience other music to be. But, nonetheless, those things called works of art are, ontologically, just like other music.

Assemblages, then, allow us to do two things. First, they allow us to understand different expressions of music as sharing a common ontology without flattening the differences between them. Secondly, they give us a framework to talk about music, even while acknowledging that it is a mediation. They allow us to talk of genres, of songs, of pieces of music, and even of those things described as works of art. They allow us to continue to talk of musical differentiation, of musical objects, and of musical wholes. And – in conjunction with the last ontological claim of this chapter – I suggest that they will allow us to make signification observations about music in worship.

### **Music as Practice**

Finally, there is one observation implicit in both of the claims made so far in this chapter: that music is a collection of practices: ‘something that people do’.<sup>54</sup> This idea was introduced in chapter 2, but is still worth examining closely here. This is because it can at first seem utilitarian, underplaying the way in which music seems to move and act upon us, and undermining any sense of musical agency. It can also seem anthropocentric, diverting attention from the givenness of musical materials – those of sound and movement, say – and the broader propensity for worship in creation. I want to suggest in this section, however, that in taking the practices of music seriously we can still understand

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<sup>54</sup> Small, *Musicking*, p. 2.

music as powerful and affective, but do so on surer ontological footing. I will also suggest here that, while the ontology of music established in this chapter might come from musicological theory, it is deeply resonant with theological themes.

First, it is important to distinguish between two claims about music's practical nature. In one sense, the idea that music is generated by activity is incontrovertible – whether music is believed to be discovered or created, autonomous or embedded in ordinary life, there is little getting away from performance as it creates and instantiates music in time and place. This is still the case for recorded music, even if it feels more removed from human actors: somebody performed the song; someone else recorded it; and it is another person who turns on their car radio to listen to it. Even AI-generated music involves people: those who train AI to make music, those on whose musical performances the AI was trained, those who profit from AI-generated music, and those who listen to AI-generated music. And since the advent of mediatized music more generally, performance and reproduction have begun to exist in a mutually dependent relationship: 'all performance modes, live or mediatized, are now equal [...] the live performance is just one more reproduction of a given text or one more reproducible text.'<sup>55</sup> In this way, music – even recorded music – is incontrovertibly practical. No matter the other ontological claims employed, or caveats added, music is 'something that people do' in this broad sense.

However, there is a second type of claim about music's practical nature – one that follows from the logic of mediation and assemblages. This is that music is practical all the way down. Like the movement from music as mediated to music as a mediation, we might say that music is not so much practical as it is a collection of practices. There is no music *beyond* practices; music is rather constituted by them. After all, the mediatory phenomena

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<sup>55</sup> Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, 2nd edn. (Routledge, 2008), p. 55.

comprising musical assemblages are either practices in themselves (playing, performing, or listening), or objects (and other phenomena) taken up within and consisting of practices (writing, recording, or buying). This is why Small does not simply suggest that music is mediated to us *via* activity, but contends that music should be understood *as* ‘an activity’.<sup>56</sup> This theory need not be reductionist nor anthropocentric. As noted in the previous chapter, DeNora provides a rich account of music as a ‘cultural activity’ which can provide ‘respite from distress and a place and time in which it is possible to flourish.’<sup>57</sup> Not only can music, so DeNora suggests, ‘offer protection against a distressing social world’, it also ‘remakes or renegotiates social worlds.’<sup>58</sup> Music is a means through which human actors move through their environment, a way of ‘creating room, whether by furnishing or removal’.<sup>59</sup> It is powerful and deeply felt, inextricably embedded within ‘the deepest recesses of the self – emotion, memory, self-identity’.<sup>60</sup> And (as I will expand in chapter 6) it is dialogic: it echoes and reverberates across individuals, cultures, and locations. As Frith suggests, our tastes ‘do not just derive from our socially constructed identities; they also help to shape them.’<sup>61</sup> Drawing from the insights of Cultural Studies, we might say that there are ‘articulations’ between ‘forms of music and forms of social life.’<sup>62</sup> Music may be an expression, means, or tool – a way of shaping and reshaping the world around us – but it also shapes us back.

It is also worth noting that DeNora’s research forms part of a recent interest in the relationship between music, emotion, and affect – interest emerging afresh from the claims of new musicology rather than waning in its wake. As Kassabian suggests:

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<sup>56</sup> Small, *Musicking*, p. 2.

<sup>57</sup> DeNora, *Music Asylums*, p. 1.

<sup>58</sup> DeNora, *Music Asylums*, p. 55.

<sup>59</sup> DeNora, *Music Asylums*, p. 63.

<sup>60</sup> DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life*, p. 151.

<sup>61</sup> Frith, *Performing Rites*, p. 276.

<sup>62</sup> Tia DeNora, ‘Emotion as Social Emergence: Perspectives from Music Sociology’, in *Music and Emotion*, ed. by Patrick N. Juslin and John A. Sloboda, pp. 158-83 (p. 165).

if pieces of music aren't hailing us as bourgeois subjects, what *are* they doing? [...] It seems clear that they are operating in a different modality altogether, and I am proposing that that modality is affect. *Affect* is the circuit of bodily responses to stimuli that takes place before conscious apprehension.<sup>63</sup>

This suggestion is particularly consonant with, although not dependent upon, an understanding that 'Emotions relating to music are culturally embedded and socially constructed, and can usefully be viewed as being about an individual within a community, rather than being exclusively about internal states.'<sup>64</sup> For Kassabian, as well as DeNora, it is perfectly possible to hold that music is 'something that people do', and to maintain that it is powerful and deeply felt. In fact, there is a necessary relationship between these two statements: there would be little need for a detailed account of musical affect if pieces of music really transcended the material realities of performance and experience. It makes sense to study music as powerful and deeply felt, in other words, precisely *because* it is 'something that people do'.

And if this claim, or the ontology of music I have given in this chapter more generally, still seems too anthropocentric to be of use in theological discussion, I want to contend that it is not as far away from theological concern as it may first appear. None of this work, for example, denies that music is forged from concrete realities such as sound or movement; it is not much of a stretch, then, to assert in a theological context the *givenness* of musical potential – as I will discuss in chapter 5. I also have no intention of denying the worship of all creation, which necessarily extends music beyond the definition of 'humanly organised

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<sup>63</sup> Kassabian, *Ubiquitous Listening*, p. 13, emphasis in original. Affect, as in chapters 4 and 6, is defined as 'an umbrella term that covers all evaluative – or "valenced" (positive/negative) – [experiential] states', rather than simply meaning 'emotion', 'mood', or 'feeling'. Patrik N. Juslin and John A. Sloboda, 'Introduction: Aims, Organization, and Terminology', in *Music and Emotion*, pp. 3-12 (p.10).

<sup>64</sup> Judith Becker, 'Exploring the Habitus of Listening', in *Music and Emotion*, pp. 127-57 (p. 145). She expands: 'Thinking of the relationship of emotion and music as a biological process with a co-defined, historically enacted ontology, as a group creation in which self-contained individuals have undergone structural changes through their interaction with other self-contained individuals helps to provide an embodied analysis of the relationship of music and emotion and the mysteries of musical affect.' (p. 149).

sound’ – although detailed consideration of the relationship between non-human actors, music, and worship is beyond the scope of this thesis.<sup>65</sup> What I am suggesting here, in more theological terms, is that music is an assemblage of creaturely activities and created phenomena, and is assembled into existence through intentional creaturely activity. And, as a series of practices with great affective significance, it is not ultimately so dissimilar from other activities in which Christians are caught up and with which chapters 5-7 will draw parallels: language, liturgy, and prayer.

In this way, while the language of mediations, assemblages, and practices may emerge from theories of music, the ontology they construct echoes theological concerns. Underlying Hennion’s call for a return of ‘the experience of aesthetic pleasure – often regarded as immediate and subjective – to its social and historical determinations’ are, of course, musical interests: those of experience, aesthetics, and pleasure.<sup>66</sup> Yet his project is not so dissimilar from Ben Quash’s – from the commitment that ‘If God is to be “read” at all then that legibility will be in the midst of human, material and historical reality, and not in abstraction from it.’<sup>67</sup> While Hennion and Quash have different concerns, there is a common commitment between them: if music (as one of the arts) is to be examined, studied, or in some sense understood, it will not be in abstraction nor in unattainable “pure” experience. It will be in concrete realities, distinct places, and human lives.

## Conclusion

Music, then, is a mediation, an assemblage, and a collection of practices. In some sense, what I have given in this chapter is not an account of music at all. Nothing written here

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<sup>65</sup> Blacking, *How Musical Is Man?*, p. 3.

<sup>66</sup> Hennion, ‘Music and Mediation’, p. 249.

<sup>67</sup> Ben Quash, *Theology and the Drama of History* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 201.

has come close to describing – let alone comprehending – what it is to stand in a stadium of ninety thousand, sound pulsing through your veins, or what it is to sing, in hushed tones, at a funeral. But it has laid out broad principles and subsequent conditions: things which can be legitimately said of the practices we describe as music, and things which cannot. And it has examined the claims made of the music which is often seen as functional, social, and ritualistic, taking them seriously as the basis of a common ontology of music, while deflating the claims made of western art music which do not stand up to scrutiny. This ontological framework may be common to all types of music, but it is not, I contend, homogenising: it takes seriously the profound differences between musical cultures, genres, pieces of music, and performances, recognising the vast array of different phenomena which comprise these many musical assemblages. It is based upon the principles that music is grounded, concrete, experienced, particular, and deeply human.

There are any number of questions still to be asked about music. But from this ontological starting point, it is possible to make a series of theological claims about music in worship. The account I will draw from here, grounded in these ontological claims, will not look much like the account of music given by Begbie, Brown, or Hopps. It will instead examine music at its most particular and ordinary, through the means of qualitative research, and from there look to questions of practice, experience, and meaning.

## 4 – Musical Practice

our liturgical ecclesiology reminds us that the ordinary concerns of ordinary people matter to God[.]<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

*It is 10:03 on a Sunday morning at Holy Trinity.<sup>2</sup> Glancing at her watch, the vicar stands up to deliver a short welcome and announce the opening hymn – number 495 in The New English Hymnal: ‘God is working his purpose out’.<sup>3</sup> The organist starts immediately, playing the second half of the verse as an introduction at a pace that seems optimistic for congregational singing, perhaps recognising the inevitable slowing from verse to verse. Some congregants stand immediately, the hymn book already opened to the right page – those who arrived early and, with the help of the hymn board, were keen to know the first (and possibly subsequent) hymn in advance. Others flick through the pages with a growing sense of urgency, half standing as they do so, while still others laboriously start at the beginning of the hymn book and work almost page by page, resolutely sitting until they find number 495. There is a slight flurry of excitement among the congregants near the back, as one opens the hymn book to the correct page out of chance, and whispers (slightly more audibly than perhaps they expect) ‘we haven’t sung this hymn in ages...’*

*After a brief pause at the end of the introduction, the organist starts the first verse, slightly slower this time, and the congregation starts to sing, ‘God is working his purpose out, as year succeeds to*

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<sup>1</sup> James Hawkey, ‘Mixing Their Musick’: Worship, Music, and Christian Communities’, in *God’s Song and Music’s Meanings*, ed. by James Hawkey, Ben Quash and Vernon White, pp. 107-23 (p. 117).

<sup>2</sup> These accounts are fictitious but drawn from experiences of worshipping in Church of England churches across a range of traditions – to this end they might be described as ‘composite account[s].’ See Mark Porter, *Ecologies of Resonance in Christian Musicking* (Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 72.

<sup>3</sup> A. C. Ainger, ‘God is working his purpose out’, arr. by Millicent Kingham, in *The New English Hymnal*, comp. by The English Hymnal Company Ltd (The Canterbury Press Norwich, 1986), pp. 1040-41.

year...<sup>4</sup> At the front of the pews is a retired vicar who is singing the tenor line in full voice while holding the words copy of the book – the harmonies so familiar that they are committed to memory. It is hard to tell whether the person behind him is singing at all. There are two churchwardens sat halfway back on the door side, looking round to make sure everyone is either holding, or can see, a hymn book – one a professionally trained singer, though now retired; the other proclaims herself tone deaf. At the very back there is a couple whose banns of marriage were read for the first time at the previous service, visibly mumbling. As the congregation moves from verse four to verse five, the last few people trickle in to take their seats, some singing a previous verse as they do so. The organist starts playing the final verse, with increasingly unusual harmonies – something that goes unnoticed by some, but prompts a few knowing glances among others. The hymn comes to a close, and, at the injunction of the vicar, the congregation sits, and the service continues.

Meanwhile, a few miles down the road, at St Paul's and St Peter's, there is a steady stream of arrivals ahead of the 10:15 rehearsal for the 11:15 service. Some walk in carrying sheet music, placed neatly in a plastic wallet; others with an instrument and a music stand, complaining about their broken printer as they pull up the chord sheets on their phone. It is all hands on deck as the drums are moved one by one out of the corner (their midweek home owing to the toddler group who meet in the church on Tuesdays and Thursday mornings), placed in a loose formation for the drummer to arrange. She is preoccupied, carefully tightening the snare by a series of millimetres. Meanwhile, one of the guitarists and the bassist make their way to the back of church, where they petition the couple washing up after the 9:00 service for a cup of coffee – a request which will inevitably be granted, but not without some resistance. The keyboard player files in with his teenage daughter, who is on the rota to sing for the first time, shortly followed by another singer, who jokes as he walks over to the band area at 10:15 on the dot that he is always the last to arrive.

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<sup>4</sup> Ainger, 'God is working his purpose out'.

*Gradually, the band members gather into place, those with sheet music deferring to the authority of those using devices on the order of the songs. The songs are drawn largely, but not exclusively, from the Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI) top 100, but there are one or two that seem less well known, at least in this context, which provokes something of a discussion between the singers.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, a part-time sound engineer who joined the church a few years ago mills around with four microphones in one hand and batteries in the other, visibly counting the number of microphone stands while keeping half an eye on the screen – presumably checking for mistakes on the PowerPoint slides. He is hardly noticed by the keyboard player who is helping the guitarists to tune; a task that is completed via a series of nods, and entirely without words. As the last few mugs are returned to the kitchen, the 9:00 congregation makes their way out, and the hatch closes, the building becomes much quieter – peaceful, even. At 10:20, the keyboardist stands, and the rehearsal begins.*

So far, I have suggested that new musicological ideas – and the contemporary musicological thought that extends them – make good ontological and ethical sense in the study of music in worship. An approach to music grounded in mediations, assemblages, and practices, I have contended, has the capacity to provide a compelling alternative to work-based approaches, resisting the latter’s philosophical problems and tendencies towards hierarchisation. There is, however, a third rationale for using these resources, which is simply that they make good practical sense. Having worshipped for many years in predominantly Church of England churches spanning a range of musical practices – playing in bands, singing in choirs, and running the occasional rehearsal – I am unconvinced that works-based approaches can give a compelling account of music in worship as it emerges in time and place. In my experience, congregations engage with music in worship in ways that are profoundly social, concrete, physical, and practical, and,

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<sup>5</sup> CCLI top 100 <<https://songselect.ccli.com/ccli-top-100/uk>> [accessed 16 September 2025].

if an account of music in worship is to bear resemblance to ordinary practice, it must take therefore seriously music's social, concrete, physical, and practical nature. This recognisability is not a secondary matter: 'There is no hard border where ordinary belief meets doctrinal theology', and therefore the experiences and understandings of ordinary Christians at worship are necessarily of theological concern.<sup>6</sup>

This chapter gives account of fieldwork I conducted in 2022 into how Christians practice, experience, and understand music in worship. In many ways, this fieldwork is the clearest articulation in this thesis of music in worship as an object of study, describing the practices, materials, and experiences of which it is comprised – or of which it is comprised in three specific contexts. But this fieldwork also has other functions, such as serving to ensure that I have not been misreading the congregations of which I have been a part – something that could lead to an account of music in worship which is still removed from ordinary practice – and acting as an antidote to abstraction.<sup>7</sup> To say that music in worship comprises a series of mediations, assemblages, and practices may emphasise the concrete particularities of gathered communities of Christians in time and space, but it does necessarily engage with those particularities. In this way, pursuing the approach detailed in chapter 3 may lead to an account of music that is more ontologically or ethically convincing, but little closer to resembling ordinary practice. Finally, and most importantly, this fieldwork serves to invite ordinary Christians into a conversation about their worship: the claims made in this chapter are normative as well as descriptive. I do not necessarily agree with all the claims made here, but I nonetheless take them seriously. And therefore, in chapters 5-7, I seek to

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<sup>6</sup> Higton, *Life of Doctrine*, p. 104.

<sup>7</sup> As I will expand in the following section, no fieldwork is objective. Nonetheless, given that the rest of the thesis seeks to give account of musical practice as it emerges in time and place, it is important to engage with practitioners of the practice, and not to unduly speak on their behalf. The decision to conduct focus groups and not participant observation was designed to bring my participants' experiences, and not my own, to the forefront of the discussion.

give a theological account of music in worship that is recognisably related, and in some sense faithful, to these experiences and understandings.

## Methods and Ethics

Of the many ways to study ordinary Christian practice, interviews and participant observation are commonly understood to be effective for ‘gather[ing] stories from individuals and groups that describe, explain, and illuminate’.<sup>8</sup> I opted to use semi-structured focus groups (supplemented by an interview), rather than participant observation, in order to allow the voices of Christians using music in worship to speak clearly and for themselves, and to do so in collaboration with one another. This is not to negate the fact that qualitative research is always more ‘an art than a science’, shaped by the ways in which questions are asked, and by how the answers are organised and retold.<sup>9</sup> But it is to contend that the best articulations of ordinary Christian worship come from those ordinary Christians themselves.

Because the claims made in this thesis about mediations, assemblages, and practices are just as applicable to charismatic worship as they are to Choral Evensong, I could have chosen any number of churches to study. However, I was keen to avoid a tendency in the Christian congregational music literature when choosing field sites. In most of these studies, music is what draws the researcher in: Porter’s work is autoethnographic, emerging out of experience playing at the church he studies; McGann writes of her attraction through ‘the vibrancy of the community’s music’; Ingalls is concerned with the ‘collective performance

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<sup>8</sup> Harriet Mowat, ‘Interviews and Observations’, in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Theology and Qualitative Research*, ed. by Pete Ward and Knut Tveitereid (Wiley-Blackwell, 2022), pp. 551-65 (p. 551).

<sup>9</sup> Pete Ward, ‘Theology and Qualitative Research: An Uneasy Relationship’, in *Theology and Qualitative Research*, pp. 30-41 (p. 35).

of contemporary worship music’ and selects field sites accordingly.<sup>10</sup> Whether chosen through lived experience, or according to specifications of style, in each instance, the field site is selected on the grounds of its musical identity. This has a number of effects: it means that the contexts chosen are disproportionately likely to have a strong and distinct musical identity, and it means that any theology of music in worship that emerges from these studies is likely to be at far remove from churches where resources may be limited; churches where style and tradition may have as much to do with the ability of musicians as the choice of the congregation or clergy; or churches where the music may be well resourced, but is simply not the main event. But, more importantly, these studies privilege either the researcher’s musical preferences, or a particular style. Given the fraught nature of taste – as I will expand in this chapter and in chapter 5 – and the fact that the claims made in this thesis are as applicable to contemporary worship music as they are Gregorian chant, I was keen to avoid approaching churches in this way.

I primarily selected churches, by contrast, on non-musical grounds, using just two criteria. First, the churches had to be part of the Church of England, which is my own tradition – this meant that I had some familiarity and context for the discussions. Secondly, the churches had to have average attendance for a Church of England church – using statistics from 2019 as the last full year before the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>11</sup> This does not mean that the churches selected were representative – there is a huge diversity of practice which cannot

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<sup>10</sup> Porter, *Contemporary Worship Music*, p. 1; Mary E. McGann, *Exploring Music as Worship and Theology: Research in Liturgical Practice* (Liturgical Press, 2002), p. xxx; Ingalls, *Singing the Congregation*, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> The Church of England, ‘Statistics for Mission 2019’ (Research and Statistics, 2020)

<<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/2019StatisticsForMission.pdf>> [accessed 20 September 2025], p. 10. As the authors suggest, the median figure of 42 is more indicative, as the mean (74) is skewed significantly by a few much larger churches. I used the 2019 figures in recognition of the volatility of church attendance over 2020, and because statistics from 2021 were not available at the time. Since church attendance is varied, particularly over the school summer holidays, and particularly in a shared ministry/benefice model where there is significant overlap between congregants at midweek services, I in practice attended Sunday services where 20-60 was the norm, and midweek services with fewer than 10.

be captured through a study of this nature. It does mean, however, that the churches were broadly in the middle of the range of sizes of Church of England congregations, and – according to these statistics – that churches of this size are common.<sup>12</sup> It is also worth noting that I was not particularly concerned about the precise stylistic qualities of the music in worship in the churches I studied, and would have been equally happy to study a church which exclusively used online resources, and another which had a world-renowned organist who happened to live locally. However, I did ensure that there was some variety between the churches’ musical expressions, so as not to inadvertently privilege one style.

Having acquired ethical approval from the University of Durham, I found three churches, which I have given the pseudonyms St Michael and All Angels, St Nicholas’, and Christchurch.<sup>13</sup> These were all under the oversight of one incumbent – known here as Rachel – which allowed me to have consistency in how the project was advertised and conducted, and variety in the participants and the churches themselves. Rachel characterised the churches – perhaps unsurprisingly given the nature of the project – in conventionally musical terms. St Michael and All Angels (a ‘large Victorian church’) was described as having a ‘real appreciation of high quality music’ – it ‘used to have a choir’, and boasted a ‘good organist’ as well as a music group on one Sunday of every month.<sup>14</sup> St Nicholas’, by contrast, ‘has always seen itself as the parish church’; Rachel described its music as “‘straight down the middle” Anglican’ – ‘very much singing from *Hymns Old and New* rather than *English Hymnal*’.<sup>15</sup> Finally, Christchurch is a local ecumenical partnership (LEP), and a long term ‘ecumenical project’.<sup>16</sup> As ‘a blending of Anglican and Methodists’,

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<sup>12</sup> Research and Statistics, ‘Statistics for Mission’, p. 10.

<sup>13</sup> All names – including church names – are pseudonyms.

<sup>14</sup> Rachel, Incumbent Interview.

<sup>15</sup> Rachel, Incumbent Interview. The hymn book used at St Nicholas’ was *Anglican Hymns Old and New*, ed. by Kevin Mayhew and Graham Benzies (Kevin Mayhew Ltd, 2008). See also *New English Hymnal*, comp. English Hymnal Company Ltd.

<sup>16</sup> Rachel, Incumbent Interview.

Rachel perceived them to be ‘more low-church and definitely open to different types of worship’; ‘If anything they [...] complain if it’s the same all the time.’<sup>17</sup> As Rachel claimed, ‘most churches operate with no organist, no problem’, but, for various reasons, St Michael and All Angels, St Nicholas’, and Christchurch were able to call upon a range of organists to facilitate their music in worship.<sup>18</sup>

Once I had identified the churches, I began attending services and meeting congregants, before starting to formally advertise the project in each of the three churches over the course of June 2022. The only specification for participants was that they were ‘a regular congregant at an average-sized Church of England parish church’ – leaving regular attendance to be determined by the participant.<sup>19</sup> There was no stipulation of faith. I was also keen to assure congregants that I was not seeking “expert” opinions on church music, and that no musical knowledge or ability were required. For this reason, my questions – detailed below – were about hymns, songs, and singing, even while this thesis contends that music in worship is far more expansive than these objects and practices. This is because congregational singing is something in which the vast majority – if not all – of the people in these churches participate, whereas “music in worship” might have evoked ideas of playing in a band or leading a choir, alienating congregants who do not participate in this way.

Rachel agreed to be a gatekeeper, introducing me to potential participants. She helped – both directly and via churchwardens – to advertise the project (through physical notices and verbal announcements at the end of services) and to make further contact via sign-up sheets. In total, I was able to draw together six focus groups of three participants each: three

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<sup>17</sup> Rachel, Incumbent Interview.

<sup>18</sup> Rachel, Incumbent Interview.

<sup>19</sup> Participant Information Sheet, see appendix 1, pp. 315-19.

from Christchurch (the LEP), two from St Michael and All Angels (the church with a choral tradition) and one from St Nicholas' (the "straight down the middle" church).<sup>20</sup> Most of the congregants who signed up were allotted a group, although in one instance it was necessary to employ a first come, first served policy.<sup>21</sup> Participants were given an information sheet, and returned signed consent forms before the focus groups began; I also reiterated the nature of the project, participants' rights to withdraw their consent at any time, and that contributions would be anonymised, at the start of each group.<sup>22</sup>

I conducted the focus groups between July and August 2022. As far as possible, I sought to recreate in these groups the informal conversations that happen, usually over cups of tea and coffee, after church services – a fairly usual place for discussing the music in which congregants have recently participated. In practice, it was rarely possible to meet directly after any services; however, the groups still had a communal and relatively informal feel. Each had a different dynamic, not least because the groups were assigned on the basis of availability; some clearly comprised friends with shared opinions, whereas others led to eruptions of church politics. The group dynamics were also affected by the location and timing of the discussions. Focus group 4 met before a service and was marked by a number of disturbances: doors slamming, cups being set up, and linens being brought through. While distracting, these disturbances were at least in keeping with the nature of tea and

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<sup>20</sup> The groups were all designed to have three participants, but in practice one person did not attend, and someone else brought another person who was keen to be involved and I had previously been introduced to after a service. Since they had read the information sheet and signed a consent form, I decided to include them and confirm with Rachel afterwards.

<sup>21</sup> I included everyone who had signed up at St Nicholas and Christchurch. However, I had difficulty allotting the right number of people to groups at St Michael and All Angels, so was not able to include two people who had signed up last. I was also not able to include a few other participants, either because of their scheduling commitments, difficulty making contact when communication at this church took place primarily through phone calls, or because of my commitment not to select anyone who might reasonably be considered vulnerable. I confirmed participants with Rachel.

<sup>22</sup> See appendix 1, pp. 315-19; appendix 3, pp. 325-26.

coffee after church. I interviewed the incumbent separately, to ask about the contexts of the churches, and her understanding of the role of music in their worship.

The focus groups revolved around three questions. The first – a variant of ‘could you tell me your favourite/most meaningful three hymns and songs and why?’ – was designed to initiate an open conversation in which everyone (regardless of theological knowledge or even faith) was equally able to take part. I told the participants this question when advertising the project, so that they could prepare their answer and carefully consider what they wanted to share in advance. The second question was: ‘are there any events you particularly associate with these or other hymns and songs?’ This question was not always necessary as the first often led to a range of memories, stories, and associations. The third question prompted participants to comment on the significance of these hymns, songs, and singing, and to move towards broader questions of meaning: ‘If you had to explain to someone who doesn’t go to church why we sing, what would you say?’ By asking one question about pieces of music, another about experiences, and another about significance and meaning, I hoped that my participants would have space to articulate their ideas in a language that felt familiar to their perception and understanding – and I hoped that it would ensure that my own commitments around the ontology of music did not unduly influence the discussion. In this semi-structured format, I asked other related questions, following lines of thought which seemed productive or important to those involved, and redirecting discussions I felt were deviating too significantly from the subject area. Over the course of the focus groups, I also grew more informal, becoming more willing to share from my own experience where I thought it might be helpful in focusing or reshaping the conversation. While I was initially cautious about exerting too much influence over the discussion, I realised over time that there would always be someone who set the tone of the group, and it was important – in order to ensure that everyone was heard and that the discussion stayed focused enough – that it was me. Although I had initially planned to

undertake interviews to probe into questions of meaning, and conduct a survey to gather further experiences, I quickly realised I did not need to (with the exception of the interview with the incumbent) – the focus groups were rich, detailed, and substantive, providing more than enough material for this chapter.<sup>23</sup>

One significant guiding factor in terms of methods and ethics was that I undertook this research while also being in training for ordained ministry in the Church of England. While I made it clear I was there for research purposes, rather than for a placement, this nonetheless placed me in an unusual position in relation to both Rachel and her congregations. It seemed easy, for example, to build trust with Rachel, but I never felt as though I were seen as part of the leadership. I also occupied a space between insider and outsider. I had not worshipped at these churches before, and I was not from the area; I was also significantly younger than all my participants and aware of my middle-class background – particularly at St Nicholas' and Christchurch. However, I was also instantly recognised as an insider within the Church of England: doctrinally at home, liturgically comfortable, and familiar with the musical repertoire. This is another reason why I did not use participant observation, aware that the context was familiar enough that I might relate it to my own experience, but unfamiliar enough that I might miss some subtleties – and aware that observation as an ordinand would be unlikely to be perceived as neutral. For this reason, the composite accounts at the start of this chapter are drawn from different churches at which I have worshipped, and when I attended St Michael and All Angels, St Nicholas', and Christchurch, I was there to introduce myself, and indeed to participate – but not to observe.

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<sup>23</sup> See appendices 5a-f and 6, pp. 328-58.

It is important to acknowledge the ways that being an ordinand, as well as my age and gender, may have affected the ways in which participants related to me. Ingalls reflects on how, in conversation with older male interlocutors, she ‘often had the sense [she] was perceived as a daughter figure’, and that ‘they felt a paternal(istic?) inclination to help with her “school project.”’<sup>24</sup> I saw an echo of this in my own fieldwork, although without such a clear gender dynamic – I wondered occasionally if participants were overly motivated by their desire to *help*, and whether they perceived that they were helping with my research, or with my training for ordained ministry. It is also possible that my participants trusted me with information they might not have shared with someone whose faith commitments were less explicit, or that they may have been motivated to provide me with the answers for which they perceived I was hoping. I tried to counteract these possibilities by restating the nature of the project as often as I could.

Then, in January 2023, once I had finished the focus groups and interview, transcribed them, and drafted my findings, I got back in contact with my participants. I provided them with a lay summary of this chapter, a list of the quotes and excerpts used, and the offer of a further conversation to discuss any concerns – an offer that was not taken up.<sup>25</sup> I returned to the churches partly in an effort to ensure that I had represented my participants fairly, but also out of a hope that my research might offer something back to St Michael and All Angels, St Nicholas’, and Christchurch. As Henry suggested at the end of the fifth focus group, ‘just as we have given input...feedback from you would be useful’.<sup>26</sup> For this reason, I took up the offer in May and June 2023 to present my findings to each church at the end

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<sup>24</sup> Ingalls, *Singing the Congregation*, p. 26.

<sup>25</sup> I also received the sad news at this stage that one of my participants had recently died, and had some communication with one of their relatives about their involvement in the project. After careful consideration, I have opted to retain their contributions in this chapter, based on the positivity with which the relative spoke about the participant’s involvement, and since I have not included anything they had said that might be considered sensitive. My intention is that this might honour their contribution.

<sup>26</sup> Henry, Focus Group 5, 31<sup>st</sup> July 2022.

of a normal Sunday service, and to write an article for the team ministry magazine. These efforts stem from an acknowledgement of Bonnie Miller-McLemore's indictment of qualitative research as that which 'hides the personal and constructive voice and biases of the researcher and struggles to outgrow its white, colonial Westernized leanings toward detachment, extractivism, and mastery.'<sup>27</sup> But I also want to assert that it is better to speak to ordinary Christians about ordinary Christian practices, with all of the concomitant complexities and limits, than not to do so at all.

### **Focus Group Conversations and Interview**

The focus groups and interview themselves – all taking place between July 13<sup>th</sup> and September 14<sup>th</sup>, 2022 – cover a vast and disparate range of themes and ideas. For clarity, I have separated these many themes and ideas into four broad areas: singing together, particularity and personal faith, materiality and physicality, and normative claims. I have also noted two reflections which evade these categories, but which are of particular theological interest – one concerned with gift, and the other with pilgrimage. The discussion in this chapter should also be supplemented by the three brief excerpts from each focus group which can be found in the appendix.<sup>28</sup> While I have decided not to include full or abridged transcripts, given that it would be relatively easy for those within St Michael and All Angels, St Nicholas', and Christchurch to identify at least some of the participants, these excerpts should indicate something of the nature and range of the discussions.<sup>29</sup> And, while I have shortened some quotes in the main text of this thesis to aid

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<sup>27</sup> Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, 'Understanding Lived Theology: Is Qualitative Research the Best or Only Way?', in *Theology and Qualitative Research*, ed. by Pete Ward and Knut Tveitereid, pp. 659-74 (p. 669).

<sup>28</sup> See appendices 5a-f and 6, pp. 328-58.

<sup>29</sup> Although I have anonymised names and identifying details (such as a role a participant holds in the church), this is in practice only anonymisation for an external audience. Having attended the churches frequently, advertised the project in services, and used sign-up sheets, the research held a semi-public status. And, while I asked participants to keep what was said inside the group, I did not ask them to conceal their

readability, the excerpts also give a much closer impression of the conversations as they unfolded.<sup>30</sup>

## Singing Together

for me the singing together [...] embodies the sense of fellowship.<sup>31</sup>

I think communal singing gives a communal purpose.<sup>32</sup>

Each of the discussions, in different ways, emphasised two related points about congregational singing: that it is corporate, and that it is participatory. It is worth noting the context of the discussions: I conducted fieldwork in 2022, as churches were emerging from a period of successive lockdowns; perhaps unsurprisingly, Covid-19 appeared in every conversation without prompts. Some of these reflections were explicitly concerned with music in worship: Ann recounted returning to church after lockdown only to find ‘the services weren’t the same really without the music’ (meaning that, while music was played,

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involvement in the project as a whole. Therefore, references to other people, places, careers, particular life events, nationality, education, and health – or even anecdotes and characteristics phrases – could easily locate a participant to another congregant, particularly with only 19 participants. The incumbent in particular is virtually impossible to internally anonymise, and removing all information that could possibly locate a participant would so drastically change the nature of the conversations as to be self-defeating. I have therefore concluded that providing full or abridged transcripts is unfeasible. I have, however, quoted rich anecdotes throughout the chapter, while taking out sensitive details, and assigned quotes to focus groups, so it is possible to have a sense of each conversation as a whole. Conversely, I have also tried, where possible, not to state which church each focus group was from. In practice, the three focus groups from Christchurch are easily identified by their discussion of Methodism, but the two focus groups from St Michael and All Angels and one focus group from St Nicholas’ should not be distinguishable.

<sup>30</sup> For example, I have removed false starts so as to make clearer my participants’ meanings, and used short portions of quotes to make this chapter more readable. I have indicated where I have edited a quote through the use of square brackets.

<sup>31</sup> Heather, Focus Group 5.

<sup>32</sup> Jean, Focus Group 6, 6<sup>th</sup> August 2022.

congregants were not allowed to sing).<sup>33</sup> But some of these reflections were more concerned with the corporate nature of church more broadly. As Robert articulated:

This isn't about *me*. It's about *us*. And it's not *my* story; it's God's story. And when we were in lockdown...and we couldn't sing in church, I mean...you missed so much of coming together with other people, and worshipping God as part of the entire church of all believers in the world and...for so many congregations round the world, to have stopped that part of worship[...]<sup>34</sup>

It is in this context that the discussions reiterated, frequently and with feeling, the importance of singing together – and often in contrast with the challenges of online church and the ‘unnatural’ services that took place without singing.<sup>35</sup> This is not to say that assertions such as ‘being together is fundamental’ would not have been expressed before the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>36</sup> But I wondered whether the fraught recent history of congregational singing made the project seem more relevant, or even important, to my participants. Rachel suggested that perceptions around congregational music had been profoundly affected by the events of recent years, and the ‘murder’ of not being able to sing together.<sup>37</sup> She suspected that, for most congregants, ‘you wouldn’t describe yourself as belonging to a choir but I think actually Covid makes you realise you are the choir...’<sup>38</sup> She also reflected that music was ‘more than anything else, the glue that holds congregations together.’<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ann, Focus Group 1, 13<sup>th</sup> July 2022. Other descriptions used were ‘dreadful’, ‘awful’ and ‘daft’ (Focus Groups 6 and 4, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2022).

<sup>34</sup> Robert, Focus Group 5.

<sup>35</sup> Jean, Focus Group 6.

<sup>36</sup> Janet, Focus Group 4.

<sup>37</sup> Rachel, Incumbent Interview.

<sup>38</sup> Rachel, Incumbent Interview.

<sup>39</sup> Rachel, Incumbent Interview.

Rachel was not the only person to discuss choirs, particularly in relation to the corporate nature of congregational singing. Ann reflected that ‘if I’m sitting in the congregation [...] I’m frightened to sing out [...] as much ’cause you feel that you’re exposed, people can hear you, whereas if you’re sitting in the choir surrounded by other people that are singing out it makes a big difference.’<sup>40</sup> Or, as Roger suggested, ‘You need a bit of a choir to lead’.<sup>41</sup> There are, after all, a complex set of roles and dynamics within any group setting, and music in worship is no exception. Some voices – even without a choir – stand out more than others: Henry told me that he could often hear retired clergy singing more loudly than other people – something he thought was ‘inspiring’.<sup>42</sup> And congregational singing is marked by differences in (perceived or actual) ability. John jokingly suggested that ‘we should do it like they do at the football’ and have ‘a singing area in church’, where those who perceived themselves to be good at singing could sit.<sup>43</sup> This was met by Sue’s exclamation: ‘It’s called a choir!’<sup>44</sup> There are also implicit rules of choreography and position – ‘people [...] have their own seats you know.’<sup>45</sup> Congregational singing may be communal but it is not equalising: there are differentiations of role, tone, prominence, and ability. And this should not be a surprise, theologically speaking: Gary suggested that ‘it is an act of being one when [...] we sing hymns together’, but this ‘oneness’ comprises ‘different parts’.<sup>46</sup> He asserted that singing together, as congregation and choir, was an exemplification of the difference and unity of the body of Christ.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ann, Focus Group 1.

<sup>41</sup> Roger, Focus Group 2.

<sup>42</sup> Henry, Focus Group 5.

<sup>43</sup> John, Focus Group 3.

<sup>44</sup> Sue, Focus Group 3.

<sup>45</sup> Ann, Focus Group 1.

<sup>46</sup> Gary, Focus Group 4.

<sup>47</sup> Gary, Focus Group 4.

The discussions also emphasised that the corporate nature of congregational singing extends well beyond particular congregations worshipping in one time and one place. From carol services to Sunday School anniversaries (where Roger told me ‘Summer suns are glowing’ was a firm favourite even when it was raining), the discussions considered traditions, seasons, and prominent occasions.<sup>48</sup> From tropes (such as which verse ‘the organist tends to play a bit quieter on’ in the hymn ‘We have a gospel to proclaim’) to denominational tendencies (such as which tune of ‘When I survey the wondrous cross’ would be most likely to be sung at a Salvation Army church) much of the discussion was – in one way or another – concerned with participation in broader musical traditions.<sup>49</sup> This was especially important to Roger, who told me his favourite hymns according to the names of their tunes. And, while we discussed particular traditions – ‘the hymn sandwich’, say – we also considered the regulative nature of tradition conceived more broadly: the idea that congregational singing takes place because ‘we always have done so’.<sup>50</sup>

The heritage of Methodism was notably prominent within the discussions at Christchurch, the LEP. As Gerald told me, ‘Methodism was born in song.’<sup>51</sup> He later expanded that music ‘was a very strong feature [...] of the worship’, and ‘[a]lways has been’, particularly in ‘Methodism in the villages’.<sup>52</sup> Jean added that in the Methodist village church her father had attended, ‘when the service finished they would stay and [...] they would sing each other’s favourite songs.’<sup>53</sup> Martin Clarke concurs, ‘Hymnody is widely recognised as a central tenet of Methodism’s theological, doctrinal, spiritual, and liturgical identity.’<sup>54</sup> The

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<sup>48</sup> Roger, Focus Group 2.

<sup>49</sup> Ann, Focus Group 1; Roger, Focus Group 2.

<sup>50</sup> Jean, Focus Group 6; Pauline, Focus Group 4.

<sup>51</sup> Gerald, Focus Group 6.

<sup>52</sup> Gerald, Focus Group 6.

<sup>53</sup> Jean, Focus Group 6.

<sup>54</sup> Martin V. Clarke, *British Methodist Hymnody: Theology, Heritage, and Experience* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), p. 11.

importance of the musical heritage of Methodism was also borne out by the fact that the project had better take-up at Christchurch than at St Michael and All Angels and St Nicholas' – I conducted three focus groups here rather than two and one respectively – and by the fact that many of the participants identified themselves as Methodists, at least by origin. This is noteworthy for three reasons: Christchurch is a long-term ecumenical project; my participants knew I was a Church of England ordinand; and the fieldwork was explicitly about Church of England churches.<sup>55</sup> Rachel suggested that 'I think for the majority of people they would say "I'm a member of Christchurch" and they don't give denomination a second thought' – although she added, 'the Methodists are more aware of it, because they're the minority.'<sup>56</sup> When it came to music, however, the heritage of Methodism was clearly significant. And while Roger suggested there was 'not a big difference between Anglican hymns and Methodist', and Jean claimed it was 'much more blurred than it used to be', even the designation 'Methodist hymns' is revealing – the suggestion that in an LEP the Methodist musical tradition is in some sense distinct.<sup>57</sup>

Not all the traditions discussed were ecclesial, either. Even though the project was explicitly concerned with congregational singing, we touched upon many other places where hymns (and the national anthem) are important. From (boarding) schools to uniformed organisations to the armed forces, from colliery bands to the rugby, hymn singing in the public consciousness was a key concern – and in particular the ways in which it has declined. As Jean expanded:

I think [...] not traditions, but things have changed a lot, because [...] people do not want to sing[...] [...] I went to a [...] Remembrance Day and...brilliant brass

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<sup>55</sup> Conversely, it is possible that, since the project was examining Church of England churches, participants felt a greater need to distinguish between musical styles and experiences associated with Anglicanism and Methodism.

<sup>56</sup> Rachel, Incumbent Interview.

<sup>57</sup> Roger, Focus Group 2; Jean, Focus Group 6; Anthony, Focus Group 2.

band, loads of people, school kids, and nobody sang, they didn't sing the national anthem[...] [...] [T]he music was lovely but [...] the voices weren't there.<sup>58</sup>

Similar concerns were raised in other focus groups, particularly with respect to funerals, usually for people who have not been regular churchgoers. Anthony reflected: 'I just find it sad that you go for a funeral service and you have the words printed out and the number of people that just don't sing because they don't know how to...' before adding, 'that's if they do have hymns.'<sup>59</sup> In a different discussion, John observed that 'when we do have funerals in church a lot of the time now it's music or songs that's played [...] not proper hymns.'<sup>60</sup> Anthony suggested that this was in large part a result of children not learning hymns at school in the way they had done in previous generations.<sup>61</sup> There were also broader concerns expressed around declining church attendance and institutional change. In my second focus group, Roger suggested that 'in the Anglican church harmony's almost gone', and Anthony expressed sadness at the church 'wanting to become modern' at the expense of 'the old favourites.'<sup>62</sup> Mark, Ann, and Jean – each in different discussions – pointed to a perceived link between more informal worship and younger generations of worshippers, alluding to a sense of inevitable ecclesial, social, and institutional change.

For my participants, then, congregational singing is communal and participatory: singing hymns and songs is an act of engagement in broader musical, denominational, and institutional traditions. However, it is also worth saying that the discussions drew clear lines around congregational singing: lines between the visiting baptism family ('there's no singing at all from those rows') and the regular attenders; lines between those who choose 'All things bright and beautiful' for a funeral 'just because it's the only hymn people know',

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<sup>58</sup> Jean, Focus Group 6.

<sup>59</sup> Anthony, Focus Group 4.

<sup>60</sup> John, Focus Group 3.

<sup>61</sup> Anthony, Focus Group 2.

<sup>62</sup> Anthony, Focus Group 2; Roger, Focus Group 2.

and those who know hymns from church rather than school; lines between churches which use ‘churchy music’, however defined, and those which do not.<sup>63</sup> Music is often perceived as a point of accessibility – I was told that ‘singing is a thing we can all do’, and that ‘everybody enjoys [...] congregational singing’.<sup>64</sup> Gerald suggested that it was ‘the music rather than the word’ that would create ‘a good experience’ for a newcomer.<sup>65</sup> However, music can also be profoundly alienating – Rachel recounted that, for visiting baptism families, ‘people will actually say, “oh we haven’t got to sing have we?”’<sup>66</sup> This is not to negate the significance of communality and participation in my participants’ understanding of congregational worship. But it is to acknowledge a subtle counternarrative at play in these discussions: that music in worship is an effective way to separate insiders from outsiders. And it is worth bearing in mind this tension, and the ways in which music in worship falls short of stated ecclesial ideals, when we move from this chapter to the next.<sup>67</sup>

### **Particularity and Personal Faith**

I do find myself occasionally singing hymns at home [...] and actually...I do feel I need it[.]<sup>68</sup>

It’s my Dad’s favourite, and, funnily enough, it’s my favourite.<sup>69</sup>

I’ve been thinking towards my funeral[.]<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Mark, Focus Group 6; Jean, Focus Group 6; Ann, Focus Group 1.

<sup>64</sup> Pauline, Focus Group 4; Mark, Focus Group 6.

<sup>65</sup> Gerald, Focus Group 6.

<sup>66</sup> Rachel, Incumbent Interview.

<sup>67</sup> See pp. 200-05 for a discussion of sin in Christian music-making.

<sup>68</sup> Robert, Focus Group 5.

<sup>69</sup> John, Focus Group 3.

<sup>70</sup> Julian, Focus Group 1.

While emphasising the corporate nature of congregational singing, the focus group discussions were also rich with personal stories, reflections, and memories. These speak to the distinctly personal nature of music in worship, and to how hymns and songs can become intricately intertwined in the narratives Christians tell of their lives. Some of the stories, reflections, and memories we discussed were too sensitive to include in this chapter, but I will describe a number of the less sensitive ones here.<sup>71</sup>

Before I do so, however, it is first necessary to make a few guiding comments on style, preference, and taste. As I showed in chapter 2, much of the literature concerned with music in worship makes implicit (or explicit) value judgements about some genres of music over others. This was something I reflected on with Rachel. She suggested:

I do think as well, increasingly, the shorthand for me, and I think it took me a while to realise it, is [...] people defend their hymn choice and all the rest of it [...] it's a very highly defended territory isn't it. And I think [...] what they're actually saying is equivalent to, "I also listen to Radio 3 not Radio 1." And [...] why would I want to try to get St Michael and All Angels to tune in to Radio 1? When the whole reason they're there is they're Radio 3? What matters is, can they worship and access God through what is being offered? And I think that's why they're there. So why would you take it away?<sup>72</sup>

This was demonstrated particularly aptly by the range of non-ecclesial music also considered in the focus groups, from Elgar to Meat Loaf. The references to western art music came primarily from St Michael and All Angels, the 'Radio 3' congregation.

It is therefore important to note three things. First, the majority of hymns and songs raised in the discussions could be found in hymn books – and most were described as hymns

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<sup>71</sup> I have opted not to include details of stories which are particularly sensitive, especially where they predominantly concern other people who were not participants in my research.

<sup>72</sup> Rachel, Incumbent Interview.

rather than songs. Although not by my conscious design, this was the tradition in which most of my participants felt comfortable.<sup>73</sup> Secondly, there were a few instances where comparisons were drawn between hymns and modern songs: Pauline suggested, for example, that ‘modern songs haven’t really stood that test [of time] yet.’<sup>74</sup> Thirdly, however, the discussions were rarely derogatory about unfamiliar styles of music; people were keen to justify their choice of hymns and songs, but rarely in opposition to other options. Admittedly, Gerald did describe some music as ‘[h]appy clappy’, but these comments were few and far between, and I did not get the impression he was trying to be particularly derisory.<sup>75</sup> In some sense, then, there was not much explicit, or critical, discussion of style and taste. But style and taste were still undeniably present in the discussions. They were present in the fact that ‘nearly all of the congregation of St Michael and All Angels live in the parish of Christchurch’, and ‘drive past Christchurch in order to get to the worship that they like.’<sup>76</sup> They were present in the hymns and songs that were discussed, and they were present in the hymns and songs which were omitted. Underlying every choice of hymn or song, every justification, and every value judgement, is a complex interrelation of individual preferences and social factors.<sup>77</sup> This is important to bear in mind as we move from more general claims about congregational singing to the specifics of the practice.

With hymns and songs, then, come stories. Some of the stories told by my participants were about music in worship in everyday life. Heather, for example, described taking her

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<sup>73</sup> It is worth acknowledging that some musical expressions are likely to be more viable in a church of around 42 congregants than others. While I did not actively seek participants who felt more comfortable with traditional hymns, this may have been made more likely by my research design.

<sup>74</sup> Pauline, Focus Group 1.

<sup>75</sup> Gerald, Focus Group 6.

<sup>76</sup> Rachel, Incumbent Interview.

<sup>77</sup> Pierre Bourdieu’s *Distinction* provides a compelling account of the relationship between ‘social origin’ and taste. He suggests, ‘nothing more clearly affirms one’s “class”, nothing more infallibly classifies, than tastes in music.’ See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. by Richard Nice (Routledge, 2010), pp. 5 and 10.

parents for a regular ‘Sunday afternoon drive’ where her father would shout out numbers, and her children would sing the equivalent hymn from their hymn book – one with an ‘orange cover’.<sup>78</sup> Or Edith recounted taking round ‘a little portable organ’ when singing hymns in her local area as a child.<sup>79</sup> Or Roger recalled:

when we have [...] ‘When I survey the wondrous cross’ I can’t help thinking of my uncle leading worship. And we came to the last verse and he says, ‘we’re not going to sing’ (with a – I’ll do it in a Geordie accent), ‘we’re not going to sing “demands my soul”’ we’re going to sing, “shall have my soul!”<sup>80</sup>

Some of the stories were about music in worship at important occasions. Henry told me that, before he got married, he had visited the elderly local vicar, and his fiancée ‘impressed upon [the vicar]... “I don’t want ‘Here comes the bride’, I want ‘Holy, Holy, Holy”’.<sup>81</sup> Apparently, ‘she mentioned that, oh half a dozen times’. However, on their wedding day, the organist started to play ‘Here comes the bride’. Henry recounted relief that his wife came down the aisle but added, ‘when I lifted the veil up, she was steaming!’ Or take Jean, who told me how much she, and her family, valued the hymn ‘Trust and obey’, which they always had at funerals. She described the importance of having a hymn about ‘hope’ which was not ‘sombre’.<sup>82</sup> On a similar theme, Edith recalled a funeral where they had sung ‘Be still for the presence of the Lord’, but, unusually, remained seated – ‘I can remember that moved me terribly.’<sup>83</sup> Common to each of these stories are particular people, times, and places. And, while in several of the groups I asked participants whether hymns and songs reminded them of particular events, I only asked whether hymns and songs reminded them of particular *people* once. I quickly realised that I did not need to use this prompt again.

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<sup>78</sup> Heather, Focus Group 5.

<sup>79</sup> Edith, Focus Group 1.

<sup>80</sup> Roger, Focus Group 1; Isaac Watts, ‘When I survey the wondrous cross’, adap. by Edward Miller, in *New English Hymnal*, pp. 212-13.

<sup>81</sup> Henry, Focus Group 5.

<sup>82</sup> Jean, Focus Group 6.

<sup>83</sup> Edith, Focus Group 1.

Memories of valued family and friends came flooding into every discussion, no matter the question.

These varied stories also betray differences in how my participants related to music in worship. Some of these differences were articulated in terms of faith: Henry, for example, was prompted to reflect towards the end of the discussion that his ‘feeling about some of the things we’ve discussed today’ (namely, matters of Christian belief and worship) were more ‘peripheral’ than those of Heather and Robert – something they robustly contested.<sup>84</sup> Others were concerned with the role of music in personal devotion: Jean told me she would ‘tend to sing hymns’ when alone at home, and Robert suggested that ‘if I remember a favourite hymn, whether I sing it out loud or not, it reminds me of my faith’; an important practice to him as an act of ‘touching base’, or ‘keeping in contact with home’.<sup>85</sup> Most of my participants did not mention similar practices, however. Some differences were concerned with musical training: Roger’s knowledge of the names of hymn tunes, say, or Gary’s discussion of the importance of breathing – something he thought congregations should be taught to do.<sup>86</sup> Others were concerned with (perceived or actual) musical ability: Janet and Sarah telling me that they could not sing, for example, whereas other participants in the discussions were members of choirs (making it unlikely they shared such a perception).<sup>87</sup> And some differences, finally, surrounded taste and preference – the tastes and preferences of my participants, and how they intersected with the tastes and preferences of those involved in leading the music of their church. I was struck by Roger stating a favourite hymn before remarking ‘we never sing that one’; by Heather suggesting ‘we don’t seem to sing [‘Fight the good fight’] very often’; and by Gerald noting that his

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<sup>84</sup> Henry, Focus Group 5.

<sup>85</sup> Jean, Focus Group 6; Robert, Focus Group 5.

<sup>86</sup> Gary, Focus Group 4.

<sup>87</sup> Janet, Focus Group 4; Sarah, Focus Group 3.

hymn and songs choices ‘didn’t really represent very much of what [...] we sing here.’<sup>88</sup> I wondered how their relationships with music in worship were affected by their favourite hymns being outside the current musical repertoire of their church.

There were also differences in whether participants were more drawn to particular hymns or songs, or to musical practices. The participants of the third focus group, for example, struggled to restrict themselves to three hymns or songs each. Once Sarah had finished introducing her favourites, John exclaimed: ‘You were only supposed to have three, you’ve had five!’<sup>89</sup> A related difficulty was expressed by Pauline, who suggested, ‘there are a lot that are meaningful but maybe not many that really stand out.’<sup>90</sup> Henry, though, said he ‘struggled [...] to think of favourites’, instead remarking, ‘I just like to *sing*’.<sup>91</sup> For Sarah, there are too many hymns to choose, too many that are meaningful or valued. For Pauline, hymnody is important, but particular hymns harder to identify. For Henry, it is the visceral, communal experience of singing that counts.

In each of the recollections and claims given in this section, there are social factors at play: the distribution of musical training, for example, or the realities of taste. There are also shared themes: those of comfort, of celebration, and of grief. But it is clear from these discussions, too, that congregational singing is deeply personal, embedded in particular experiences, understandings, preferences, memories, and commitments of faith.

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<sup>88</sup> Roger, Focus Group 2; Heather, Focus Group 5; Gerald, Focus Group 6.

<sup>89</sup> John, Focus Group 3.

<sup>90</sup> Pauline, Focus Group 4.

<sup>91</sup> Henry, Focus Group 5.

## Materiality and Physicality

There's [...] something about [...] the ambience in church[...] [...] [I]s it feeling safe?<sup>92</sup>

the singing is actually affected by [...] that sense of just give it what for[.]<sup>93</sup>

this to me is...the most uplifting part of congregational singing. When you really can give it all you've got[.]<sup>94</sup>

The discussions also emphasised the materiality and physicality of congregational singing. The material nature of congregational singing was exemplified in the many references throughout the discussions to hymn books, screens, singing while wearing masks, CDs, the state of the organ, upkeep, buildings, and finance. Jean, Gerald, and Mark, say, expressed relief that, when Christchurch was first built, they did not take up the offer of a pipe organ but instead started with an electronic instrument. While this had not been a straightforward choice, Jean thought 'it was probably a wise decision', given the number of churches no longer being able to afford the upkeep.<sup>95</sup> It is worth noting the narrative of decline here – demonstrated by the suggestion that screens 'would cost a lot of money', and the expressed difficulty of 'finding musicians'.<sup>96</sup> There were also subtler forms of materiality at play in the discussions too, seen in references to repertoires and canons. Observations such as, 'It's not in any of the hymn books', provide a commentary on how music in worship is shaped and determined by material objects.<sup>97</sup> Such a comment also points to the broader processes behind congregational singing: of composition, selection, and distribution.

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<sup>92</sup> Julian, Focus Group 1.

<sup>93</sup> Julian, Focus Group 1.

<sup>94</sup> Robert, Focus Group 5.

<sup>95</sup> Jean, Focus Group 6.

<sup>96</sup> Ann, Focus Group 1; Sarah, Focus Group 3.

<sup>97</sup> Roger, Focus Group 2.

In the introduction to this thesis, I noted a common distinction between the “musical” and “extra-musical” – a tendency to see talk of organs and finance, for example, as secondary to music-making and worship. My participants, however – like many of the musicologists we have encountered in chapters 2 and 3 – did not uphold such a distinction. Gerald, for example, reflected, ‘I wonder how important the actual musical instrument is’, and expressed interest in whether it had any ‘impact on opinions about the music and the hymns.’<sup>98</sup> Ann talked about how different styles of music relate to physical space, noting differences between St Michael and All Angels and other churches with ‘a lot of young people’.<sup>99</sup> She summarised, ‘we sit in our pews with our hymns books [...] but their hands are in the air, they’re jigging about and it’s [...] a different way of praising God isn’t it?’<sup>100</sup> And these comments went further still. Julian suggested that ‘the ambience in church’, and its ‘artefacts’ – namely, ‘the altar’, ‘processional crosses’, and ‘candles’ – are not secondary, but rather ‘part of worship’.<sup>101</sup> Or Anthony, reflecting on the movement away from hymn boards to screens, reflected:

But yeah I think...it’s got me thinking [...] that yes it’s all very well to have modern technology until it goes wrong as they say you know, it takes a computer to really mess things but...I do miss, you know, with the, having the hymn, the board up there [...]<sup>102</sup>

He continued: ‘and I think that’s something there that is part of [...] the worship.’<sup>103</sup> In each of these comments about instruments, altars, processional crosses, candles, and hymn boards, the material is not peripheral to worship; it is essential.

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<sup>98</sup> Gerald, Focus Group 6.

<sup>99</sup> Ann, Focus Group 1.

<sup>100</sup> Ann, Focus Group 1.

<sup>101</sup> Julian, Focus Group 1.

<sup>102</sup> Anthony, Focus Group 2.

<sup>103</sup> Anthony, Focus Group 2.

Closely related to music in worship's materiality is its physicality. This was communicated both in what participants said about music and in how they expressed it. Participants were keen, for example, to note the way music helps to create an 'atmosphere'.<sup>104</sup> Ann told me about the 'vast difference' it makes to the singing '[w]hen it's a full church', and particularly when they are singing 'a hymn that everybody knows.'<sup>105</sup> Or Gerald recalled that 'certainly when I was a kid, I think what would be expected as one entered church was silence.'<sup>106</sup> He reflected that it was now more common to have music playing before the start of a service – something that he considered 'immensely relaxing', while also allowing participants to '[get] ready for worship'; Jean concurred that this music was 'welcoming'.<sup>107</sup> Such claims are deeply evocative of DeNora's account of the way music 'remakes or renegotiates social worlds.'<sup>108</sup>

Participants were also keen to emphasise the affective nature of music. There were ten separate references to congregational singing as 'uplifting' across the discussions. As Heather summarised, in relation to 'I, the Lord of sea and sky', 'it just makes me feel good'.<sup>109</sup> A range of other emotions were expressed too, though. Edith suggested, for example, that she did not feel able to request some of her favourite hymns for her funeral because they were too 'slow' and emotive; she suggested, 'I couldn't put my son through that.'<sup>110</sup> Anthony recalled, too, not liking a hymn he had sung at school, and that he particularly associated with singing in chapel after a bereavement.<sup>111</sup> It was only Gary who

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<sup>104</sup> Gerald, Focus Group 6.

<sup>105</sup> Ann, Focus Group 1.

<sup>106</sup> Gerald, Focus Group 6.

<sup>107</sup> Gerald Focus Group 6; Jean, Focus Group 6.

<sup>108</sup> DeNora, *Music Asylums*, p. 55.

<sup>109</sup> Heather, Focus Group 5.

<sup>110</sup> Edith, Focus Group 1.

<sup>111</sup> Anthony, Focus Group 2.

asked, 'Should hymns always make us happy?'<sup>112</sup> Reflecting on Christ as 'a man of sorrows', Gary concluded that 'some hymns are sad' and 'there's a beauty in that as well.'<sup>113</sup>

Then there were discussions of, and indeed disagreements over, the embodiedness of music. Anthony, for example, expressed a dislike of 'This little light of mine', and especially of the expectation that he would join in with its associated actions.<sup>114</sup> Jean, however, suggested that sometimes hymns require a physical response – 'I think if the hymn demands it I'll do it.'<sup>115</sup> For her, 'it's just another way of getting into the music'.<sup>116</sup> And there was a more substantive difference between Ann and Julian's account of music and the body in the first focus group. Here, Ann suggested that 'you can forget all your troubles and anxiety' through singing, something which prompted Julian to reflect on 'the corporate nature and the physical activity' of music, and the idea that 'mentally you are focusing somewhere completely outside of yourself'.<sup>117</sup> But in Julian's interpretation, this means that 'you're transported', while, for Ann, the mark of good music is when 'everybody put[s] their heart and soul into it'.<sup>118</sup> While Ann and Julian did not express disagreement – but rather a sense of building on one another's ideas – I was left wondering about the tensions in their collective account of music: for one, singing draws upon the whole of the self; for the other, singing facilitates a loss of, or transport away from, the self. There was a similar conversation in the fifth focus group, too. While Robert spoke of praising God 'with your whole *being*', Heather responded that, while she is initially aware of her own singing ability in church, she is eventually able to 'get lost in it', becoming

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<sup>112</sup> Gary, Focus Group 4.

<sup>113</sup> Gary, Focus Group 4.

<sup>114</sup> Anthony, Focus Group 1.

<sup>115</sup> Jean, Focus Group 6.

<sup>116</sup> Jean, Focus Group 6.

<sup>117</sup> Ann, Focus Group 1; Julian, Focus Group 1.

<sup>118</sup> Julian, Focus Group 1; Ann, Focus Group 1.

somehow unaware of physical limitations.<sup>119</sup> John also suggested that he ‘used to drift away’ (sometimes with negative consequences if he forgot he was in charge of the PowerPoint).<sup>120</sup> And sometimes both views were expressed by the same participant. When talking about physical movement while singing – as discussed earlier – Jean suggested it was a way ‘to really sort of give yourself up to what you’re doing’.<sup>121</sup> The ‘power of music’ here is grounding, concrete, embodied, yet also a loss of self, a means of transport.<sup>122</sup>

Participants were also keen to note the difference between live and recorded music. Edith, for example, asserted, ‘There’s nothing like live music’.<sup>123</sup> Jean, too, noted that in services using recorded music ‘we always seem to be out of step with it’.<sup>124</sup> She reflected that she was not entirely sure why this was the case, ‘‘cause there’s nothing wrong with the music’, but observed that the congregation ‘seem to be more in sync’ when the person leading it is in the room.<sup>125</sup> These comments are particularly significant in a context where many churches do not have the resources for live music – and operate with ‘no organist no problem’.<sup>126</sup> And they are significant because of the ‘continued domination of mediatized forms’ within the music of the west; live music is now relatively uncommon.<sup>127</sup> For Philip Auslander, ‘The relationship between the live and the mediatized is volatile and subject to significant change over time, as is the definition of liveness itself’ – it is a mistake to cede to ‘the common assumption [...] that the live event is “real” and that the mediatized events are secondary and somehow artificial reproductions of the real.’<sup>128</sup> But, while my

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<sup>119</sup> Robert, Focus Group 5; Heather, Focus Group 5.

<sup>120</sup> John, Focus Group 3.

<sup>121</sup> Jean, Focus Group 6.

<sup>122</sup> Sarah, Focus Group 3; Pauline, Focus Group 4.

<sup>123</sup> Edith, Focus Group 1.

<sup>124</sup> Jean, Focus Group 6.

<sup>125</sup> Jean, Focus Group 6.

<sup>126</sup> Rachel, Incumbent Interview.

<sup>127</sup> Auslander, *Liveness*, p. xii.

<sup>128</sup> Auslander, *Liveness*, pp. 187 and 3.

participants did not articulate a sense that one was more real than the other – and in many church contexts which use recorded music, it is overlaid with live singing anyway – it is notable that they sensed a difference between the two, and that they sensed the impact that using recorded music has on the felt experience of singing. Their reflections significantly echo Walter Benjamin’s assertion, although articulated in the language of the work-concept and not in terms of musical practice, that ‘Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be.’<sup>129</sup>

What is also interesting is the way the discussions enacted the affectivity and embodiedness of their subject matter. First, my participants sang. Although I had suggested at the start of the research that there would be an option for singing together, and quickly realised this would be off-putting for a number of potential participants, it happened spontaneously. The third focus group featured a scratch version of ‘Everlasting God (strength will rise)’ and the fifth, ‘To God be the glory’.<sup>130</sup> It was also not uncommon for participants to sing or hum part of a hymn or song. Secondly, my participants cried. As will be developed in chapter 7, music is associated with various forms of meaning, and often related to people, places, and events – and hymns and songs are no exception. Participants drew rich and evocative links between hymns, songs, and funerals, and related – with emotion – hymns and songs to their memories of people who have died. Thirdly, participants reacted viscerally to their own choices of hymns and songs, and the choices of others. Through exasperated sighs at recollections of singing with masks, to non-verbal affirmations of others’ choices of hymns and songs, participants communicated their depth of feeling

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<sup>129</sup> Walter Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’, in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (Schocken Books, 2007), pp. 217-51 (p. 220).

<sup>130</sup> Brenton Brown, ‘Everlasting God (Strength Will Rise)’, from *Everlasting God* (Thankyou Music, 2005).

about congregational singing.<sup>131</sup> In these many ways, my participants attested to the materiality and physicality of music, and not only using words.

## Normative Claims

Then there's the – what is that? – St Augustine quote, 'when you sing you pray twice' is it or something?<sup>132</sup>

I mean, what's a hymn?<sup>133</sup>

Finally, my participants made normative theological claims about hymns, songs, and singing. Some of these were in response to my final question: 'if someone who didn't come to church asked you why we sing, what would you say?' But many were not. In a range of discussions, and in a range of ways, participants related singing to church practice, Christian doctrine, and the nature of God.

First, a number of normative claims were made *about* congregational singing. When Ann reflected on congregational singing as collective praise, for example, Edith suggested this was 'our gift to him', before Julian added, 'his gift to us, too.'<sup>134</sup> Similarly, Roger defined a hymn as 'an address to God', while Julian suggested music in worship is a combination of 'the words, and the Word'; there is 'something of Godly presence' in ecclesial music that is not present elsewhere.<sup>135</sup> Music in worship, according to these accounts, is both a gift and a response. It is worth acknowledging that at least some of these claims were contested. Edith, for example, suggested that 'Even in classical music without words [...] you can still get spiritual kind of feelings' – alluding to the perceived special relationship between

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<sup>131</sup> Julian, Focus Group 1; Robert, Focus Group 5.

<sup>132</sup> Edith, Focus Group 1.

<sup>133</sup> Roger, Focus Group 2.

<sup>134</sup> Ann, Focus Group 1; Edith, Focus Group 1; Julian, Focus Group 1.

<sup>135</sup> Roger, Focus Group 2; Julian, Focus Group 1.

western art music and transcendence that we examined in chapter 2, as well as claiming that hymns and songs may not be devotionally unique.<sup>136</sup> And Robert noted that he had been taught (and was possibly articulating for himself, too) that ‘hymn singing must be scripturally based or it [...] has no validity.’<sup>137</sup> Not all hymn singing, in other words, is desirable, appropriate, or even acceptable.

Singing was also linked to participation and praise. As I mentioned earlier, Gary described choirs and congregations in terms of the body of Christ. As he expanded, singing together is an act of ‘doing something together with that Body’, or, put particularly succinctly, ‘being the lungs of that Body.’<sup>138</sup> And participants were keen to note a close relationship between music and praise. For Ann, music is a ‘wonderful way to praise God’; for Sue it is ‘[a]n expression of joy and praise’, an act of ‘giving glory to God’; for Robert it is ‘a sort of special way of praising God’; and for Mark when you are singing, ‘you’re singing praises’.<sup>139</sup> It is also noteworthy that a variant of singing as ‘praying twice’, was invoked in two focus groups and the incumbent interview, all with reference to Augustine.<sup>140</sup>

It was only Robert who considered the theological implications of participation and praise in relation to finitude. When I asked whether singing hymns in church was different to singing them at home, Robert suggested:

Yes, it is. I think part of it is the realisation that when we come together as the body of Christ, we’re part of something so much bigger, and that part of the Eucharistic service ‘with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven’, ‘holy, holy,

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<sup>136</sup> Edith, Focus Group 1.

<sup>137</sup> Roger, Focus Group 2.

<sup>138</sup> Gary, Focus Group 4.

<sup>139</sup> Ann, Focus Group 1; Sue, Focus Group 3; Robert, Focus Group 5; Mark, Focus Group 6.

<sup>140</sup> Edith, Focus Group 1; Robert, Focus Group 5; Rachel, Incumbent Interview.

holy Lord’, we’re joining in with *them*[.] [...] [W]e’re time bound, they’re not! [...] [W]e are just a part of that whole process, and *one day* we’ll do it as they do it!<sup>141</sup>

This was the only time that participation – a common theme – took on an emphatically eschatological character.

Then there were normative claims made *through* hymns and songs. For Julian, ‘We have a gospel to proclaim’ is a reminder of Jesus’ birth, death, resurrection, and reign, an affirmation that ‘he’s done it.’<sup>142</sup> And, although expressed slightly humorously, Anthony suggested that ‘And can it be’ reminds him, ‘I’m a sinner.’<sup>143</sup> For Rebecca, ‘My Jesus, my Saviour (Shout to the Lord)’ ‘tells me that Jesus is so powerful and every time I need him he’s going to be there’; ‘Great is the Lord’ acts as a reminder ‘that there is a heaven’.<sup>144</sup> For Robert, the first line of ‘How great thou art’ (‘O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder, consider all the works thy hand hath made’) particularly stands out to him – ‘it’s the love of creation’.<sup>145</sup> He expanded, ‘and to some extent loving God for me is loving what he has done. What he’s made [...] what he’s given us to be our [...] temporary abode.’<sup>146</sup> For Gerald, ‘Breathe on me, breath of God’ ‘seems to me to strike the very depth...of sort of life and living, within the Spirit of God’.<sup>147</sup> For Sarah, a song she had sung as a child reminded her: ‘I’ve got a relationship with Jesus, and it’s real.’<sup>148</sup> For Ann, ‘All my hope on God is founded’ ‘says everything’ about what she believes, and articulates how ‘God guides

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<sup>141</sup> Robert, Focus Group 5. See Church of England, *Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England* (Church House Publishing, 2000), p. 188.

<sup>142</sup> Julian, Focus Group 1.

<sup>143</sup> Anthony, Focus Group 2.

<sup>144</sup> Rebecca, Focus Group 3.

<sup>145</sup> Stuart K. Hine, ‘O Lord my God! (How great thou art)’, Swedish folk melody arr. by Stuart K. Hine (Stuart K. Hine/The Stuart Hine Trust/Published by kingswaysongs.com, 1953), in *Anglican Hymns Old and New*, no. 563; Robert, Focus Group 5.

<sup>146</sup> Robert, Focus Group 5.

<sup>147</sup> Gerald, Focus Group 6.

<sup>148</sup> Sarah, Focus Group 3. I have not quoted the song as it would be likely to make Sarah identifiable to other members of her congregation.

me in my life.<sup>149</sup> Throughout the focus groups, participants applied their experiences and understandings of hymns and songs to their lives of faith.

There are two particularly interesting normative ideas across these discussions. The first is an ongoing conversation between the groups as to whether corporate worship is *complete* without music. Roger, for example, suggested that not having music in a service is ‘a little like not having a Bible reading, or not having a sermon.’<sup>150</sup> While he acknowledged that, ‘We’ve certainly not had sermons before’, he concluded, ‘It’s just that something’s missing [...] you feel that it’s missing. It’s incomplete.’<sup>151</sup> For Roger, it was viable not to have music, but this would only detract from the service. I was struck by the movement from ‘something’s missing’ to ‘you feel that it’s missing’, as if to suggest that the ‘something’ that was missing might be difficult to articulate, but deeply felt. The same sentiment was expressed by Sarah with a lot more force: ‘can you imagine if we didn’t sing in church? [...] I wouldn’t come! It’d be boring!’<sup>152</sup> Henry, too, suggested that not to sing ‘[t]akes the joy out of the service’.<sup>153</sup>

Conversely, when discussing Book of Common Prayer (BCP) services without hymns or songs, Robert reflected on the importance of silence and contemplation. Pauline, too, suggested: ‘if you go to a service with hymns then that’s a bonus’ before adding, ‘or...just different.’<sup>154</sup> She also noted that ‘The silence is part of music as well’; music would not exist without silence.<sup>155</sup> And, while she expressed a deep love of music, she thought it was

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<sup>149</sup> Ann, Focus Group 1.

<sup>150</sup> Roger, Focus Group 2.

<sup>151</sup> Roger, Focus Group 2.

<sup>152</sup> Sarah, Focus Group 3.

<sup>153</sup> Henry, Focus Group 5.

<sup>154</sup> Pauline, Focus Group 4.

<sup>155</sup> Pauline, Focus Group 4.

important to note: ‘that doesn’t mean it has to be there all the time.’<sup>156</sup> She suspected that, ‘Some people would go [to BCP services] because there aren’t hymns.’<sup>157</sup> When I asked Rachel about this, she thought that congregants would be more likely to attend because ‘they like the BCP, rather than they don’t like the music’.<sup>158</sup> Interestingly, however, she added that, for herself, ‘I really struggle to connect with worshipping God without music’, suggesting ‘I can worship God in silence but I don’t want a whole load of words’.<sup>159</sup> These different reflections point to the complex relationships between music, silence, and language, and to the difficulty of articulating the significance of music in corporate worship. There are a range of understandings of the role of music in worship, here: from optional, to beneficial, to essential.

The second ongoing conversation is between normative claims and affective experience. Sarah, for example, suggested:

It’s just an essential part of *worship*. I [...] don’t know how you could worship God without [...] singing music because it sort of generates all those emotions [...] and for me it makes me feel more connected to God[.]<sup>160</sup>

For Sarah, there is a close relationship between music, emotional experience, and connection with God – in this account, music is a way in which Sarah encounters God, and precisely because of the way music makes her feel. Similarly, Sue described ‘Dear Lord and Father of mankind’ as calming, ‘real presence of God time’; Rebecca suggested that ‘Great is the Lord’ ‘brings heaven to me’; and Janet claimed, ‘when I feel enthusiastic about something’ – in this case, music – ‘I feel God’s presence.’<sup>161</sup> In these accounts, there is a

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<sup>156</sup> Pauline, Focus Group 4.

<sup>157</sup> Pauline, Focus Group 4.

<sup>158</sup> Rachel, Incumbent Interview.

<sup>159</sup> Rachel, Incumbent Interview.

<sup>160</sup> Sarah, Focus Group 3.

<sup>161</sup> Sue, Focus Group 3; Rebecca, Focus Group 3; Janet, Focus Group 4.

clear and direct connection between the presence of God and particular affective experiences of music. In Sarah's account particularly, worship is only possible if it involves awareness of the presence of God, and such awareness of the presence of God stems from particular forms of affective experience. While she used the clarification 'for me', her claim was still presented in largely normative terms: any alternative, such as worshipping God without music, or without emotion, was presented as inconceivable.

This is something I interrogated further towards the end of the third focus group, when I asked a much more direct question about affective experience in worship than I had done in other groups – something I felt able to do given the nature of the conversation so far and the way in which each participant had described their faith. This was: 'do you sense God when you sing in church? And can you say a little bit about what that feels like?' Sarah replied, 'it depends', continuing, 'If the singing is bad and the organ playing is slow, *no!*'<sup>162</sup> She elaborated, 'I get easily distracted' when the music is 'not going quick enough' or when what is played is 'not what's written in the music'.<sup>163</sup> Sarah was not talking about musical excellence here – a theme that was absent in all of my focus groups – but she was concerned with competence. Cohering with her account above, where a lack of competence impedes focus, and thereby impedes certain forms of affective experience, music cannot, for Sarah, become worship.

These conclusions were not universally accepted. In a different focus group, Pauline contended, 'perhaps hymns shouldn't be there [...] for our benefit, or as entertainment'.<sup>164</sup> Instead, she suggested, 'they're part of worship', and therefore 'we aren't the purpose for hymns'.<sup>165</sup> While 'singing is a way we can [worship]', 'they're not just there to make us feel

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<sup>162</sup> Sarah, Focus Group 3.

<sup>163</sup> Sarah, Focus Group 3.

<sup>164</sup> Pauline, Focus Group 4.

<sup>165</sup> Pauline, Focus Group 4.

good.<sup>166</sup> And Anthony gave a different account again, suggesting that congregational singing was ‘to do, I think, with praising the Lord [...] and letting your emotions sort of convey [...] well his creation and his love for us’.<sup>167</sup> He suggested, in other words, that the affective and emotive nature of music is not a form of encounter (as Sarah and Sue suggested), or a by-product of worship (as Pauline would contest), but instead the very means of praise.

The focus groups, then, contained a wide variety of normative claims. Some claims were made *through* hymns and songs, and usually through their lyrics – articulations of the relationships between hymns and songs, doctrinal claims, and personal beliefs. Some claims were made *about* hymns and songs, about being the body of Christ, and about participating in the worship of the angels. Some claims addressed indirectly, or directly, what it means to use music in worship at all, and whether it is necessary. And some addressed the relationship between worship, experience, and efficacy. In these ways, the material from the focus groups and interview does not just paint a rich picture of congregational singing in a few contexts; it also makes normative claims about music in worship. These are claims that I will seek to address in chapters 5-7, while also giving an account of music in worship that acknowledges its communal, personal, material, and physical nature.

### **Gift and Pilgrimage**

Before I do so, however, it is worth noting two reflections which do not align straightforwardly with any of the four themes discussed so far in this chapter. The first is Sue’s account of her three favourite, or most meaningful, hymns and songs, which started

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<sup>166</sup> Pauline, Focus Group 4.

<sup>167</sup> Anthony, Focus Group 2.

the discussion of the third focus group. Sue began with a description of an ‘extremely difficult’ time, involving a family member and a profound period of ill health.<sup>168</sup> She recounted:

I just said, ‘Lord, I can’t do this. I feel empty, I’ve got no physical strength, I’ve got no emotional strength, I’ve got no spiritual reserves, I am *empty*. If you can’t help me I don’t know what’s going to happen.’

And immediately, Lydia, these words came into my head. ‘How sweet the name of Jesus sounds in a believer’s ear! It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds, and drives away his fear. It makes the wounded spirit whole, and calms the troubled breast; ‘tis manna to the hungry soul, and to the weary rest.’ And all [...] [s]ix verses, they just flowed straight into my head, I couldn’t believe it. And I felt peace. I felt God’s presence [...] and if you’d said to me, ‘can you tell me all the words of ‘How sweet the name of Jesus sounds?’ I would have said ‘no’. And yet every verse, every line of every verse just came straight in at the very moment I needed it. So it’s a powerful hymn for me, I hope we don’t sing it too often. But I needed that hymn at that very moment, and I felt that God had given me that hymn.<sup>169</sup>

She continued:

The other hymn [...], well the chorus that I’ve been given, again we haven’t sung it for years. ‘You are the King of glory’.<sup>170</sup>

She explained, again, a recent period of profound difficulty, where she realised she might have been infected with Covid-19. She recounted:

I went to bed and said, ‘Okay, Lord, if this Covid affects me very badly, if I die I’m safe in your hands. I’m not going to worry about it [...] And I went to sleep, had a good night’s sleep, woke up in the middle of the night. These words, before I was fully conscious! And I thought, what?! [...] But, every night, this was a year...oh probably, I don’t know, last October, September, October, every night these words

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<sup>168</sup> Sue, Focus Group 3.

<sup>169</sup> Sue, Focus Group 3; John Newton, ‘How sweet the name of Jesus sounds’, arr. by Alexander Reinagle, in *New English Hymnal*, pp. 804-05.

<sup>170</sup> Sue, Focus Group 3.

wake me up[.] [...] And I know it's bizarre, and I don't understand it, but it happens. And I think, 'what am I singing? What's this? Oh, 'You are the King of glory', what? And it's like a gift that I don't understand. There's so many other hymns I would choose, that I love. But this is the one that comes into my head, every night. And I, it's just, it's amazing, it's wonderful, and I'm very humbled and very grateful for it.<sup>171</sup>

These accounts paint a vivid picture of hymns and songs providing comfort and assurance. There are echoes here of the didactic and affective nature of hymns and songs considered earlier – Sarah's suggestion that a particular song reminded her: 'I've got a relationship with Jesus, and it's real.'<sup>172</sup> 'How sweet the name of Jesus sounds' is, of course, a reminder – an affective reinforcement – of Jesus as 'shepherd, guardian, friend' as well as 'Prophet, Priest, and King'.<sup>173</sup> 'You are the King of glory', similarly, reinforces a commitment to which Sue would presumably attest – of God's sovereignty. They, in other words, "make real" Christian faith commitments, in ways that are appropriate to the situations described.

However, Sue's claims go much further than affective reinforcement of hymn lyrics. What Sue is describing here is a gift that she has been given by God. The hymns emerge involuntarily, without conscious thought or even desire. She suggests she could never remember all six verses of 'How sweet the name of Jesus sounds', yet 'every line of every verse just came straight in at the very moment I needed it.' She suggests, too, that 'You are the King of glory' first came to her while she was sleeping. They are not even her favourite hymns – ones she might expect to be lodged in her memory. In fact, whether through association or previous taste, she expresses a hope not to sing 'How sweet the name of Jesus sounds' very often, and suggests that, if she could choose a hymn to come to her every night, it would not be 'You are the King of glory'. She also specifies that neither are sung

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<sup>171</sup> Sue, Focus Group 3.

<sup>172</sup> Sarah, Focus Group 3.

<sup>173</sup> Newton, 'How sweet the name of Jesus sounds', pp. 600-01.

often at her church. She is discounting, in other words, alternative explanations to these hymns being a gift. They are not hymns she remembers particularly, and nor are they hymns she particularly likes, and nor are they hymns she had sung recently. The only viable explanation, for Sue, is that ‘God had given me that hymn.’ It is through ‘How sweet the name of Jesus sounds’ that Sue felt ‘peace’, and, going further, ‘God’s presence’. It is through ‘You are the King of glory’ that, over the course of a very difficult year, Sue experienced assurance. And, Sue asserted, these were gifts given directly. It is not just that God communicated with her through music, that God speaks through congregational songs on a Sunday morning – which seemed to be what Sarah, and the other participants who drew theological meaning from particular hymns, were implying. These particular hymns and songs were a gift from God to Sue in times of distress.

The second reflection is more disparate, comprising a series of passages across the fourth focus group with one common thread. Here, Janet told me, ‘I feel as if I’ve been on a pilgrimage, or journey, just picking the three hymns, it’s been quite amazing’.<sup>174</sup> She went on to reflect on childhood, grief, family, and her career; on visiting grandchildren, and teaching them ‘Jesus’ love is very wonderful’; on a song from her primary school which evoked the school motto: ‘perseverance’; on her changing politics; on a period abroad; on nursery rhymes; and on finding a sense of home. During the process of transcription, I realised that these disparate ideas, memories, and themes were often linked to formative events throughout her life, and that she was using music to help to make sense of them. These events were largely related either to Covid-19, or to her period of time abroad. For example, she suggested:

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<sup>174</sup> Janet, Focus Group 4.

the other one is [...], I thought of it very much in the pandemic, [...] ‘Come down O love divine, seek thou this soul of mine’[...] [...] in this pandemic I found myself walking, because I had to get out of the house [...] and I look at this, where I live now in a totally different way. Much deeper and richer. And my faith much deeper and richer.<sup>175</sup>

I mean in the pandemic [...] someone sent me [...] a person singing in one place, and then another one joined, and then it was like a choir but it was one, and then another and then another [...] and it was so comforting[...] [...] And it was powerful[...] [...] Each voice added to it, and I think that’s right ’cause it’s a community[...] [...] [W]e’ve got faults and everything but [...] we’re building a community.

we humans like to...associate but disassociate as well. And that’s why it’s hard sometimes because you might disagree with somebody, but once you start to sing [...] I think [...] you can find some common thing to sing that you both like or whatever[...] [...] And it’s joyful, ’cause it makes you feel better[...] [...] [I]n the pandemic we were dancing around the living room just singing any old thing[.]<sup>176</sup>

In these examples – and there were other comparable ones relating to other formative events – Janet made clear links between music, singing together, community, and personal faith. She was, as she articulated, finding ‘connections in places that you don’t think’ between music, faith, and life. Some connections were largely self-explanatory: her discussion of community choirs and the joy of singing together; others were perhaps less obvious: her discussion of politics, and her reflections on her career. But each, she suggested, were ‘connected’, somehow, part of a broader ‘pilgrimage’ or ‘journey’. It seemed impossible for Janet to separate out three meaningful hymns and songs from her life as a whole.

Neither of these passages fit neatly into the categories above. Sue articulated music as a gift from God, but without making normative claims about congregational singing. Janet’s

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<sup>175</sup> Bianco de Siena, ‘Come down, O Love divine’, trans. by Richard F. Littledale, arr. by Ralph Vaughan Williams, in *Anglican Hymns Old and New*, no. 120.

<sup>176</sup> Janet, Focus Group 4.

account at first reads as an expression of particularity and personal faith, but on closer inspection exemplifies broader claims about life, faith, and music. In part, these reflections demonstrate that my treatment of the focus group conversations and interview can only ever be partial. However, these passages also help to set up the theological task ahead. They forcefully articulate the way in which music is considered *powerful* and *other* – the way it can seem to assail from outside (however designated). Yet they also articulate the way in which music is deeply, and irretrievably, embedded in ordinary life. On the one hand, music is presented here as a divine gift, far removed from everyday experience. On the other, music is presented as inextricably linked with the ordinary, part of the ‘journey’ or ‘pilgrimage’ of Christian life. Both, I contend, are significant – articulating how music is both something that people do, and how music is perceived as an agentive force. The account of music in worship given in this thesis, I suggest, must contend with both of these aspects, with both Sue and Janet.

## **Conclusion**

Congregational singing, then, is communal, particular, physical, material, and normative. To a large degree, my participants’ reflections cohere with the musicological claims outlined in chapters 2 and 3, demonstrating that these ideas – while making good ontological and ethical sense – also resemble ordinary practice. While the retelling of conversations is never neutral, my participants undeniably described music in grounded, concrete, social ways; as something that people do; and as something deeply experiential. The account of music in worship given in chapters 5-7, then, should be recognisably related to these understandings, and will indeed draw from many of the narratives, memories, and reflections of these focus groups and interview as examples.

More than that, though, chapters 5-7 should honour the normative and prescriptive character of these discussions. Chapter 5, for example, provides some commentary on the discussion of whether music in worship is optional, beneficial, or essential. While I do not straightforwardly advocate for any one of these three positions, I do comment on the role of music in worship, asking: what is music in worship? And what is it for? Chapter 6, drawing on the relationship between affective experience and normative claims, asks: when is music music, and when is music worship? Can we distinguish between the two? Should we? And to what extent is it viable to draw upon affective experience to try? Chapter 7 comments on the relationship between hymns, songs, and theological knowledge. And, as a whole, these constructive chapters seek to articulate how music in worship is deeply interconnected with the ordinary things of life, as well as powerful and other. In these ways, I seek to give an account of music in worship that is recognisably related to ordinary practice, remaining committed both to the ontology of music laid out in the previous chapter, and to the accounts given here of music as communal, particular, physical and material – inasmuch as one confirms the other.

## 5 – Music and Body of Christ

Whence the Prophetic Spirit proclaims symbolically that God is to be praised on cymbals of jubilation and on other musical instruments, which clever and industrious men invented, since all the arts that contribute to the utility and need of mankind were discovered by some breath that God sent into the body of man. Thus it is just that God be praised in everything.<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

So far, I have presented a range of ways of talking about music, three theoretical suggestions about musical ontology, and some descriptive and normative accounts of music in worship as it occurs at St Michael and All Angels, St Nicholas', and Christchurch. Chapters 2-4 are not intended to form a neat whole – that would, after all, be inconsistent both with the theory of chapter 3, and with the complexity of music in worship as it occurs in time and place. However, there are meaningful theological connections between these chapters, in their varying articulations of music as it is practised, experienced, and understood. It is the task of this chapter to draw together some of the connections between the theory and practice laid out in the previous three, and thereby to start to give a constructive theological account of music in worship.

This chapter is concerned with two at once deceptively simple, and yet vast, questions: what is music in worship? And what is it for? I am not so much concerned with *an* answer to these questions, but rather with the *many* plausible answers that have emerged, or can be extended, from chapters 2-4. There are the answers to these questions posed by theologians and encountered in chapter 2: those concerned with praise, formation,

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<sup>1</sup> Hildegard of Bingen, 'Epistle 47: To the Prelates of Mainz', in *Source Readings*, ed. by W. Oliver Strunk, pp. 183-86 (p. 185).

devotion, and sanctification. There are the answers given by the congregants at St Michael and All Angels, St Nicholas', and Christchurch in chapter 4, often expressing similar concerns, but intertwined with memories of people and places, and sometimes a realism about the profound challenges of doing music well together. And there are the answers of the musicologists, anthropologists, and sociologists of chapter 3, those concerned with assemblages, mediations, and practices – answers likely to be more interested in power and hierarchy than praise and worship.

This chapter is concerned not simply with these disparate answers, but with their relationship to one another. In a broad sense, I am interested here in how the ontology of music in worship (expressed in my first simple but vast question) influences, makes sense of, or can be integrated within the purpose or function of music in worship (expressed in the second question) where this function or purpose is understood in primarily theological terms. Or, more simply, I am interested in what we can say theologically about music in worship, if music really is an assemblage, a mediation, and a collection of practices, and if we want such an account to be recognisably related to ordinary practice.

I will begin by introducing a series of answers to the questions: what is music in worship? And what is it for? For the purposes of clarity, I will draw a relatively sharp distinction between these two questions, answering the first in largely musicological terms and the second in theological terms – although drawing on the focus group conversations and interview for both. This is not, it is important to say, to suggest that there are no theological answers to the first question or musicological answers to the second, and it is not to suggest that ontology and function can be neatly delineated. Rather, the distinction serves a functional purpose: to group similar claims about music in worship together and with clarity; and it serves a constructive purpose: to demonstrate by its outworking that this distinction – at least in any straightforward, or linear, sense – cannot ultimately hold.

I will then explore three ways of finding coherence between the many answers to the questions: what is music in worship? And what is it for? The first way to find this coherence, I suggest, is to maintain the divisions that I have already established between disciplines, and between ontology and purpose – suggesting that these questions properly belong to two different conversations. The second way to find coherence is to see the first set of answers as a form of participation in the second, where it is through the ontology of music that the purpose becomes possible. The third way, however, which I suggest stands up to greater scrutiny, is to view the relationship between these many claims non-linearly, drawing on Bogost’s ‘flat ontology’, and Williams’ *The Edge of Words*.<sup>2</sup> It is from here that I will provide an account of music in worship as a form and expression of praise, formation, devotion, and sanctification – and suggest that this praise, formation, devotion, and sanctification is necessarily wrapped up in, and inseparable from, finite, contingent, and even risky musical practices. In so doing, I will unfold a distinctively theological account on the basis of a musicological claim: that music (in worship) is *something that people do*.

### **What is Music in Worship?**

There are many answers to the question, “what is music in worship?”, which can be derived from both the theory of music espoused in chapter 3, and the reflections on music presented in chapter 4. First, both chapters emphasise that music in worship is a series of practices. The theme that dominated the focus groups discussions was singing together: engaging vocal cords and producing sound. But there are other practices that can occur at the same time, too: the practice of operating the organ pedals, or sight-reading an alto part in the choir, or playing a bass guitar line, or drumming loudly enough to keep a band together, or breathing in time with other unaccompanied singers, or conducting a brass

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<sup>2</sup> Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology*, p. 17; Williams, *Edge of Words*.

band, or playing a recording of a hymn or song, or adjusting microphones, or working at a sound desk to ensure balance between amplified instruments. And there are other practices that are also necessary to music in worship (at least as we know it), whether standing, sitting, dancing, clapping, raising a hand, looking at screens, or holding a hymn book. These practices are culturally defined – Tanya Riches and Alexander Douglas are keen to remind us that ‘while it is important to emphasize that “worship” is not primarily about cultural identity’, we must be wary of ‘an unregulated assumption that “worship” is an anthropologically disengaged or objective reality’.<sup>3</sup> There are undoubtedly a wide range of practices that comprise music in worship in time and space, and they vary substantively from one location to another.

Then, as described by Robert, there are at least two other practices implicit in music in worship – those of ‘coming together with other people’, and ‘worshipping God’.<sup>4</sup> Music in worship is in part constituted, or at the very least made possible, by a range of other practices: the practice of holding a service of public or private worship; the practice of hiring or appointing an organist, or gathering together a choir or band; and the practice of any congregants deciding to come to church at all. Underpinning the act of singing together is a complex and delicate arrangement of social contracts and agreements – or, put another way, a commitment to coming together as the body of Christ. There are roles and positions – ‘people [...] have their own seats you know.’<sup>5</sup> Some people sing, some people lead, some people compose, and most people talk about music in one way or another. Some people stand, others sit. Some people sing, others are silent. Some people know the music well; others (according to the focus groups and interview, most likely

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<sup>3</sup> Tanya Riches and Alexander Douglas, “Hillsong and Black”: The Ethics of Style, Representation, and Identity in the Hillsong Megachurch’, in *Ethics and Christian Musicking*, ed. by Nathan Myrick and Mark James Porter (Routledge, 2021), pp. 145-63 (p. 160).

<sup>4</sup> Robert, Focus Group 5.

<sup>5</sup> Ann, Focus Group 1.

visiting baptism families) may not know the tune. All of these practices constitute ‘coming together with other people’.<sup>6</sup> And they are also involved in the second of Robert’s practices: the act of worshipping God – something which will be discussed further in the following section.

There are also boundary practices: activities which define the limits of acceptable music in worship. These might include decisions about which hymns and songs are sung, and consequent tensions around who is allowed to make such decisions – thinking back to remarks such as ‘we never sing that one’ in the focus groups.<sup>7</sup> They include, on a broader scale, the compilation of hymn books, and related legal and ethical concerns – which, as Maggi Dawn asserts, ‘mostly have less to do with distinguishing between originality and plagiarism than with the common, though much-debated, practice of subjecting existing hymns and songs to multiple changes, not for a new writer to claim the work as their own, but either to improve or to update the hymn for its usage in worship.’<sup>8</sup> Underpinning the act of adaptation or compilation of any form of repertoire – explicit or implicit – are questions of ‘culture, theology, [...] taste’, power, hierarchy, and influence.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, there are background practices, which are seen only by their effects. Every virtuosic voluntary played by an organist at the end of a service is underpinned by hours of practice, by slow and sometimes painful development of technique, by guidance from teachers and peers. At some point, every virtuosic organist has had to learn to play, to learn (almost always) to read music, to learn to improvise, and to learn the spoken and unspoken rules of style, genre, and setting. Every charismatic worship leader, too, has had to learn how to

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<sup>6</sup> Robert, Focus Group 5.

<sup>7</sup> Roger, Focus Group 2.

<sup>8</sup> Maggi Dawn, ‘The Ethics of Adaptation in Hymns and Songs for Worship’, in *Ethics and Christian Musicking*, ed. by Nathan Myrick and Mark James Porter, pp. 124-41 (p. 124).

<sup>9</sup> Dawn, ‘Ethics of Adaptation’, p. 124.

sing in accordance with the style of their tradition, to learn (often) to play an instrument as well – then to learn to sing and play at the same time – and to learn how to inhabit the role of a leader, adopting the often unspoken cues that make congregational music possible in their context. If the surface presentation on a Sunday morning looks effortless, it is almost certainly underpinned by meticulous and often painstaking practice.

These are only a small fraction of the range of practices that constitute music in worship; it would of course be impossible to detail them all. However, they demonstrate that music in worship is comprised by an incalculable amount of personal, communal, legal, and ethical activity. Beneath and behind and surrounding the moment of singing together, or the moment of the organist playing a voluntary, or the moment of improvisation during prayer, are innumerable practices. Not all these practices are necessary in every context, and nor are they particularly obviously related – except through music in worship. There is nothing inherently alike about the activity of standing up to sing and the activity of submitting a final draft of a hymn book for publication – although in some churches the latter may be necessary for the former. But, no matter what the practices themselves are, music in worship is necessarily constituted by them.

Music in worship is also, drawing back once again to the terms of the theory chapter, a mediation. Music in worship is experienced, enacted, and performed through – as Antoine Hennion describes – ‘precise devices, places, institutions, objects, and human abilities, constructing identities, bodies, and subjectivities’.<sup>10</sup> For there to be music in worship at all, in other words, there must be *people* – leaders, musicians, and congregants; there must be *locations* – churches, school halls, and festival tents; there must be *institutions* – committees, boards, and licences; there must be *objects* – organs, music stands, and microphones; there

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<sup>10</sup> Hennion, ‘Music and Mediation’, p. 250.

must be *human abilities* – learned skills, practised behaviours, and musical techniques; and there must be *subjectivities* – tastes, preferences, and intentions. Music in worship is always performed and experienced amidst these mediations. And, since (as detailed in the theory chapter) there is no music without such mediations, so it is possible to say that there would be no *music in worship* without them.<sup>11</sup>

One of these mediations is taste. Every congregant has a relationship with music that extends well beyond Sunday worship – tastes and preferences shaped at least in part by overlapping and intersecting factors such as experience, class, and opportunity.<sup>12</sup> As Morris Holbrook and Robert Schindler demonstrate, people are, on average, most likely to enjoy music that was popular when they were twenty three years and six months’ old, which means that when different generations – even from similar backgrounds – sing the same hymn, they are unlikely to be experiencing it in the same way.<sup>13</sup> While congregants might ‘not expect the genres of worship music to mirror the music they listen to for leisure’, the latter is likely to have an effect on their experience of the former.<sup>14</sup> Music in worship is performed amidst this mediation, and, since music in worship would be qualitatively different if congregants had no tastes and preferences, there would be no music in worship (as we know it) without it.

Another of these mediations is the music leader. Whether a choir director, a worship pastor, an organist, a worship leader, a music co-ordinator, or the person in charge of playing the recording of a hymn or song, there is virtually always someone leading music

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<sup>11</sup> Hennion, ‘Music and Mediation’; see also pp. 102-04 of this thesis.

<sup>12</sup> See Bourdieu, *Distinction*, pp. 62-64, for a discussion of how some of these factors interact.

<sup>13</sup> Morris B. Holbrook and Robert M. Schindler, ‘Some Exploratory Findings on the Development of Musical Tastes’, *Journal of Consumer Research* 16.1 (1989), pp. 119–24 (p. 122).

<sup>14</sup> Gerardo Martí, *Worship across the Racial Divide: Religious Music and the Multiracial Congregation* (Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 81.

in worship. Some leadership of music happens in the background – in the selection of hymns and songs, or in a more experienced organist teaching a more junior organist – and some happens in the foreground. But music in worship must always be initiated, sustained, organised, directed, and managed. Music in worship is performed amidst this mediation, and there would be no music in worship (as we know it) without it. Similarly, take committees, used here broadly to define groups and organisations which act as gatekeepers between hymns and songs and worshipping congregations – this includes both committees with direct editorial control over hymnals, and committees with broader and less direct oversight, such as the Bethel Board of Elders. While operating in a range of ways, such committees are involved in shaping repertoires and forming canons. The hymns and songs that appear on a Sunday morning are those that have been permitted for use, at one level or another. Once again, music in worship is performed amidst this mediation, and there would be no music in worship (as we know it) without it.

Finally, music in worship is an assemblage, an aggregate of the practices and mediations discussed above. It is a complex collection of activities, materials, spaces, traditions, objects, and actors – multiplicities on multiplicities. Music in worship is, in part, a collective act of singing in unison or harmony; a corporate act of the body of Christ; a joining in ‘with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven’; an anticipation of an eschatological future.<sup>15</sup> It is also a manifestation of differences in taste, affective response, skill, and privilege, ‘a very highly defended territory’; a site of power struggle and interpersonal conflict.<sup>16</sup> It is, as described in chapter 4, deeply powerful, relational, and significant – intertwined with memories of people and special occasions. It is also held together at least in part by a series of activities as mundane as buying a CCLI licence, printing service sheets,

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<sup>15</sup> Robert, Focus Group 5.

<sup>16</sup> Rachel, Incumbent Interview.

or dusting the organ. Music in worship is, in other words, an assemblage of disparate objects, mediations, and practices.

### **What is it For?**

If this is what music in worship *is*, then there are also any number of answers to the question of what it is *for*. A primary answer, as articulated both by Ford and Hardy and my fieldwork, is praise. As I noted in chapter 2, Ford and Hardy define praise as ‘an attempt to cope with the abundance of God’s love’ and suggest that ‘Singing is worth special comment as an instrument of praise.’<sup>17</sup> This was reiterated in chapter 4, where Mark was keen to emphasise that congregational singing is about ‘singing praises’.<sup>18</sup> For James K. A. Smith, it is important to note that singing is an embodied practice, and this is part of its significance for praise: ‘singing is a full-bodied action that activates the whole person – or at least more of the whole person than is affected by merely sitting and passively listening [...] Singing requires us to call on parts of the body that might otherwise be rather dormant – stomach muscles and vocal chords, lungs and tongues.’<sup>19</sup> And this means that ‘song often pulls us into dance or raising our hands in praise’ – singing (and, we might add, music more broadly) is both a means of embodied praise, and can invite other expressions of embodied praise.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ford and Hardy, *Living in Praise*, pp. 2 and 19.

<sup>18</sup> Mark, Focus Group 6.

<sup>19</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Baker Academic, 2009), p. 170. As Elizabeth Margulis suggests, it is difficult to draw such a sharp distinction between ‘presentational musics’ and music designed for ‘actual participation’. She contends that it is possible to experience a sense of ‘virtual participation’ even in contexts where the ‘bodily involvement of audience members’ would be discouraged. Elizabeth Margulis, *On Repeat: How Music Plays the Mind* (Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 142, 144, and 143.

<sup>20</sup> Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, p. 170.

Music in worship is also corporate. The importance of singing together was a common theme in my focus group discussions, as was the ‘murder’ of not being able to do so within recent memory.<sup>21</sup> For Smith, the corporate significance of music can be demonstrated aesthetically: ‘The delights of harmony [...] attest to an aesthetic expression of interdependence and intersubjectivity.’<sup>22</sup> Music in worship is a potent reminder of the close entanglements between different human lives, and between these lives and creation as a whole: ‘In short, music and song seem to stand as packed microcosms of what it means to be human.’<sup>23</sup> For Wren, the importance of corporate singing can be noted historically and anthropologically:

Vigorous community singing has been the hallmark of Christian renewal movements, including early Methodism, Pentecostalism, American camp meetings, and the Salvation Army. New songs, sung by all, are important means of building faith and identity. African Americans, Anabaptists, Mennonites, and Moravians have sometimes literally sung for dear life.<sup>24</sup>

But this point can also be made theologically. As I will develop in this chapter, there is good reason to suggest, with Gary, that singing together is like being ‘the lungs’ of the body of Christ, and can play a formative role in Christian community.<sup>25</sup>

Conversely, my fieldwork also demonstrates that music in worship is of individual devotional significance. Jean told me that she would often sing hymns when she was alone; Robert suggested that hymns were a means of ‘touching base’ midweek.<sup>26</sup> As noted in the previous chapter, the focus group conversations and interview were marked by profound

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<sup>21</sup> Rachel, Incumbent Interview.

<sup>22</sup> Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, p. 170.

<sup>23</sup> Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, p. 170.

<sup>24</sup> Wren, *Praying Twice*, p. 150.

<sup>25</sup> Gary, Focus Group 4.

<sup>26</sup> Jean, Focus Group 6; Robert, Focus Group 5.

differences in experience (perceived or actual), musical skill, and taste, and not all of my participants related to music in these ways. Yet these personal significances – and individual differences – are both of theological importance. Not only can music in worship be significant for personal devotion, but it also necessarily involves a negotiation of difference, and there is an opportunity for this negotiation (at least for some people, some of the time) to be a means of sanctification – an act of ‘nonprioritization of the self’.<sup>27</sup>

In this way, both the corporate and individual nature of music are consonant with music, in some contexts, and among other things, being a means of participation and incorporation. As Saliers notes, there are three types (or, for him, ‘levels’), of participation implicated in Christian worship.<sup>28</sup> The first is ‘the level of participation *in the phenomena*, in the actual singing, in the reading, in the praying’; the second – which is routinely ‘neglected in a culture of radical individualism’ – is ‘participation in the singing, praying, reading, listening, *as church*’; and the third is ‘participation in the [...] divine life’.<sup>29</sup> Participation in the music of the church is in this way distinct from, yet related to, participation in God. He summarises: ‘The truth revealed in such a gathering is truth in the form of music heard deeply enough to make us the music; stories told so well that we become part of the story’.<sup>30</sup>

Music in worship, it is important to add, has different functions, and different restrictions, in different contexts. The ‘various “moods” of the Christian liturgy’ listed by Wainwright – ‘Adoration’, ‘Confession of sin’, ‘Proclamation and thanksgiving’, ‘Commitment’,

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<sup>27</sup> Greggs, *Dogmatic Ecclesiology*, p. 368.

<sup>28</sup> Don E. Saliers, ‘Sounding the Symbols of Faith: Exploring the Nonverbal Languages of Christian Worship’, in *Music in Christian Worship*, ed. by Charlotte Kroeker, pp. 17-26 (p. 23). I am unconvinced that presenting these forms of participation as levels is helpful, as will be strongly implied by my subsequent advocacy for a flat ontological account of music in worship.

<sup>29</sup> Saliers, ‘Sounding the Symbols’, pp. 23-24, emphasis in original.

<sup>30</sup> Saliers, *Worship as Theology*, p. 210, emphasis in original.

‘Intercession, ‘Expectation, ‘Absence’, and ‘Wrestling’ – may all be deemed appropriate and necessary for worship, but they are not all readily associated with music, or not in all contexts.<sup>31</sup> As Bret Polman observes in relation to the two latter ‘moods’, ‘If you look at an average modern hymn book, that whole important phenomenon of lamenting before God in faith is largely missing’ – an observation that raises questions about the relationship between hymnody and psalmody.<sup>32</sup> This is not universal: as Cone asserts on the spirituals, ‘The “Glory, Hallelujah!” was not a denial of trouble; it was an affirmation of faith: God is the companion of sufferers, and *trouble* is not the last word on human existence.’<sup>33</sup> But it does show that the functions of music are restricted in some contexts and certain ways – and not always for good theological reason. There are places where music is not, or is only occasionally, found; there are places where music is not deemed appropriate; and there are places where music is associated with some human emotions and experiences over and against others.

Music in worship, then, has a number of purposes – praise, community formation, devotion, and sanctification – and there are also restrictions placed on its use. There is much else that could be said here, of course – these are only some of the things we might say about the role of music in worship, and it would not be possible to do justice to them all. It is also important to note that the purposes here may seem to instrumentalise music: I will discuss why music must first and foremost be treated as a creaturely good in chapter 7. However, for the purposes of this chapter, I have given some short form answers to the question of what music is for, reiterating some of the core explanations from chapters 2

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<sup>31</sup> Wainwright, *Doxology*, p. 36.

<sup>32</sup> Bret F. Polman, ‘Forward Steps and Side Steps in a Walk-Through of Christian Hymnody’, in *Music in Christian Worship*, ed. by Charlotte Kroeker, pp. 62-72 (p. 62).

<sup>33</sup> Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues*, p. 58, emphasis in original.

and 4 as to why ‘the church has always found itself *breaking out* into music, especially into song.’<sup>34</sup>

### **Option One: Maintaining Disciplinary Divisions**

The two sets of claims about music in worship made so far in this chapter – about what it is, and what it is for – may not sound particularly similar to one another; there is a significant shift of tenor and emphasis between them. But it is this perceived dissimilarity that is the primary concern of this chapter. This is because each of these claims is a valid response to the nature of music in worship. It is legitimate to describe music in worship as a site of intense power struggle; it is also legitimate to describe music in worship as an act of praise. These claims might – in their own way – both be valid descriptions. And if they might both be valid descriptions, then an account of music in worship should either be able to incorporate both, or justify its exclusion of one. What follows in this section, and the next two, are three proposals as to how these two seemingly very different sets of claims might relate to one another.

The first option is to regard these two sets of claims as properly belonging to two different disciplines. Each set of claims about music in worship is legitimate, possibly of equal value – perhaps they are even two sides of the same coin – but they are ultimately part of two different conversations: one theological, and the other musicological/sociological. This line of thinking is implicit in theological accounts of music in worship which have a limited engagement with the sorts of ontological claims with which I am operating in this thesis. Looking back at the second set of claims, as articulated earlier in this chapter and in chapter 2, for example, music often functions either implicitly or explicitly as a vehicle, or means,

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<sup>34</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, ‘Thinking about Church Music’, in *Music in Christian Worship*, pp. 3-16 (p. 11), emphasis in original.

or perhaps “instrument” for praise, community building, devotion, and sanctification. For Saliers, music is a means of becoming ‘part of the story’; or, for Greggs, singing is ‘an expressive variation of an orientation on God [...] and on the other’ – a means of sanctification.<sup>35</sup> However, the relationship between music in worship and these intended outcomes or consequences is assumed rather than explained. Neither offers an account of how arguments in the choir stalls, or choosing the hymns, or handing out hymn books might be doing formational or sanctifying work – even though these are the objects and practices of which music in worship, and singing, are comprised. There is not much indication that these accounts have a thoroughgoing interest in the practices of music in worship as it emerges in time and place, or in relating theological claims to this ontology.

This is not to say that such accounts have *no* recognition of the first set of claims. Both Saliers and Greggs address singing – which is, after all, a practice. And Ford and Hardy are clear that the potency of singing emerges from its relationship to ‘body, feeling and imagination’, emphasising its embodied nature.<sup>36</sup> But this practice is still described in largely idealised terms:

singing is a model of the way praise can take up ordinary life and transpose it to a higher level without losing what is good in other levels. The social power of music in general (for good or ill) is well known[.]<sup>37</sup>

In fact, there are three different forms of idealisation at play in Ford and Hardy’s account. First, by describing music as an ‘instrument of praise’, but not a means of protest, intercession, or despair (as we find particularly acutely in the tradition of the spirituals), Ford and Hardy are presenting a restricted account of the possible uses of music in

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<sup>35</sup> Saliers, *Worship as Theology*, p. 210; Greggs, *Dogmatic Ecclesiology*, p. 326, emphasis removed from original.

<sup>36</sup> Ford and Hardy, *Living in Praise*, p. 19.

<sup>37</sup> Ford and Hardy, *Living in Praise*, p. 19.

worship.<sup>38</sup> Secondly, by focusing on music as a means of praise, Ford and Hardy are not dealing with music which, in some sense, falls short of praise. And thirdly, Ford and Hardy – like Saliers and Greggs – do not consider what music in worship looks like on the ground, that it might be a site not only of despair, but also of tension, negotiation, and compromise. It is not that the first set of claims is omitted in their entirety – music is recognised as a practice – but rather that priority is given to the second set of claims. For Ford and Hardy, some (and only some) of the second set are the goal, the desired outcome, and the intended use. Depending on their suitability to achieve it, the first set may be a means, an instrument, or a vehicle to these uses. Put more bluntly, the second set of claims is the theological ideal to which the first set of claims aspires. While the first set of claims may be relevant to a theological account of music, it is ultimately secondary.

Conversely, the ethnographic accounts of music in worship given in *The Spirit of Praise: Music and Worship in Global Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity*, or *Christian Congregational Music: Performance, Identity, and Experience* each describe in some detail the things that congregants do, feel, and believe as they employ music in worship – they engage in a thoroughgoing way with matters of musical ontology.<sup>39</sup> However, these accounts are not then paired with detailed discussion, for example, of the nature of sanctification. There are, of course, some studies, such as Packiam's *Worship and the World to Come: Exploring Christian Hope in Contemporary Worship* which seek to cross the disciplinary divide between theology and ethnography on the topic of music in worship.<sup>40</sup> But he describes his work

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<sup>38</sup> Ford and Hardy, *Living in Praise*, p. 19.

<sup>39</sup> *Spirit of Praise*, ed. by Monique M. Ingalls and Amos Yong; *Christian Congregational Music: Performance, Identity, and Experience*, ed. by Monique Marie Ingalls, Carolyn Landau and Thomas Wagner (Ashgate, 2013).

<sup>40</sup> Packiam, *Worship and the World to Come*.

in terms of the ‘normative’ interrogating the ‘espoused’ – not in terms, as I am suggesting here, of the realities of music-making being themselves of theological significance.<sup>41</sup>

There are obvious reasons for this disciplinary divide, and reasons too for its maintenance; different disciplines operate with different assumptions, concerns, and emphases. The first set of claims seems highly particular: the act of putting out pew sheets or of gauging (for the church context) whether it would be more acceptable to raise one hand in the air or two may be important or valid as expressions of music in worship, but they are localised and non-generalisable. Ethnography seems suited to these concerns. And the second set of claims is largely normative, concerned with what music in worship should look (or sound) like, with the work music in worship should be doing, with the places where music in worship falls short of these ideals. These are plausible theological concerns. In this line of thinking, what I have presented in this chapter are two different conversations, both of relevance, but belonging to different places. To treat these claims properly, and to honour both as responses to the nature of music in worship, involves handling them separately, placing them in the conversations to which they are suited.

The problem with this approach, however, is that it presents a foregone conclusion on the theological significance of the first set of claims. There can be little challenge to the idea that these claims are of secondary significance if they are treated as such. And actually, it is reasonable to think that there might be a meaningful theological connection between these two sets of claims: between what music is and what it is for – whether we want to use the language of participation or affordances to discuss the fittingness of creation, or to make more abstracted points about the connection between ontology and function. Such an approach also risks presenting a stark position on created reality. The deeply human

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<sup>41</sup> Packiam, *Worship and the World to Come*, p. 24. See also Cameron, *Talking about God in Practice*, p. 2.

practices of music can easily become an inconvenience, or neglected entirely in service of a theological account that bears little resemblance to even the best (however defined) ordinary practice. Those things which are most precious to those who use music in worship – memories, events, and emotions – become increasingly extraneous, useful only insofar as they serve pre-determined ends of praise, community formation, devotion, and sanctification, and as long as they do so convincingly or demonstrably. There is little space here for discussion of how one hymn might relate to a congregant’s experience of grief, say, unless it clearly relates to one of these ends. And ultimately, then, such an account relies upon a generalised object of study beyond human practice, or on another form of “the music itself”.

This is not to negate concerns about musical ideals. After all, if we are any in sense participating in the worship of the angels, and anticipating the worship of the new creation, then there are forms of music in worship to which we in some sense aspire. Nor is it to say that we cannot meaningfully ask a range of ethical questions about music. As Jeff Warren suggests, all musical experience – and indeed all musical action – ‘involves encounters with others’, and these encounters ‘create ethical responsibilities.’<sup>42</sup> And, as Saliers reminds us, ‘Questions concerning Christian ethics and the shape of the moral life cannot be adequately understood apart from thinking about how Christians worship.’<sup>43</sup> However, to work with a musical ideal that sees real musical practices as subsidiary, or as irrelevant, is simply not ontologically or theologically viable.

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<sup>42</sup> Jeff R. Warren, *Music and Ethical Responsibility* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> Don E. Saliers, ‘Liturgy and Ethics: Some New Beginnings’, *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 7.2 (1979), pp. 173–89 (p. 174).

## Option Two: Participation

The second option is to understand the first set of claims as the way in which we participate in the second. This approach focuses in on music as a means, vehicle, or instrument – familiar terms from the second set of claims, although each with different emphases.<sup>44</sup> And it recognises that music in worship was described in participatory terms (in one form or another) by many of my fieldwork participants. Broadly speaking, this approach can acknowledge that music is an assemblage, a mediation, and a set of practices, and it can assert that it is through the music in worship assemblage that congregants can participate in praise, in community building, in devotion, and in sanctification. Music is not, of course, the only means, vehicle, or instrument of praise, formation, devotion, and sanctification. However, it is a distinctive one, and should be studied accordingly.

Like the disciplinary divide approach, this option takes the second set of claims as normative. After all, ‘All creation [...] praises God’ – praise and devotion are the appropriate posture and response for the creature to adopt before their Creator.<sup>45</sup> And the corporate worship of the body of Christ does not initiate itself – ‘The cause of the church’s becoming is an act of the Holy Spirit.’<sup>46</sup> It is how this option treats the human realities of the musical assemblage that is different. This option recognises, following Kathryn Tanner, that, ‘If God’s agency must be talked about as universal and immediate, then, conversely, everything non-divine must be talked about as existing in a relation of total and immediate dependence upon God.’<sup>47</sup> And therefore, ‘There need be no contradiction in saying

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<sup>44</sup> To describe music as an ‘instrument’, say, makes its properties seem more extraneous in comparison to describing music as a ‘means’.

<sup>45</sup> Ford and Hardy, *Living in Praise*, p. 104.

<sup>46</sup> Greggs, *Dogmatic Ecclesiology*, p. 11.

<sup>47</sup> Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment?* (Basil Blackwell, 1988), p. 84.

relations that are free or contingent along the horizontal axis of created order are determined to be so in a vertical relation of absolute dependence on divine agency.<sup>48</sup> This means that the human activities that comprise the music in worship assemblage are examples of ‘genuine created causal efficacy’ – a product of creaturely freedom and creativity – while, of course, they ‘follow only from the direct founding agency of God.’<sup>49</sup> Human activities – such as music – have their own integrity, while existing in this relationship of total dependence. And therefore, it is important to study those human practices, with their own integrity, as well as to observe their dependence.

From this basis, we can say that music is a means of participation. It is through music, and other activities, that humans (and other creatures) praise, or build community, or offer devotion. These are givens in which we participate, and in which we are formed and perhaps sanctified. Through music we can participate in the worship of all creation, and anticipate the worship of the new creation. And ultimately, through music, worshippers may be caught up in the divine life: the corporate praise of the church echoing the Son’s adoration of the Father. The relationship between divine and created activity is, of course, asymmetrical – the divine activity as primary. But this need not limit the integrity or capacity of the created activity. After all, ‘created being becomes what it is and this all the more fully, not by way of separation or neutrality from God, but within the intimacy of a relationship to divinity as its total ground.’<sup>50</sup> The distinctly human practices of music are a means of participation in something much greater than these practices alone.

Music in worship is, then, to use two conventionally musical terms with slightly different eschatological emphases, a rehearsal, and a performance. In part, it is a way in which

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<sup>48</sup> Tanner, *God and Creation*, p. 90.

<sup>49</sup> Tanner, *God and Creation*, p. 91.

<sup>50</sup> Tanner, *God and Creation*, p. 85.

congregants rehearse the worship of the new creation, participating in a flawed and fallible set of practices in the hope that they will one day be redeemed. But in creaturely conditions as we know them, it is also a means of performing praise and worship, formation, devotion, and sanctification. To say that music is a performance is not a marker of its ‘illusoriness or artificiality’ – as Judith Butler would note, in a false dichotomy with the ‘real’ and ‘authentic’.<sup>51</sup> It is a way of describing how music can bring into being the effects of praise and devotion. And it is a way of describing how music in worship in a sense performs the body of Christ, while also acknowledging the givenness of the church. The advantage of this option is that it takes seriously music as something that people do, as a participation in the corporate worship of the body of Christ, and as an act of eschatological anticipation. It manages, in other words, what the first option did not – a strong emphasis on the human activities that constitute music, with no sense of diminishing music’s theological importance, or music’s capacity to relate to categories such as devotion.

It is worth acknowledging that participation is a broad category, and terms such as rehearsal and performance are porous too. When thinking about agency and participation, it is easy to assume that we are in the territory of ‘the participationist language of Platonism’, which as Tanner notes, might consider how ‘created being exists only as communicated form in essential dependence upon Pure Form.’<sup>52</sup> However, the language of agency and participation is just as plausible in ‘[a] theology availing itself of an event-centred ontology’, which ‘might do much the same thing by saying that created being *is* the history of its acts in obedient response to God’s action in Christ.’<sup>53</sup> This can be exemplified by looking at Andrew Davison and Greggs’ accounts of praise. As Davison suggests, ‘At the heart of a Trinitarian participatory account of divine exemplarity is the

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<sup>51</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge, 2006), p. 32.

<sup>52</sup> Tanner, *God and Creation*, p. 84.

<sup>53</sup> Tanner, *God and Creation*, p. 84, emphasis in original.

idea that the Son, as the eternal Image of Father, is the archetype for all creation.<sup>54</sup> So if, as Davison would assert, ‘The creature’s fundamental orientation is towards God’, then the sheer act of being is some form of participation in the praise of all creation.<sup>55</sup> This is not, of course, to suggest that everything lives ‘up to the likeness it is called to bear’ – there is still evil, a ‘failure to participate’.<sup>56</sup> But, nonetheless, ‘Creatures, ultimately, exist only because God has created them: their being comes from God; they exist by participation in God’s plenitude of being.’<sup>57</sup> For Greggs, however, who rejects the *analogia entis*, participation is no less significant a category.<sup>58</sup> In his account of thanksgiving and praise (and music), he suggests: ‘the creature, as the one elected, replies in gratitude as she too is caught up in, moves within, and participates actively within God’s gracious moving towards another in the believer’s horizontal and vertical dimensions of reality to God and one another as her heart is turned outwards from the *cor incurvatum in se*.’<sup>59</sup> In this way, corporate thanksgiving ‘not only binds the community together’, but also ‘expresses thanksgiving for the Holy Spirit’s saving grace, which enables the believer to participate in the body of Christ’.<sup>60</sup>

Given this variety of things that participation may mean, theologically speaking, a participatory account of music in worship is likely to raise more questions than it answers. It is likely to raise questions about the means of participation, and questions about that in which congregants participate. Does music in worship *evoke* community, say, or does it *enact* it? Does music facilitate, or make possible, praise, or does music become praise itself?

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<sup>54</sup> Andrew Davison, *Participation in God: A Study in Christian Doctrine and Metaphysics* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 91.

<sup>55</sup> Davison, *Participation in God*, p. 114.

<sup>56</sup> Davison, *Participation in God*, p. 239.

<sup>57</sup> Davison, *Participation in God*, pp. 25-26.

<sup>58</sup> Greggs, *Dogmatic Ecclesiology*, p. 310.

<sup>59</sup> Greggs, *Dogmatic Ecclesiology*, pp. 306-07.

<sup>60</sup> Greggs, *Dogmatic Ecclesiology*, p. 308.

Is music in worship a social performance, a fixed and given tradition into which participants can be initiated? Or is it rather ‘an on-going process made up of uncertain, fragile, controversial, and ever-shifting ties’?<sup>61</sup> If, as Sarah Koenig observes, for many charismatic and evangelical churches, music in worship ‘not only replaces the service of the Table as a primary ordering liturgical element, it also in some sense functions eucharistically for its participants’, does music in some way parallel a sacramental function?<sup>62</sup> And what is this participation in anyway? Is it participation in the corporate worship of the body of Christ? In the praise of heaven? In the Son’s adoration of the Father? In all three at the same time? What are the conditions for this participation? What difference does music make?

This multitude of questions, however, may be a strength of a participatory account, not a weakness. It is perfectly possible to suggest music is a means of praise, community formation, devotion, and sanctification, without making a strong commitment on questions of evocation, enactment, performance, and even sacramentality. It is, in a way, theologically generous: broad in scope and capable of drawing upon a range of traditions. This is not to suggest that the first set of claims are easily compatible with any participatory account. Davison’s Neoplatonic account of musical form – ‘the inner coherence of what something adds up to but also the inner principle of its ongoing persistence’ – has strong echoes of the work-concept.<sup>63</sup> There is a danger, then, in taking his line of a participation in a “music itself” of praise, rather than the musical assemblage being a participation in praise. However, to suggest that music is both a human practice, and a means of

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<sup>61</sup> Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 28.

<sup>62</sup> Sarah Koenig, ‘This Is My Daily Bread: Toward a Sacramental Theology of Evangelical Praise and Worship’, *Worship* 82.2 (2008), pp. 141-61 (p. 147).

<sup>63</sup> Davison, *Participation in God*, p. 85.

participating in praise, is a valuable route of enquiry from a variety of theological perspectives.

There is a more general risk in this participatory approach, however. Given the fundamental asymmetry between divine and human activity, this approach naturally takes an account of the divine life (however apophatic) as primary; it is anchored to a picture of the triune life. The risk, though, is that it will be interested only in the musical practices, mediations, and assemblages that obviously share those dynamics of the divine life – and that obviously share in the dynamics of the divine life with which we are most concerned. In this way, such an account may overlook the significance of other practices. Take, for example, Greggs' account of learning to love one another as the way we learn to love God. If we are to follow his account, then we are likely to be concerned about the ways in which music can extend, or transport, congregants beyond themselves. In this way, we might overlook other forms of participation in the divine life, too – such as experiences of grief, which may be a form of participation in the Son's interceding work before the Father, and grief over the brokenness of the world.

And even if we were conscious to broaden the theological picture, to include grief as well as praise, there would still be many types of music-making that do not obviously share in the dynamics of the divine life, or do not do so as straightforwardly as other expressions. In a sense, there would be no formal reason why a participatory account might be more likely to look to a congregant with advanced dementia singing 'Be thou my vision' from memory than to a parent frantically trying to stop their toddler from unplugging the keyboard in middle of a Taizé chant – as I contend later in this chapter, events such as these may help congregants to grow in Christlikeness. But the first example is clearer and simpler: it incorporates fewer distractions, frustrations, thwarted ambitions, and misjudgements, and as such is a more straightforward example of the way in which music

might help its practitioners to participate in the divine life. And, while there would be no formal reason, then, to choose the first example over the second, the first would be likely to make a more compelling case for participation – even if the second, on closer inspection, may be a means of incorporation in the divine life, too.

But, more fundamentally still, not all music is obviously participatory. It would be difficult, for example, to make a participatory case for the organist playing the wrong hymn on Henry's wedding day.<sup>64</sup> It is not that such an argument could never be made, but rather that this might not be the best way to approach Henry's wife coming down the aisle to 'Here comes the bride', theologically speaking. And this is the crux of the problem with the participatory approach. Because it is anchored on a picture of the divine life, it assumes that we know the theological significance of musical practices in advance of examining those practices; because the *goal* of music is to participate in the love of God, this is the lens through which to *view* music. In this way, to return to the terms of this chapter, the theological significance of the first set of claims emerges from its participation in the second. I want to suggest, by contrast, that there might be theological significance to the first set of claims, even where they do not relate straightforwardly or obviously to the second – or, at the very least, that we should not predetermine the theological significance of the first set of claims if we have not examined them first.

### **Option Three: Flat Ontology**

Before I introduce the third option – a flat ontology – it is worth noting that there are many aspects of the previous two options that are productive and valuable. There are, of course, particular musical practices located in time and space, and broad, overarching claims to be

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<sup>64</sup> Henry, Focus Group 5. See also p. 140 of this thesis.

made about music in worship more generally. There are ethical decisions to be made about music in worship, and ideals to which its participants aspire. And music in worship is participatory – I want to maintain that it is an act of participation in the body of Christ, in the worship of all creation, and of the Son’s adoration of the Father. The problem with these approaches, then, is not so much with their content, but – I contend – with their structure. In both options, attention ascends: from reality to ideals, and from the participating human action to the divine action in which it participates. I want to suggest, by contrast, that the relationship between music as an assemblage, a set of practices, a mediation, and music as praise, community formation, and devotion might not be vertical, but rather *flat*.

This is a claim not only about music, but more generally about creation. Turner, on the topic of apophatic and cataphatic language in Denys the Areopagite, is useful here. Creation for Denys, so Turner suggests, ‘is the erotic outpouring of the divine goodness into all things, it is the divine ecstasy, by which the One comes to stand outside itself in the multiple differentiations of the created world, while still retaining its self-possessed Oneness.’<sup>65</sup> There is, however, for Turner, a tension in Denys’ thought. On the one hand, Denys presents ‘the movement of creation, the *proodos*, or progression, by which beings descending on the scale of being dispersed into ever increasing multiplicity, variety and differentiation.’<sup>66</sup> On the other hand, he assumes an ‘*immediacy* of the relation between Creator and created which is entailed by the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*.’<sup>67</sup> If, then, every being ‘is in an absolutely *direct* and unmediated relation of existential dependence on God’, then ““existence” cannot be conceived of within the logic of an hierarchical sliding scale’.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Turner, *Darkness of God*, p. 29.

<sup>66</sup> Turner, *Darkness of God*, p. 30.

<sup>67</sup> Turner, *Darkness of God*, p. 30, emphasis in original.

<sup>68</sup> Turner, *Darkness of God*, p. 31, emphasis in original.

After all, ‘For each and every being the relation of its existence to its creating cause has the same immediacy.’<sup>69</sup>

This is a point about ontology, not about human practices such as music. However, Turner’s observation is important for a theological account of music in worship. It is incredibly easy to envisage music in worship in hierarchical terms: individual, local, human practices only mattering where they transparently act as a means of higher ideals of praise and worship. This is implicit in each of the two options I have considered before this one. Yet to take seriously creation *ex nihilo* is to envisage creation in much less hierarchical terms, and indeed to be suspicious of hierarchy. Music is not a being in creation – it cannot and should not be neatly mapped onto Turner’s concerns. However, it is an assemblage of creaturely practices and created things: creation affords music – in sound and movement – and all manner of creatures have great capacity, and even perhaps desire, for music. There are, therefore, good theological reasons to suggest that the specificities of the musical assemblage – individual, local, and human though they are – should not be overlooked in a theological account of music in worship.

This flattened view of creation finds an echo in Bogost’s ‘flat ontology’.<sup>70</sup> In fact, there is much in Bogost’s work on ‘object-oriented ontology’ that is striking for a discussion of music as an assemblage of practices and objects – although not sufficient space to detail it all here.<sup>71</sup> The core premise, though, is that ‘everything exists equally – plumbers, cotton, bonobos, DVD players, and sandstone, for example.’<sup>72</sup> This is consistent with an account of assemblages, whereby ‘all heterogenous entities of an assemblage can be conceived at

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<sup>69</sup> Turner, *Darkness of God*, p. 31.

<sup>70</sup> Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology*, p. 17.

<sup>71</sup> Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology*, p. 6, emphasis removed from original.

<sup>72</sup> Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology*, p. 6.

the same level, without any ontological exceptions or priorities'.<sup>73</sup> This is not to suggest that there are no distinctions between plumbers and cotton. But it is to emphasise that humans 'can no longer claim that our existence is special *as existence*'.<sup>74</sup> This is a useful starting point for envisaging music in worship within a much flatter view of creation.

As an example of this flat ontology, Bogost draws upon 'the ill-fated 1982 videogame adaptation of *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* for the Atari Video Computer System (VCS).'<sup>75</sup> He asks, simply, 'What is *E.T.*?', and provides eleven answers.<sup>76</sup> These include: '8 kilobytes of 6502 opcodes and operands, which can be viewed by human beings as a hex dump of the ROM'; 'a consumer good'; 'a unit of intellectual property'; 'a collectable'; and 'a sign that depicts the circumstances surrounding the videogame crash of 1983'.<sup>77</sup> Details of *E.T.* aside, it is clear that each of these is a legitimate answer to the question of its ontology. To draw this back to a more familiar example, we might say that, to the question, 'what is a hymn?', answers such as 'a song of praise', 'a setting of a biblical or Christian text', 'appropriate music for a procession', 'organised sound', or, indeed, as Bogost notes, 'a consumer good' and 'a unit of intellectual property', are all legitimate ontological answers. Some of these answers might seem more appropriate in some contexts than others (depending on whether the question is posed in a courtroom or a cathedral) but all are ontologically valid. It is easy to place these ontological answers in a hierarchy, where we move beyond concerns such as intellectual property such that we can praise. But Bogost is clear: 'All these sorts of being exist simultaneously with, yet independently from, one another.'<sup>78</sup> That *E.T.* is 'a

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<sup>73</sup> Slavoj Žižek, 'The Descent of Transcendence into Immanence, or, Deleuze as a Hegelian', in *Transcendence: Philosophy, Literature, and Theology Approach the Beyond*, ed. by Regina Schwartz (Taylor and Francis, 2007), pp. 310-326 (p. 318).

<sup>74</sup> Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology*, p. 8, emphasis in original.

<sup>75</sup> Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology*, p. 17.

<sup>76</sup> Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology*, p. 17.

<sup>77</sup> Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>78</sup> Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology*, p. 18.

sign' does not stop it being '8 kilobytes of 6502 opcodes and operands'. It is both, separately and simultaneously. And, in the same way, we might suggest that hymns being units of intellectual property does not stop them being acts of praise.

It is important to note the context of these ideas. Bogost is writing at least in part in response to Bruno Latour's Actor-Network-Theory – a resistance to the idea of the 'social' being used to 'designate a stabilized state of affairs, a bundle of ties, that, later, may be mobilized to account for some other phenomenon.'<sup>79</sup> For Latour, the 'social' is valid 'as long as it designates what is *already* assembled', but it does not describe 'the *nature* of what is assembled.'<sup>80</sup> In other words, the 'social' and 'society' should not be perceived as monoliths, or realities in their own right; for Latour, this is antithetical to the real task of sociology, which is 'to scrutinize more thoroughly the exact content of what is "assembled" under the umbrella of society.'<sup>81</sup> An Actor-Network-Theory approach, in response, is a 'tracing of associations', which in turn 'traces a network.'<sup>82</sup> It is a commitment to close study of mediations and practices, and their productions and maintenances. And in the network, as in the assemblage, things relate to one another horizontally not hierarchically. The ambition is to start with practices on the ground and to stay there – not to let attention ascend. For Bogost, however, even 'the "network" is an overly normalized structure, one driven by order and predefinition.'<sup>83</sup> Things relate horizontally, but not always predictably or normatively.

From this background, it is fair to say that it would be difficult to adopt either Latour or Bogost's approaches wholesale in a theological account of music in worship. There are

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<sup>79</sup> Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, p. 1.

<sup>80</sup> Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, p. 1, emphasis in original.

<sup>81</sup> Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, p. 2.

<sup>82</sup> Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, pp. 5 and 128, emphasis removed from original.

<sup>83</sup> Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology*, p. 19.

serious questions to be asked about order in creation, say, and also about the givenness of the church. However, the flat ontology of Bogost, emerging out of the network of Latour, is still valuable. It demonstrates how the first and second sets of claims we might wish to make of music in worship (assemblage, practices, and mediations; praise, formation, devotion, and sanctification) can both be maintained, without adopting a hierarchical account which lifts attentions away from music in worship as it operates on the ground, and it demonstrates how these claims can be meaningfully related. With this flattened account, we can still ask questions of interrelation: what does it mean that a hymn is both a unit of intellectual property and a song of praise, say? Or, to return to the larger questions of the chapter, what does it mean that music in worship is a set of disparate practices, and an act of devotion? The difference with this approach, compared to the two options considered above, is that these claims about music in worship relate horizontally not vertically, forming a flat ontology.

This approach is not only less hierarchical, but it also allows us to encompass more of the things that it is easy to neglect in an account of music in worship. Take, for example, one of my participants, Edith, and her recollection of a funeral where the congregants had remained seated for ‘Be still for the presence of the Lord’.<sup>84</sup> A participatory account might say that, through the hymn – and possibly the gesture of remaining seated – congregants were able to, perhaps, offer devotion and praise. A flat account would acknowledge the importance of the hymn, the gesture, the act of singing together, and praise and devotion, too. However, it would also consider the dynamics in the church – those who knew the hymn and those who did not; those who liked the hymn or found it a useful expression of their experience, and those who did not; those who professed the faith described in the

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<sup>84</sup> Edith, Focus Group 1. See also p. 140 of this thesis.

hymn ('Be still for the presence of the Lord, the holy one is here'), and those who did not.<sup>85</sup> It would consider the implicit meaning of standing to sing, and how sitting might represent something contrary to that meaning. It would consider how 'Be still' was written, notated, published, and sold, and how it was chosen for the funeral. It would consider the range of emotions exacerbated or evoked by the hymn – those of grief, or longing, or comfort. It would consider, too, the impact of this iteration of 'Be still' on later iterations: the ways in which this hymn might come to be associated with the person who had died; how later iterations of 'Be still' might remind some congregants of the funeral for the rest of their lives; how some congregants might not ever be able to sing 'Be still' again. A flat ontological account, in other words, would incorporate praise, community building, and devotion *into* the assemblage of 'Be still', rather than seeing 'Be still' simply as a vehicle to them. This is not to suggest that praise must be cast aside, or that there are no means (singing together) and ends (devotion). It is rather that praise, community formation, devotion, and sanctification are wrapped up in a huge number of other experiences, emotions, and practices, which are all inseparable from the event, and which might not be distributed linearly. And a flat ontological account would interrogate the theological significance of all of these experiences, emotions, and practices, without knowing in advance what the answer might be, or even knowing in advance what form the answer might take.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Daniel J. Evans, 'Be still for the presence of the Lord' (Thankyou Music/Adm., 1986), in *Anglican Hymns Old and New*, no. 62.

<sup>86</sup> For example, the answer might be expressed in the form 'x participates in the life of God by doing y' but it might also be expressed as 'x reminds a congregant of their complex relationship with their mother' – a form which could still be of significance to the life of the church before God, without obviously relating to categories such as devotion or praise.

Another example of non-linearly distributed means and ends can be found in Gary's account of music in worship as 'being the lungs' of the body of Christ.<sup>87</sup> This seems consonant with a participatory account: singing together (means) is a good way to build community (end). As I have suggested in chapter 3, however, singing together is a hugely complex phenomenon. Behind every act of congregational singing, there have been decisions: decisions about which hymn book or database to use; decisions about the musical accompaniment that is appropriate for the context, considering factors such as resource and tradition; and decisions about the particular hymn or song for that moment in the service. In some churches, there will have been choir rehearsals in advance of the service – a space for members to practice singing different parts. There will most likely have been wrangling there too – the insistence that someone sings alto rather than soprano because the choir is short of altos; discussions about whether the choir should sit in the choir stalls or closer to the congregation; disputes over ability (should the choir be auditioned?) and taste (would John Ireland or John Rutter be better for the music during Communion?). Each of these decisions, tensions and compromises lies behind the moment where the congregation stands to sing, where they join their voices together, and where they act as the lungs of the body of Christ. And I want to contend that the enacting of the church's life before God might have happened *in these places, too* – just as much, if not more, in the decision-making, in the practising, in the compromising; in the spaces where people have had to learn to live together; in the places where corporate life is fraught. I want to suggest that there is a connection between music in worship and the corporate life of the body of Christ, but that this connection is not straightforward, linear, or direct.

This is not intended to diminish the moment when a congregation begins to sing. And it is not to say that such a moment cannot be affectively powerfully, or personally and

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<sup>87</sup> Gary, Focus Group 4.

corporately meaningful. It is rather to say that these experiences are not the only ones that count, theologically speaking. The act of an older member of the congregation singing very loudly to encourage a teenage pianist while they play a steady series of incorrect chords (according to the ideals of their musical tradition) might not be aesthetically pleasing or sonically consonant. It might limit the possibility of powerful experiences of music for anyone else in the congregation. But it demonstrates a kindness – the encouragement and generosity of one congregation member towards another. Something similar might be going on when a congregant pulls a silly face to distract the toddler from their ambitions to unplug the keyboard. And *kindness is not antithetical to worship*. In fact, this sort of kindness is a very plausible way in which congregants may be caught up in the divine life as they use music. This sort of experience, in other words, might count too.

A flat ontological account suggests that music in worship is a means of praise, community formation and devotion, but not always in the ways we might expect. Music in worship is a rehearsal and a performance, a way of participating in the worship of all creation, and of performing the body of Christ. It entails means and ends, practices and outcomes. And there are ideals to which those who participate in music in worship can and should aspire. However, this rehearsal and performance encompasses a lot more of the things of ordinary life than just singing on a Sunday morning. Means and ends are distributed in ways that are neither neat nor linear. And the ideals might be as much to do with relationality as with aesthetics, kindness as much as powerful experience. When viewed from this perspective, rather than from the perspective of the first and second options suggested in this chapter, there is a much closer connection between corporate musical practices on a Sunday morning and a life of faith, and there is a lot more ordinary life going on in even the most affectively powerful of musical experiences. And, from this perspective, it is possible to make a theological claim about the gift that we call music: that praise,

formation, and devotion are wrapped up in, and inseparable from, finite, contingent, fragile, and even risky musical practices.

## Language

Before I further characterise the fragility and riskiness of these practices, I want to briefly consider where these ideas find an echo elsewhere in the theological tradition. While the claims I am making here may seem unusual compared to much of the discussion around music in worship examined in chapter 2, I want to suggest that there are similar theological moves made in discussions of other practices. One of the most striking of these is Williams' *The Edge of Words*: a theological account of language. By drawing this comparison, I am not trying to suggest that music is a language. Rather, I am seeking to observe how physical behaviours and material phenomena associated with sense-making, relationality, and even, perhaps, revelation, have been treated in a theological context, and how this treatment might come to bear on our understanding of music.

*The Edge of Words* is a response to natural theology – or, as Williams terms it, a desire for ‘ways of speaking about God that were not vulnerable to *history*’.<sup>88</sup> Williams suggests that, while this ‘was always an eccentric enterprise’, ‘It obliges us to pay attention to the ways in which language about God actually finds its way into our speech, and so delivers us from discussing the language of belief in a vacuum.’<sup>89</sup> When we do so, Williams suggests, we ‘begin to see some of the ways in which talking about God is not a marginal eccentricity in human language’.<sup>90</sup> It is rather ‘something congruent with the more familiar and less noticed oddities of how we speak.’<sup>91</sup> And, crucially, in this way, ‘the language of

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<sup>88</sup> Williams, *Edge of Words*, p. 2, emphasis in original.

<sup>89</sup> Williams, *Edge of Words*, p. 17.

<sup>90</sup> Williams, *Edge of Words*, p. x.

<sup>91</sup> Williams, *Edge of Words*, p. x.

“revelation” [...] *goes with the grain* [...] of our human speaking.’<sup>92</sup> For Williams, there is then a common patterning between ordinary language and the language of revelation. Clearly, there are a number of epistemological moves made here that would require close attention in a theological discussion of language, and there is not space to examine them properly in this thesis – although I will briefly return to his account of revelation in chapter 7. But what is most interesting for the purposes of this chapter is how Williams characterises language. And it is important to note that he invites parallels between this account of language and music – suggesting elsewhere, in a very similar move, that ‘What we learn, in music as in the contemplative faith in which music is a part and also a symbol, is what it is to work *with* the grain of things, to work in the stream of God’s wisdom.’<sup>93</sup> I will address here four areas of Williams’ thought in *The Edge of Words* which are of particular significance to the themes of this chapter: exchange, finitude, excess, and longing.

First, Williams asserts that language is congruent with that which is ‘distinctively human’.<sup>94</sup> It is wrapped up in ‘the phenomena of exchange, exploration, uncertainty, trust, error, excess.’<sup>95</sup> In some sense, this is simply an observation about materiality – speech is of course ‘a material phenomenon’, ‘a form of physical behaviour.’<sup>96</sup> Spoken words are inextricable from physicality; ‘Our vocal cords obey the same inexorable physical laws as the rest of our organism.’<sup>97</sup> In another sense, however, this is a broader observation about human experience. Speaking is always ‘time-related’ and ‘incomplete’; it invites the action and

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<sup>92</sup> Williams, *Edge of Words*, p. 184, emphasis in original.

<sup>93</sup> Rowan Williams, ‘Keeping Time’, in *Open to Judgement: Sermons and Addresses*, ed. by Rowan Williams (Darton Longman & Todd, 2014), pp. 247-50 (p. 250).

<sup>94</sup> Williams, *Edge of Words*, p. x.

<sup>95</sup> Williams, *Edge of Words*, p. 183.

<sup>96</sup> Williams, *Edge of Words*, p. 35.

<sup>97</sup> Williams, *Edge of Words*, p. 35.

response of another; it is a participation in the ‘unfinished character’ of exchange.<sup>98</sup> It is both finite and communal. When speaking, ‘There is always a struggle to make what we say both recognizable and defensible’ – a sense of attempting to bridge the gap between one person and another.<sup>99</sup> And, in this way, language is a series of material phenomena, a set of practices that are uncertain, finite, and risky, tied up in trust, error, and excess. Yet language is also a reaching out of the self, an exchange with another.

What is particularly significant here, in terms of the flat ontological approach I am proposing in relation to music, is that Williams investigates language not *in spite* of its finitude, uncertainty, and indeterminacy, but in some sense *because* of it. He is concerned with what such finitude and uncertainty might tell us about ourselves and about revelation, rather than with what it obscures. Williams is careful to specify that language is ‘not some kind of “fallen,” distorting medium or activity: it is finite and historical but not intrinsically corrupt; capable of truth-telling in the sense of representing what is not itself, or not the contents of some dematerialized mind, but telling the truth often by indirection, by the admission of difficulty and limitation, and by its own scrutiny of its workings and its learning.’<sup>100</sup> The finitude and historicity of language is, in other words, part of its createdness, not a product of its fallenness. It is worth noting that questions of representation (and indeed meaning) are particularly fraught in relation to music – as I will discuss in some detail in chapter 7 – and so it would not be desirable to uncritically map this point about language onto music. But the broader point may have significance for music, which is also a finite and historical practice: what Williams is suggesting here is that language might be capable of doing productive work because, and not in spite, of its finitude and historicity.

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<sup>98</sup> Williams, *Edge of Words*, pp. 65, 86, and 32.

<sup>99</sup> Williams, *Edge of Words*, p. 42.

<sup>100</sup> Williams, *Edge of Words*, p. 167.

The finitude of language, for Williams, is also held together with excess. He notes, ‘there is not in fact a plain substrate of language that is without redundancies, symbolizations, appeals to schema or context.’<sup>101</sup> It is easy to see this as a problem: that much language is extraneous, insignificant, or secondary to effective communication – a barrier between one person and another. But such a view overlooks the significance of the excess. Here Williams echoes Soskice in her suggestion that ‘there is no particular virtue of literal language for literal language’s sake’; and in fact, ‘There are many instances where, if we do not speak figuratively, we can say very little.’<sup>102</sup> Similarly, Williams is keen to defend the Thomist claim that ‘our (quasi-)representing of God is least off the mark when we are furthest from anything that looks like a fully coherent schema.’<sup>103</sup> Redundancies, symbolisations, and excesses are not simply inconveniences in the study of language; they are how language works, and part of its gift. And this excessiveness is impossible to pin down or describe – rather, ‘Examining our speech may bring us to the point where we recognize that language cannot describe or contain the conditions of its own possibility.’<sup>104</sup>

It is in this way that ‘language is constantly “transcending” its current limitations’.<sup>105</sup> This is not, as Williams specifies, to do with ‘some goal of transcending limit itself’ – nor indeed with transcending language itself.<sup>106</sup> It is rather an observation that ‘our speech can never close itself off from further response and so any form of words will be open to development’.<sup>107</sup> Language is characteristic of the way in which humans are ‘both radically limited and radically innovative’, in its capacity for ‘gesturing towards what appears

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<sup>101</sup> Williams, *Edge of Words*, p. 31.

<sup>102</sup> Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, pp. 95 and 96.

<sup>103</sup> Williams, *Edge of Words*, p. 148.

<sup>104</sup> Williams, *Edge of Words*, p. 172.

<sup>105</sup> Williams, *Edge of Words*, p. 109.

<sup>106</sup> Williams, *Edge of Words*, p. 109. It is worth noting that music is often credited as transcending language’s limitations, and it is worth asking, if language is not fallen nor intrinsically corrupt, what is at stake in this idea. See Begbie, *Peculiar Orthodoxy*, p. 259.

<sup>107</sup> Williams, *Edge of Words*, p. 109.

beyond and between speakers'.<sup>108</sup> This is a point made elsewhere in relation to music, too: Kramer, drawing on Emmanuel Levinas, claims, 'with music distance is never simple observation; it is a restlessness' – music, too, gestures towards that which is beyond, and demands development and response.<sup>109</sup> And Warren also connects music and proximity but through an ethical lens – that if proximity is 'the encounter with an other in a shared space', this carries 'ethical responsibilities'.<sup>110</sup> Language and music, in other words, both involve a drawing out of self, forms of exchange, and ethical response. And, as I will develop in chapter 7, in this demand for exchange and response, both language and music are closely linked to desire – to directed longing. But, in contradistinction from some of the musicological claims encountered in chapter 2, this is not a longing for autonomous music, inaccessible and remote. It is not a longing even for human music to give way to the music of the angels. This is a longing, to return to the claims of Williams, for the distinctly human practices and exchanges of music to continue.

It is important to recognise, however, that the idea of limitation plays a greater role in Williams' argument than I would advocate for in relation to music. While I very briefly point to a possible relationship between music, finitude, and limits in chapter 6, in dialogue with one of his sermons, limits clearly play a much more significant role for Williams' argument than my own. For Williams, 'the framework we start with is irresistibly oriented toward an articulation of its own limits'.<sup>111</sup> And so, as we 'track the insistence in language of what is alien and uncontained', it is possible to then 'develop an enhanced capacity to recognize at least what is being claimed in this particular discourse of revelation that is Christian theology'.<sup>112</sup> Put another way, if we study language closely, we are soon

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<sup>108</sup> Williams, *Edge of Words*, p. 94.

<sup>109</sup> Kramer, *Thought of Music*, p. 170.

<sup>110</sup> Warren, *Music and Ethical Responsibility*, pp. 135 and 140.

<sup>111</sup> Williams, *Edge of Words*, p. 179.

<sup>112</sup> Williams, *Edge of Words*, p. 180.

confronted by limits – of language, of knowledge, of ourselves – and this realisation is a realisation of particular theological insight and significance. The difficulty is that, while all language is finite, some draws closer attention to its finitude than others. Silence and paradox are instructive examples for Williams’ point, but it would be harder to make the same case for shopping lists or shipping forecasts. It is not that shopping lists and shipping forecasts are unable to communicate anything about finitude, but rather that – a little like the toddler attempting to unplug the keyboard – they might be less compelling examples of the point Williams is making than silence or paradox. And if this overarching emphasis on limits implicitly prioritises some forms of language over others – if it is not as flat as the account I am proposing here – then I am wary of drawing too close a parallel with music.

Nonetheless, *The Edge of Words* demonstrates that language is a material phenomenon and a series of human practices, and that there is theological significance to both of these aspects. Language here is complex, finite, including but not exhausted by the literal, non-linear, and even risky – caught up in exchange and excess, trust and error. And yet it is distinctively human, doing active and meaningful work between self and other. As Williams goes on to suggest, it even can be said to go with ‘the grain’ of revelation.<sup>113</sup> From his characterisation of language, we can see that there are good theological reasons to suggest that music, as a complex, finite, and risky assemblage, might be doing work for the self; between self and other in the body of Christ; and between self, community, and God. And it might be doing so, not in spite of its indirectness or excess, not in spite of its finitude and locatedness, not in spite of its embeddedness in the fabric of human life, but in some sense because of its complexity, finitude, and riskiness. There are a number of reasons why I will not adopt Williams’ approach wholesale – most notably that there are profound differences between music and language, and because of his emphasis on limits. However,

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<sup>113</sup> Williams, *Edge of Words*, p. 184, emphasis removed from original.

*The Edge of Words* still suggests there is good reason to explore the possibility that the complex, risky, and sometimes fraught practices we call music might be of theological significance.

### **Damage, Harm, and Sin**

There is, however, a danger in the line of thinking I have proposed in this chapter. So far, I have described a flat ontology of music, one where complex relationship dynamics, issues of legality, and aesthetic enjoyment are all part of music in worship. And, as Williams suggests of language, I have claimed that the complex and risky practices we call music may not be ‘distorting’ nor ‘intrinsically corrupt’, but simply finite and contingent. This, I have suggested, represents an alternative to ways of understanding what music in worship is, and what it is for, which lift attention away from human practices. It is not to relativise all musical practice, as if there are no musical ideals at all – although we must be careful in how we define them. Rather, it is to suggest that complexity and finitude are part of the gift of music, and must be taken seriously. The problem, however, with this approach is that it can underplay the realities of sin. It, too, can idealise, as if all wrangling in the choir stalls builds up the body of Christ, or as if every church musician deemed to lack proficiency is met with kindness. In order to give a credible account of music in worship, it is vital that we take seriously the places where music does harm, and creates distance between self, other, and God.

One primary example is the widespread, and reverberating, impact of the relationship between colonialism and European hymnody. As Agawu contends, ‘perhaps *the* iconic marker of the kind of tonal thinking exported to Africa is the Protestant Christian

hymn.<sup>114</sup> Because ‘tonality has always followed the movement of global capital’, and because ‘an immediate and practical outcome [of tonality] was almost always the gradual loss of a heritage [musical] language’, the colonial export of the hymn ‘amounts to musical violence of a very high order, a violence whose psychic and psychological impacts remain to be properly explored.’<sup>115</sup>

Muriel Swijghuisen Reigersberg’s study of music in the Aboriginal town of Hopevale in Australia, for example, notes, ‘There is no pre-colonial song material being performed regularly’.<sup>116</sup> Instead, ‘Lutheran and Anglican hymnody, Christian choruses, Country and Western, Country Gospel, Reggae, and R&B’ are performed – in a form of musical erasure.<sup>117</sup> And even where there has not been such straightforward erasure, the musical effects of colonialism are still deeply felt. Barz’s account of *kwaya* music, examined in chapter 2, notes that ‘An instrument of conversion and domination such as European hymnody [...] never loses its associative historical power, even in a post-colonial, post-mission context.’<sup>118</sup> For this reason, ‘When hymnody is transformed in contemporary *kwaya* music, it becomes a vehicle facilitating a negotiation between two moments in time – Tanzania’s colonial/missionary past and its post-Independence present.’<sup>119</sup> Music has a history, in other words, which cannot be either ignored or forgotten, and the impact of which requires fraught negotiation.

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<sup>114</sup> Agawu, *On African Music*, p. 54, emphasis in original.

<sup>115</sup> Agawu, *On African Music*, pp. 58, 74, and 57.

<sup>116</sup> Muriel Swijghuisen Reigersberg, ‘Applied Ethnomusicology in Post-Mission Australian Aboriginal Contexts: Ethical Responsibility, Style, and Aesthetics’, in *Ethics and Christian Musicking*, ed. by Nathan Myrick and Mark James Porter, pp. 183-201 (p. 187).

<sup>117</sup> Reigersberg, ‘Applied Ethnography’, p. 187.

<sup>118</sup> Barz, *Performing Religion*, p. 115.

<sup>119</sup> Barz, *Performing Religion*, p. 115.

Similar themes are found in Timothy Rommen's study of Full Gospel Believers ('at best, a loose affiliations of several denominations and strands of Protestantism in Trinidad, most of which are Pentecostalist in orientation'), and the complex interplay of 'musical style, colonial and missionary histories, national and regional politics, media flows and migration, and aesthetics.'<sup>120</sup> He observes the significance of North American gospel music being incorporated into worship services concurrently with the construction of 'a post-independence identity', and how local styles – such as gospelypso – 'struggle for acceptance'.<sup>121</sup> In terms of contemporary musical use, Pentecostal churches are likely to avoid 'long-meter hymns and only a select few, if any, Baptist choruses', and instead use Trinidadian praise choruses and North American gospel choruses.<sup>122</sup> Yet the roles assigned to each are revealing: 'if a Trinidadian congregation wishes to express joyful praise (physical, interpersonal, and centrifugal) during a worship service, then it is likely that a Trinidadian praise chorus will be used[.] [...] If, however, that same congregation wishes to attain a worshipful (spiritual, personal, centripetal) atmosphere, then it is virtually guaranteed that a North American gospel chorus will be sung.'<sup>123</sup> Given the 'primacy of experience' in this context, so Rommen suggests, this tendency illustrates the perceived 'inferiority of local cultural production'.<sup>124</sup>

In these ways, the musical assemblage may reinforce social dynamics. Lange's account of musical eclecticism in a Hungarian Pentecostal church – again discussed in chapter 2 – demonstrates that the incorporation of a range of styles in this context relies on forms of self-censorship: 'Brother Misi told me that the Romani believers were careful to suppress

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<sup>120</sup> Timothy Rommen, *Mek Some Noise: Gospel Music and the Ethics of Style in Trinidad* (University of California Press, 2007), p. 1.

<sup>121</sup> Rommen, *Mek Some Noise*, pp. 21 and 22.

<sup>122</sup> Rommen, *Mek Some Noise*, p. 19.

<sup>123</sup> Rommen, *Mek Some Noise*, p. 53.

<sup>124</sup> Rommen, *Mek Some Noise*, p. 53.

almost all kinds of behavior marked as Gypsy-like in order to be sure that elderly Magyar church members would not condemn them, whether it was for engaging in bodily pleasure or for being uncultured.<sup>125</sup> This demonstrates her observation that ‘Members of different Romani ethnic groups mutually condemn each other for being uncouth or immoral, possibly as a way to establish ethnic boundaries.’<sup>126</sup> Music may still be a means of resistance and a statement of identity: Jeffers Engelhardt demonstrates how the Estonian aphorism ‘Every bird has its own song’ came to be significant in the ‘transition from the logogenic melodic rendering of conventionally translated Orthodox liturgical texts [...] to the melogenic congregational performance of rhymed, strophic texts’, particularly as an assertion of the ‘rightness of their singing’ in the midst of national independence.<sup>127</sup> And Erin Johnson-Williams and Philip Burnett similarly assert, across a range of contexts, that ‘hymns can both reinforce and disrupt hierarchies of social power that are founded on notions of race, identity, and belonging.’<sup>128</sup> But the complex assemblage of music can also mirror, perform, and maintain the world around it – and indeed take part in its construction.

It is important, however, to resist simplistic narratives of music, history, people, and place. Gerardo Martí describes two tendencies – or pitfalls – in discussions of music and race, although the point is he making could be applied more broadly. The first is a ‘belief that music is a universal language that communicates and draws all people equally’; a belief he describes as ‘prevalent, although mythological’.<sup>129</sup> The second, which is ‘equally pervasive’,

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<sup>125</sup> Lange, *Holy Brotherhood*, p. 152.

<sup>126</sup> Lange, *Holy Brotherhood*, p. 152.

<sup>127</sup> Jeffers Engelhardt, *Singing the Right Way: Orthodox Christians and Secular Enchantment in Estonia* (Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 125.

<sup>128</sup> Erin Johnson-Williams and Philip Burnett, ‘Introduction: Constructing Hymns and Race’, in *Hymns and Constructions of Race: Mobility, Agency, De/Coloniality*, ed. by Erin Johnson-Williams and Philip Burnett (Taylor & Francis Group, 2024), pp. 1-10 (p. 1).

<sup>129</sup> Martí, *Worship across the Racial Divide*, p. 31.

is the idea that ‘all music is essentially racialized.’<sup>130</sup> While it is important to take seriously musical identities and histories, it is also necessary to be wary of accounts of authorship, ownership, and authenticity which tend towards essentialism. It is also necessary to be wary of the analytical tools used to characterise musical styles and traditions. Returning to Berhó’s study of Spanish language churches in Oregon, we can see that ‘Music is a complex area for analysis.’<sup>131</sup> While her approach has a textual focus, other scholars have ‘focused solely on song provenance and musical style’ in their study of similar churches.<sup>132</sup> Questions of ‘form, space, and performance practice’ have been neglected by both.<sup>133</sup> It is important, then, to be sceptical of easy associations between style, genre, and identity, and the tools used to make such associations.

Yet even with suitable caution surrounding musical essentialism, it is clear that music has done, and continues to do, harm. It is not simply finite and contingent – it is capable of creating distance between self, other, and God. There is harm where one type of music has subjugated another, or where one type of music has erased another. There is also harm where differences of taste, expertise, and knowledge within congregations drive them apart. As Dawn noted in the 1990s, ‘The “worship wars” that rage in so many congregations are preventing us from truly being the Church.’<sup>134</sup> There is harm in macrocosm, in the widespread imposition of European hymnody, and harm in microcosm, in whispered comments about the organist’s ability. Harm is part of the assemblage of music in worship, part of its flat ontology. But it is not simply a marker of music’s finitude and contingency; it is a marker of the susceptibility of human musical practices to sin.

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<sup>130</sup> Martí, *Worship across the Racial Divide*, p. 31.

<sup>131</sup> Berhó, ‘Echo in the Soul’, p. 213. See pp. 89-90 of this thesis for a further discussion of Berhó’s textual focus.

<sup>132</sup> Berhó, ‘Echo in the Soul’, p. 213.

<sup>133</sup> Berhó, ‘Echo in the Soul’, p. 213.

<sup>134</sup> Dawn, *Reaching out*, p. 3.

In a sense, this should not be surprising: as Lauren Winner notes, ‘deformations of Christian practices are part of the practice themselves, because nothing apart from God (not church, not sacraments, not saints) is exempt from the damage produced by the Fall.’<sup>135</sup> Yet the predictability of the relationship between music and harm should not lead to complacency. As Ashley Cocksworth suggests, ‘There are occasions [...] when the most doxological thing Christians can do is to refuse to pray as they ought and so refuse to collude with and extend the damage enacted in the name of prayer’ – and the same logic can be extended to music.<sup>136</sup> If music is a way in which we learn to offer kindness, to negotiate honourably, to love ‘on the horizontal axis’, then we must also contend seriously and meaningfully with the places where it fails to do so.<sup>137</sup> And, if loving on the horizontal axis is how we participate ‘in the divine loving of creation which accords with the constancy of the divine being’, this failure is serious indeed.<sup>138</sup>

## Conclusion

In chapter 4, I noted a brief but highly instructive exchange between Edith and Julian, on the topic of why Christians sing in church. Edith suggested that congregational singing was ‘our gift to him’, and Julian responded, as an aside, ‘his gift to us, too.’<sup>139</sup> This exchange, if we do not pay close attention to the order in which the claims were made, in many ways encapsulates the ideas of this chapter – about what music in worship is, what it is for, and how these two sets of claims relate to one another. It takes the logic of the flat ontology, and the musical assemblage, one step further, theologically speaking, recognising that

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<sup>135</sup> Lauren F. Winner, *The Dangers of Christian Practice: On Wayward Gifts, Characteristic Damage, and Sin* (Yale University Press, 2018), p. 16.

<sup>136</sup> Ashley Cocksworth, ‘When Prayer Goes Wrong: A Negative Theology of Prayer’, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 76.1 (2023), pp. 10-23 (p. 16), doi:10.1017/S003693062200092.

<sup>137</sup> Greggs, *Dogmatic Ecclesiology*, p. 405.

<sup>138</sup> Greggs, *Dogmatic Ecclesiology*, p. 405.

<sup>139</sup> Edith, Focus Group 1; Julian, Focus Group 1.

music is a *human response to divine gift*. Music is an assemblage of all manner of created objects, using the means of createdness, and is rightly offered back to the Creator of all things – as well as being subject to damage that impedes this right response. It is both a divine gift, and yet also, to repeat a new musicological claim with now particular theological significance, *something that people do*.

I have suggested in this chapter that music in worship is a gift afforded in creation, and yet also an assemblage of objects and practices that are contingent, fragile, risky, and comprised by human practices that are susceptible to sin. Music in worship is a means of sanctification and formation, both because, and in spite, of it being a site of fracture and division. Music in worship participates in the givenness of the church, and yet meaningfully performs the body of Christ. Music in worship is an act of anticipation and participation, a rehearsal of the worship of the new creation, a participation in the Son's adoration of the Father – and yet meaningfully created afresh in the creaturely realities of finitude and contingency. Music does all of these things, and is all of these things, at the same time.

To suggest this is to work with the logic of createdness, and with the logic of human and divine agency. As Tanner suggests, 'The theologian must correct the assumption that freedom and power are had by the creature only in independence of God's creative agency for them.'<sup>140</sup> While there are insights, then, in the options presented earlier in this chapter – of maintaining disciplinary divisions, and of drawing a participatory account – they risk only telling one side of the theological story. When the ontology of music is omitted, or the distinctly human practices of music are not treated in their fullness, the resulting account will fail to recognise the nature of music as freely given gift *upon which we freely respond*. To talk of the politics of choir rehearsals, or the realities of funerals, is not to

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<sup>140</sup> Tanner, *God and Creation*, p. 161

downplay the gift of music. It is rather to examine closely the nature of this gift, and to examine closely the nature of our human response.

There are few better summaries of the themes of this chapter – the gift of music in creation, and music as a form of human response – than this reflection from Barth:

To it first among all creatures the call of God has gone forth, and gone forth effectively, as its existence shows. It could and can hear it. In it, it is recognised by at least some among the great masses of men and nations, invincibly if only from afar and with considerable obscurity, that the Lord alone is God. In it, some men, even though they are weary and heavy-laden because blind and deaf and lame, do come into His presence with real singing, if only in the form of sighs and croaks. In it, even though under the severe pressure of human corruption and always on the edge of the abyss of the Christian and therefore the worst possible deception, and yet always restrained and called back to reality by His call, the attempt it at least made to serve the Lord, and to serve Him in the only way possible, i.e., with joy and therefore without murmuring or complaint. In it, even though from the depths and with many a discord, yet continually lifted out of the depths and brought into an obvious final harmony, creatures are gathered out of every land and speech and natural and cultural sphere, and for all their difference and antagonisms united with one another in this joyous praise.<sup>141</sup>

Perhaps, however, this chapter might be summarised more succinctly in the words of ABBA:

Thank you for the music, for giving it to me.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* VI. 3. 2 (T&T Clark, 1962), p. 794, fn.

<sup>142</sup> Benny Andersson and Björn Ulvaeus, 'Thank You for the Music', from *ABBA: The Album* (Polar, 1977).

## 6 – Music, Experience, and Otherness

It's just an essential part of *worship*. I [...] don't know how you could worship God without [...] singing music because it sort of generates all those emotions [...] and for me it makes me feel more connected to God[.]<sup>1</sup>

perhaps hymns shouldn't be there [...] for our benefit, or as entertainment[.] [...] [T]hey're not just there to make us feel good.<sup>2</sup>

### Introduction

If music is something that people do, music also seems to do something back. Whether mundane or dramatic, positive or negative, 'there is some indication that most people experience music (somehow, somewhere) every day of their lives, often with an accompanying affective reaction of some sort'.<sup>3</sup> These experiences and affective reactions are part of the gift of music and dominate discussions of its use in worship: my conversations at St Michael and All Angels, St Nicholas', and Christchurch were shot through with the 'power of music', and its perceived ability to transport, comfort, elate, and reassure.<sup>4</sup>

In theological writing, too, music has often been ascribed an agency, or at the very least a slightly unwieldy power, of its own. We might think of Augustine's concerns about musical idolatry, about the 'sensual pleasure' of music and its capacity to be 'held in a regard beyond what is proper'.<sup>5</sup> He claims, 'Sometimes I have actually wished for every tune of those soothing songs that pervade David's Psalter to be expunged from my ears and

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<sup>1</sup> Sarah, Focus Group 3.

<sup>2</sup> Pauline, Focus Group 4.

<sup>3</sup> Juslin and Sloboda, 'Introduction', in *Music and Emotion*, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Sarah, Focus Group 3; Pauline, Focus Group 4.

<sup>5</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, ed. and trans. by Carolyn J. B. Hammond (Harvard University Press, 2014) p. 153.

those of the Church herself.’<sup>6</sup> Or, we might look to Luther’s striking assertion that ‘next to the Word of God, music deserves the highest praise’ – combined with the reality that his hymns are strictly ‘proselytic and exegetical’; something which ensures that music’s powerful affective qualities are used in the service of teaching and proclamation.<sup>7</sup> Or, we might consider Calvin’s suggestion: ‘among the other things proper to recreate man and give him pleasure, music is either the first or one of the principle, and we must think that it is a gift of God deputed to that purpose.’ He continues, ‘For which reason we must be the more careful not to abuse it, for fear of soiling and contaminating it, converting it to our own condemnation when it has been dedicated to our profit and welfare.’<sup>8</sup> There is, in other words, both a longstanding theological recognition that musical experience is a powerful gift, and proposed restrictions surrounding its use. At least some of these concerns are echoed in more recent theological work, too: it is the experience of listening to music, and the theological generativity of such experience, that forms the subject matter of Brown and Hopps’ *The Extravagance of Music*, for example. For theologians writing on music, its perceived power and agency – its provocations to (sometimes powerful) experience – are both key areas of interest, and core causes for concern.

This chapter seeks to give an account of musical experience, and particularly musical affectivity – music in worship *as something that people feel* – against this contested backdrop. This is neither a small, nor straightforward, task: as Zahl notes, ‘Few themes are more important in Christian life, and few are more fraught in Christian theology, than

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<sup>6</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, p. 153.

<sup>7</sup> Martin Luther, ‘Preface to Georg Rhau’s *Symphoniae Iucundae*’, trans. by Ulrich S. Leupold, in *Luther’s Works, Vol. 53: Liturgy and Hymns*, ed. by Ulrich S. Leupold (Fortress Press, 1965), pp. 321-24 (p. 323); Adam Hough, ‘Martin Luther and Musically Expressed Theology’, *Illumine: Journal of the Centre for Studies in Religion and Society* 11.1 (2014), pp. 27-49 (p. 38), doi:10.18357/illumine.hougha.1112012.

<sup>8</sup> Jean Calvin, ‘The Geneva Psalter (1542): Epistle to the Reader’, in *Source Readings*, ed. by W. Oliver Strunk, pp. 364-67 (p. 366).

“experience.”<sup>9</sup> And, while it might be useful to distinguish between experiences ‘that are understood to have God as their explicit agent or object’ (those which we might term “religious experiences”) and ‘human experience in the world in general’ to narrow the field of study, I am reluctant to either neatly categorise musical experiences in this way, or focus on one at the expense of the other – in fact, I am unsure we can assume which experiences of music are which at all.<sup>10</sup> Rather, I am interested here in the range of experiences of music, from joy to ambivalence, sorrow to stage fright, boredom to absorption, that are present – and, I want to contend, doing work – in the worship of the body of Christ. In examining this range of musical experience, I will seek to give an answer – however partial – to the series of questions provoked by my conversations at St Michael and All Angels’, St Nicholas’, and Christchurch: when is music music, and when is music worship? Can we distinguish between the two? Should we? And to what extent is it viable to draw upon affective experience to try?

It is important to acknowledge the potential pitfalls in such a broad area of study. The first pitfall is that of balance. It would be entirely possible that, through giving studied attention to musical experience at its most ordinary, I fail to give a theological account of music at its most affectively powerful, despite the stories from St Michael and All Angels, St Nicholas’, and Christchurch which demonstrate the significance of such experiences for the life of faith – one of which I will examine later in this chapter. Conversely, through an account of music at its most affectively extraordinary, it would also be possible to lose sight of other experiences of music in worship, from the embarrassment of trying to persuade an unwilling congregant to accept a percussion instrument, to the frustration of trying to sing in tune while the person behind is persistently singing a quartertone sharp;

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<sup>9</sup> Zahl, *Christian Experience*, p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> Zahl, *Christian Experience*, p. 15. The claim that it is not easy to distinguish between these two types of experience will be developed in the final section of this chapter.

experiences which have received little to no theological attention but might still be of theological significance. It would also be possible that, by attempting to address both the extraordinary and the mundane, I say very little that is meaningful about either. This question of balance is one to which I will return, as I suggest later in this chapter that there is value in (once again) flattening the distinction between ordinary and extraordinary in a theological account of musical experience.

Another potential pitfall in this chapter is the possibility that I shift from a theology *of* music, as I have largely sustained thus far, to a theology *through* music. I will talk here, of how experiences of music might, for some people, some of time, prompt reflection upon God, or intimate the nature of God – concerns that cross over the border into a theology through music. However, my primary interest still lies in the suggestion that music in worship has a vast array of theological significances, and that these significances include, but are not limited to, nor indeed privilege, such forms of reflection or intimation. In other words, this chapter will describe a range of affective experiences of music, of which I will then seek to give theological account, rather than considering what such experiences might be telling us theologically.

The final potential pitfall lies in the risk of misrepresentation, through either generalisation or prescription. As Nicholas Lash insists, ‘any general account of human experience is mistaken’.<sup>11</sup> He observes a tendency for accounts of experience to descend ‘into the illusory expectation, characteristic of some forms of the “idealising project of knowledge,” that you, or I, or anybody else, could sit in an armchair and announce to other people what their experience is, or should be, like.’<sup>12</sup> It is easy to generalise from the experience of some, or

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<sup>11</sup> Nicholas Lash, *Easter in Ordinary: Reflections on Human Experience and the Knowledge of God* (SCM, 1988), p. 12.

<sup>12</sup> Lash, *Easter in Ordinary*, p. 17.

to paternalistically prescribe the experience of others, and thereby to simplify a rich and sometimes messy variety of experiences. This results in neat conclusions which are ultimately unrecognisable to the very experiences which they seek to describe – as Zahl asks, ‘Why are theologians so prone to developing systems of great intellectual coherence and elegance, but which bear only passing resemblance to the lives Christians actually seem to lead?’<sup>13</sup>

It is also important to acknowledge, then, that the claims made in this chapter will not be comprehensive. I will seek to give some account of both ordinary and extraordinary experiences of music, but will not be able to do justice to each of the experiences of music described in chapter 4, let alone discuss everything that falls into the category of musical experience. And, while I will give a positive account of musical experience, I am not interested in either generalisation or prescription. I will rather observe the sheer range of experiences of music doing work in the body of Christ, and advance positive claims from this very range. Virtually every suggestion I make here about how music is experienced could, and indeed should, be prefaced: “for some people, some of the time”.

I will start by laying out the parameters for a theological discussion of musical experience, consistent with both the theory espoused in chapter 3 and the material of chapter 4. While musical experience is a vast and unwieldy subject, I will note three claims which provide the foundation for the subsequent discussion: that musical experiences are temporal, dialogic, and excessive. From there I will give an account of musical affectivity – both in general and specifically in worship – before demonstrating how a range of experiences of music might be doing work in the body of Christ, in dialogue with writings on two other sets of practices: mysticism and glossolalia. In so doing, I will suggest that musical

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<sup>13</sup> Zahl, *Christian Experience*, p. 4.

experience is inseparable from other forms of ordinary creaturely experience, and that powerful and absorptive experiences of music are – though gifts – of secondary importance in the act of worship. I will propose that all manner of different affective experiences might be inevitable and even desirable for the worship of the body of Christ.

### **Temporality, Dialogue, and Excess**

One of the most frequent observations made about musical experience in theological and musicological writings alike is that it moves inevitably, and linearly, through time. If the temporal nature of musical experience seems like a banal observation, and one which could be made of most (if not all) human activities, it is worth qualifying. Music does not, so Begbie notes, simply happen in time; rather it is ‘a temporal art through and through’.<sup>14</sup> As Vladimir Jankélévitch expands:

Music is an essentially temporal art, not a secondarily temporal one like poetry or dramatic literature or the novel. Of course, time is necessary to perform a play: but theatrical works can be read one right after the other, or in fragments, and in any order you please. A musical work does not exist except in the time of its playing.<sup>15</sup>

Such observations – that music has a beginning and an end, cannot be substantially sped up or slowed down without having a profound effect on its character, and cannot be repeated exactly (even the same recording is experienced differently in different contexts) – have been imbued with theological significance. As Williams suggests:

if music is the most fundamentally contemplative of the arts, it is *not* because it takes us into the timeless but because it obliges us to rethink time: it is no longer time for action, achievement, dominion and power, not even time for acquiring ideas (you could misinterpret attending to drama or poetry in these terms). It is

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<sup>14</sup> Begbie, *Theology, Music, Time*, p. 29.

<sup>15</sup> Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Music and the Ineffable* (Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 70.

simply time for feeding upon reality; quite precisely like that patient openness to God that is religious contemplation.<sup>16</sup>

There are problems with such an account, however. For a start, not all music can be easily conformed to this idea. Williams' claim may seem plausible in the context of listening to Gregorian chant, but it seems less well suited to the contexts of participating in the nursery rhymes of a baby group; using music with the optimum number of beats per minute for a workout; or indeed – and most pertinently – joining in with many forms of music in worship.<sup>17</sup> Whether that it is because certain kinds of music afford certain sets of affective experiences, or because certain kinds of music are discursively linked with certain kinds of experiences, not all music is associated with, or seems to routinely provide space for, contemplation.

And, even if we were exclusively concerned with contemplative experiences of music (which is not the case in this chapter), this account would still only be partial. It would be just as easy to point to the other side of musical temporality not acknowledged here: that music is necessarily finite and therefore limited. Once experienced, it can never be accessed in the same way again, it cannot be held onto, and it cannot be captured. This is quite possibly one reason why music, though 'not a moral agency', 'influences – and perhaps even limits – human agency in important ways.'<sup>18</sup> If the sorts of musical experiences Williams is concerned with here facilitate patient openness for some people, it is also possible that, for others, these sorts of experience may draw attention to finitude and limits – that of the music, which once played can never be repeated, and that of creatures bound by the realities of temporality. Even within the world of contemplative experiences of

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<sup>16</sup> Williams, 'Keeping Time', p. 248, emphasis in original.

<sup>17</sup> This point echoes my argument in chapter 5. See p. 198.

<sup>18</sup> Nathan Myrick, *Music for Others: Care, Justice, and Relational Ethics in Christian Music* (Oxford University Press, 2021), p. 8.

music, and reflections on the realities of temporality, there would be more variety than Williams is suggesting here.

In fact, there are all manner of interpretations of spiritually significant experiences of music. In Alf Gabrielsson's study of 965 reports of 'strong experiences in connection with music' – experiences defined as 'most intense' and 'most profound' – there is a category termed 'religious experience', which includes accounts of 'how music gave rise of visions of heaven, life to come, paradise or eternity'; 'how music is associated with experiences of spiritual peace, holiness, and Christian fellowship'; and how music can be linked to the perceived 'presence of God'.<sup>19</sup> Where Gabrielsson addresses time, however, it is largely in relation to total absorption, or having 'no sense of time', rather than being increasingly aware of existing within God's created reality, or indeed with being confronted by creaturely limits.<sup>20</sup> And it is worth saying that neither of these two ideas appeared in my conversations, either. This is not to say that music *cannot* provoke contemplation, cannot make us aware of time – or indeed finitude and limits. It is rather that the sort of argument Williams is advancing here relies on a way of experiencing very particular types of music – or specifically, a way of understanding experiences of these very particular types of music – that is by no means universal. Williams' account might be theologically appealing, but musical experiences do not seem to have the effect in reality that they have in his theory – or at least not for everyone, or all the time. And, while perhaps we could argue that music is doing work in relation to time of which only some of us are aware, or that music's primary theological purpose is providing a patient openness for contemplation even if it has subsidiary functions, to make these claims would be to suggest that music is a gift of

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<sup>19</sup> Alf Gabrielsson, *Strong Experiences with Music: Music is Much More than Just Music* (Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 3, 7, 171 and 182.

<sup>20</sup> Gabrielsson, *Strong Experiences with Music*, p. 322.

God that only some people can really, or fully, access. Such a view either hierarchises or even excludes many musical expressions and experiences from theological discussion.

And so, music is a temporal art – it ‘unfolds over time’ – but we must be careful in the sorts of claims we advance from this observation.<sup>21</sup> Some musical experiences can ground individuals in the present moment, making them aware of time and space; others, as Gabrielsson attests, seem to do the very opposite. For some people, some of the time, musical experiences can be a means of contemplation – whether ‘feeding upon reality’ or becoming more aware of finitude – but there are plenty of experiences of music that do not seem to operate in these ways. That musical experience unfolds gradually and persistently may be theologically noteworthy, but it is difficult to advance any further claims from this observation without tending to problematic generalisation.

The second observation to be made about musical experience is that it is dialogic. In a broad sense, this is simply to observe that humans act to create music, and music seems to act back. As DeNora suggests:

At the level of daily life, music has power. It is implicated in every dimension of social agency[.] [...] Music may influence how people compose their bodies, how they conduct themselves, how they experience the passage of time, how they feel – in terms of energy and emotion – about themselves, about others, and about situations.<sup>22</sup>

Musical experience is dialogic because it involves real, and meaningful, interaction between human and non-human actors. Music is not simply accompaniment, a passive reflector of human action. It is much less controllable than this, and much more

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<sup>21</sup> Tia DeNora, *Music Asylums*, p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life*, pp. 16-17. DeNora recognises here, like Williams, that music can have an impact on the experience of time, but asserts that this is only one dimension of its power.

contingent, unpredictable, and sometimes even surprising. There is genuine interaction between humans and music, each shaping the other – the possibility, for example, of a real, affective, and meaningful interaction between a child joyfully playing a tambourine during a hymn, and an adult frustratedly trying to focus on the lyrics. And, as I will expand upon in chapter 7, interactions such as these can be legitimately described as formational.

Musical experience is also dialogic because it is inherently social. There are always ‘dialectical relationships between the discursive and the experiential, and between the ideological and the embodied.’<sup>23</sup> As I suggested in chapter 5, the act of projecting the lyrics to a song, or handing out hymn books, is – in particular contexts – inseparable from the act of singing; singing depends upon the activity of others.<sup>24</sup> Musical experience is also dialogic because the assemblage of any hymn, or any worship band, or any worshipping genre, is always growing and changing. Every time congregants sing ‘Dear Lord and Father of mankind’, that hymn acquires new meaning in their lives. Every time someone sings their mother’s favourite hymn, awash with particular, and entirely individual, association, new connections are forged between past and present experience. Every time hospitality is shown to a new choir member, something about the felt quality of the act of worship in that time and place changes. Musical experience is always, then, dialogic – dialogic between human and non-human actors in the broadest sense, and dialogic between memories, people, and places in specific human lives.

Finally, musical experience is excessive, in the sense that it surpasses necessity. This is not to suggest that any music is “non-functional” – that it serves no purpose. This would be a

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<sup>23</sup> Martin Clayton, Byron Dueck and Laura Leante, ‘Introduction’, in *Experience and Meaning in Music Performance*, ed. by Martin Clayton, Byron Dueck and Laura Leante (Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 1-10 (p. 2).

<sup>24</sup> See pp. 163-68.

reiteration of some of the troubling ideas about musical autonomy encountered in chapter

2. It is rather to think along the lines of Basil of Caesarea:

For when the Holy Spirit saw that mankind was ill-inclined toward virtue and that we were heedless of the righteous life because of our inclination to pleasure, what did he do? He blended the delight of melody with doctrine in order that through the pleasantness and softness of the sound we might unawares receive what was useful in the words, according to the practice of wise physicians, who, when they give the more bitter draughts to the sick, often smear the rim of the cup with honey.<sup>25</sup>

Without wanting to suggest that music's exclusive purpose lies in making doctrine palatable, there is an indication here of music 'generous excess'.<sup>26</sup> Music, for Basil, is not of first importance; it lacks the necessity granted to doctrine, just as honey lacks the necessity granted to bitter draughts for the sick. And yet, it is one example of many of the gratuitous generosity of God, of the excess of God's creation.

The excessiveness of the gift of music is also demonstrated by the range of perspectives offered in my conversations at St Michael and All Angels, St Nicholas', and Christchurch, and by the variegation between them, that there are profoundly different experiences associated with just a few minutes of the same music. To say that music is an excessive gift is not to suggest that all experiences of music are good – music is just as liable to corruption as any other human activity. It is also not to suggest, since musical experiences exceed necessity, that music is superfluous – clearly it is an important means of worship for the body of Christ. But it is to say that the gift of music, however received and used, is nonetheless generous and excessive.

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<sup>25</sup> Basil of Caesarea, *Homily on the First Psalm*, in *Source Readings*, pp. 121-22 (p. 121).

<sup>26</sup> Brown and Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, p. 35, emphasis in original.

From these three observations about musical experience, it is possible to make one fundamental claim: that musical experience works ‘*with* the grain of things’.<sup>27</sup> This claim, it is important to acknowledge, is borrowed from Williams’ account of music and contemplation quoted above, and can be subjected to the same criticisms I made earlier. Williams is considering here music as it works ‘in the stream of God’s wisdom’, but with a highly particular view of what musical experience might look like.<sup>28</sup> Such an account finds an echo in his discussion of Jacques Maritain in *Grace and Necessity: Reflections on Art and Love*, where he suggests that the arts conceived more generally engage their observers and participants ‘in an unforeseen pattern of coherence or integrity’: one that uncovers that which ““ordinary” seeing and experiencing obscure or even deny’; that ‘restores to reality a dimension that necessarily escapes our conceptuality and our control’; and that ‘opens up the dimension in which “things are more than they are”’.<sup>29</sup> This idea – that the arts in general, and music in particular, are a way in which ordinary experience is *made more real* – is one I have reservations about: clearly, music can provoke powerful experiences for some people, some of the time, but this account is simultaneously limited and overblown when it comes to the ways in which music is routinely experienced. Musical experiences on the ground are far more diverse, varied, and often mundane than this line of thinking might suggest.

But, in a more modest way, it is an expression that captures the way in which music, and specifically music offered in praise to God, works *with* the createdness of the world, and *with* the particularities of human experience. There is good reason, to use a musical metaphor, to suggest a fundamental consonance between musical experience and human experience more generally. From the way that music moves through time; to the dialogic

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<sup>27</sup> Williams, ‘Keeping Time’, p. 250, emphasis in original.

<sup>28</sup> Williams, ‘Keeping Time’, p. 250.

<sup>29</sup> Rowan Williams, *Grace and Necessity: Reflections on Art and Love* (Continuum, 2005), p. 37.

nature of musical and other forms of human experience; to the generously excessive way in which we receive it as we receive everything else, music goes with the grain of our createdness. In thinking about music, we are necessarily thinking of bodies, of time, of space, of objects, of memories, of expectations, and of experiences. This should not, perhaps, be a surprise, if music is an assemblage, comprised of interwoven elements and practices that are not exclusive to it. And nor, indeed, should it be a surprise in the light of the interconnectedness of creation. It is worth specifying, however, as we progress into a more detailed account of musical affectivity, experience, and worship.

### **Musical Affectivity**

Having established the premises of the following discussion – defined what I take musical experience to be – it is now possible to examine more closely the nature of affect. I will do so first in relation to musical experience generally, and then to music in worship in particular. For clarity, affect is used here, and indeed throughout the chapter, as ‘an umbrella term that covers all evaluative – or “valenced” (positive/negative) – [experiential] states’ (as opposed to more narrow terms such as ‘emotion’, ‘mood’, or ‘feeling’).<sup>30</sup> *Musical* affect, then, is the range of human experiential and evaluative states associated with the assemblage of music. In this section, I will map out some important facets of musical affectivity which can help us to describe a range of affective experiences of music in worship, and which in turn will ground the constructive account to follow. I will do so with reference to musicological resources, and in particular to the psychological study of music, as well as to my conversations at St Michael and All Angels, St Nicholas’, and Christchurch.

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<sup>30</sup> See Juslin and Sloboda, ‘Introduction’, in *Music and Emotion*, pp. 10-11.

The first thing to note here is that the mechanism between music and affect is difficult to establish and highly contested.<sup>31</sup> As Gabrielsson suggests, ‘One often assumes that the reaction has the same character as the expression in the music: happy music makes one happy, sad music makes one sad, angry music makes one aggressive, and so on.’<sup>32</sup> He continues, ‘Experience tells us that such unambiguous connections do not apply at all.’<sup>33</sup> And, in fact, even the suggestion that some music can be objectively labelled as “happy” is open to debate, as chapter 7 will suggest in some detail. Studying musical affect is also ridden with difficulty, not least since music is always experienced in context. As Annelies van Goethem and John Sloboda remark on their research, ‘It would never be possible to simulate a funeral in a laboratory situation, or to actually reproduce the feeling of being at home.’<sup>34</sup> Nonetheless, there does at least seem to be a close relationship between musical experience and affectivity, even if there are questions about mechanism: ‘music listening is a frequently used affect regulation tactic with a high success level’.<sup>35</sup> And this is no less true in a worshipping context, where music ‘reconfigures [...] sensory attunements and [...] affective states.’<sup>36</sup>

Musical affectivity takes a variety of forms. There are any number of accounts of very powerful, and sometimes even life-changing, experiences of music, whether performed, listened to, rehearsed, reflected upon, or experienced in another way. Gabrielsson, for example, recounts stories of ‘total absorption’, ‘out-of-body’ experience, ‘presence’,

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<sup>31</sup> See Stephen Davies, ‘Emotions Expressed and Aroused by Music: Philosophical Perspectives’, in *Music and Emotion*, ed. by Patrick N. Juslin and John A. Sloboda, pp. 15-43.

<sup>32</sup> Gabrielsson, *Strong Experiences*, p. 6.

<sup>33</sup> Gabrielsson, *Strong Experiences*, p. 6.

<sup>34</sup> Annelies van Goethem and John Sloboda, ‘The Functions of Music for Affect Regulation’, *Musicae Scientiae* 15.2 (2011), pp. 208-28 (p. 211), doi:10.1177/1029864911401174.

<sup>35</sup> Goethem and Sloboda, ‘Music for Affect Regulation’, p. 225.

<sup>36</sup> Jon Bialecki, *A Diagram for Fire: Miracles and Variation in an American Charismatic Movement* (University of California Press, 2017), p. 28.

‘ecstasy’, ‘religious experience’, and ‘therapeutic effect’.<sup>37</sup> While it would be difficult to draw broad conclusions from such a variety of experiences, Gabrielsson nonetheless observes that:

A typical feature in strong experiences with music is that the music completely dominates one’s attention and shuts out everything else. The world around one disappears, time stands still, the only thing that counts is music and oneself, here and now.<sup>38</sup>

This absorptive capacity of music is widely recognised to be theologically significant: Hopps, for example, describes a particular concern for ‘the experience of being stopped in our tracks and profoundly affected or drawn into contemplation by an art-form that seems able to “give more than it has.”’<sup>39</sup> And, as the congregants I spoke to suggested, it is possible to ‘get lost in’ music, ‘drift away’, or even be ‘transported’, seemingly drawn away from ordinary reality.<sup>40</sup> As Sue described in some detail:

‘How sweet the name of Jesus sounds in a believer’s ear, it soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds, and drives away his fear. It makes the wounded spirit whole, and calms the troubled breast, ‘tis manna to the hungry soul, and to the weary rest.’ And all [...] [s]ix verses, they just flowed straight into my head, I couldn’t believe it. And I felt peace. I felt God’s presence [...] and if you’d said to me, ‘can you tell me all the words of ‘How sweet the name of Jesus sounds?’ I would have said ‘no’. And yet every verse, every line of every verse just came straight in at the very moment I needed it. So it’s a powerful hymn for me, I hope we don’t sing it too often. But I needed that hymn at that very moment, and I felt that God had given me that hymn.’<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Gabrielsson, *Strong Experiences*, pp. 77, 95, 149, 161, 171 and 209.

<sup>38</sup> Gabrielsson, *Strong Experiences*, p. 67.

<sup>39</sup> Brown and Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, p. 162.

<sup>40</sup> Heather, Focus Group 5; John, Focus Group 3; Julian, Focus Group 1.

<sup>41</sup> Sue, Focus Group 3; Newton, ‘How sweet the name of Jesus sounds’.

In this example, music is perceived to apprehend, arrest, and accost, to cut through ordinary life and experience. Sue's musical experience is still, according to the parameters laid earlier in this chapter, temporal, dialogic, and excessive – it takes place in time, relates to memories and other people, and is acknowledged as a generous gift. However, it is also received as extraordinary, powerful, and transformative, as “other” to more everyday experience – even as it necessarily goes with the grain of such everyday experience.

But musical affectivity can also be much more mundane. As Kassabian observes, ‘our days are filled with listening’; music is often experienced as ‘background accompaniment’.<sup>42</sup> And while Gabrielsson would suggest that experiences where music is ‘just in the background’ are ‘hardly the most suitable if one wishes to penetrate deeper into questions of what a music experience can comprise and what it can mean for the individual’, Kassabian disagrees.<sup>43</sup> She asserts, ‘That *listening*, and more generally input of the *senses*, however, still produces *affective* responses’ – where affect is defined as ‘the circuit of bodily responses to stimuli that take place before conscious apprehension.’<sup>44</sup> Such experiences can still be significant and formative, because ‘Once apprehended, the responses pass into thoughts and feelings, though they always leave behind a residue. This residue accretes in our bodies, becoming the stuff of future affective responses.’<sup>45</sup> This might mean, in the context of worship, that even the most ordinary experiences of music – for example, a hymn provoking a feeling of grief, or annoyance, or satisfaction – might be doing work, the nature of which we can examine.

It is often assumed that the majority of experiences of music are affectively positive, or that positive affect is the norm. After all, there are plenty of examples of positive affect in my

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<sup>42</sup> Kassabian, *Ubiquitous Listening*, p. 12.

<sup>43</sup> Gabrielsson, *Strong Experiences*, p. 2.

<sup>44</sup> Kassabian, *Ubiquitous Listening*, pp. 11 and 13, emphasis in original.

<sup>45</sup> Kassabian, *Ubiquitous Listening*, p. 13.

conversations at St Michael and All Angels, St Nicholas', and Christchurch: the ten references to congregational singing as 'uplifting', say, or Heather's comment on 'I, the Lord of sea and sky': 'it just makes me feel good'.<sup>46</sup> And in Gabrielsson's study, too, 'some sort of positive feelings are described by more than 70% of the participants.'<sup>47</sup> Music, both in the context of worship and elsewhere, is associated with positive affect. Yet from 'longing/regret, embarrassment/shame, jealousy/envy, and feelings of loneliness/abandonment' to 'disappointment/frustration, discomfort, fear, anguish, pain, despair, anger, hatred, horror, and panic', there are any number of viscerally negative experiences of music detailed in Gabrielsson's study.<sup>48</sup> Given the situatedness of his research – and of my own – it would be unwise to take this percentage as indicative of musical experience more generally. However, it is possible to say with confidence that each of these states are related to experiences of music (while there are many more states we could add), and that the prevalence of each would be difficult to quantify.

It is important not to disregard the prevalence of negative affect, particularly in the context of worship, nor to regard it as inherently problematic. Some music used in worship, due either to its theological content, or its historical association, has the capacity to do genuine harm – remembering, for example, that 'An instrument of conversion and domination such as European hymnody [...] never loses its associative historical power, even in a post-colonial, post-mission context.'<sup>49</sup> But although some forms of harm can, and should, be prevented – through close attention to history, through critical examination of what is being espoused, and, accordingly, through careful selection of repertoire – this is not possible for all forms of harm. Hymns and songs, genres and styles can take on all manner of negative associations for all sorts of reasons, not all of which can – or perhaps should –

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<sup>46</sup> Heather, Focus Group 5.

<sup>47</sup> Gabrielsson, *Strong Experiences*, p. 122.

<sup>48</sup> Gabrielsson, *Strong Experiences*, p. 130.

<sup>49</sup> Barz, *Performing Religion*, p. 115.

be mitigated against. If, for example, one congregant associates ‘Abide with me’ with a particularly traumatic funeral, but other congregants find it an important expression of grief, it would be neither feasible nor even necessarily desirable to prevent it being sung at all funerals the first congregant might attend.

Or, as a more mundane example, take Sarah’s suggestion, ‘I get easily distracted’ when the music is ‘not going quick enough’ or when what is played is ‘not what’s written in the music’.<sup>50</sup> Sarah was observing here that the presence of musical inaccuracies in music in worship prevents her from experiencing an affective response perceived as desirable – for the sake of argument, elation – and she is left with an affective response closer to frustration instead. As with instances of harm, these affects are not always preventable, and nor would it always be appropriate to try. As Heather MacLachlan suggests, in her research on American leaders of church music, ‘music leaders negotiate between two sometimes competing priorities: their conviction that volunteer musicians must perform with a certain degree of musical accuracy, and their desire to encourage broad participation in music ministries by volunteers of diverse skill levels.’<sup>51</sup> Both instincts, she suggests, are mutually concerned with ‘an ethic of care.’<sup>52</sup> Or, as Nathan Myrick contests, ‘The most aesthetically ugly things are sometimes the most morally beautiful – if we are paying attention.’<sup>53</sup> As I have observed, too, music in worship may be doing profound work in the body of Christ, and may involve significant participation in the Son’s adoration of the Father, precisely in places where competence is limited.<sup>54</sup> As such, some negative affective

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<sup>50</sup> Sarah, Focus Group 3.

<sup>51</sup> Heather MacLachlan, ‘Church Music Leaders in the USA: Prioritizing Technical Competence and Inclusion’, *Yale Journal of Music & Religion* 8.2 (2023), pp. 58-84 (p. 60), doi:10.17132/2377-231X.1241.

<sup>52</sup> MacLachlan ‘Competence and Inclusion’, p. 60.

<sup>53</sup> Myrick, *Music for Others*, p. 119.

<sup>54</sup> See pp. 192-93.

experiences may be an inevitable, or even sometimes desirable, part of the assemblage of music in worship.

It is also worth closely interrogating the idea of distraction in this context. As Jankélévitch notes:

There is something truly strange about the boundless seriousness with which listeners apply themselves to harmonic mumbling that is void of signification; there is something comical – if one recalls that humans are frivolous and their worries futile – in the religious silence that they maintain at concerts, in their maniac fear of being distracted. Distracted from what, then?<sup>55</sup>

Questions of context, signification, and indeed human nature, aside, there is an important question here. Technical incompetence may be a barrier to certain forms of affective experience, but it is hard to determine what the distraction is *from*. It cannot be distraction from the music, since – strictly speaking – it is the musical assemblage, with all its deviations from expected norms, that is drawn into focus. It is unlikely, wholly, to be distraction from praise, worship, and adoration, either: human failings in music, as indeed in everything else, impede right worship, but it is far from clear that aesthetic failings should produce so great a distraction in the face of the inevitable personal and social failings involved in all worship. It is quite possibly distraction from a pre-determined aesthetic ideal, or from the imagined musical performance, but these concepts are hardly straightforward to pin down. And, if concert-hall audiences and church congregations were seriously concerned about the possibility that music would distract them from their aesthetic ideals or imagined musical performances, it would then be unclear why they risked engaging with live music at all. In practice, then, while it is clear what the distraction is *to* – distraction to technical errors, say, which pull focus from everything else – it is not immediately clear what the distraction is *from*. In all likelihood, the distraction is *from* a

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<sup>55</sup> Jankélévitch, *Music and the Ineffable*, p. 100.

complex array – indeed an assemblage – of practices, experiences, and understandings taking place when music is used in worship, none of which are the singular point of focus. The same might be argued of spoken liturgy: of instances where, for example, the intonation of the priest draws focus away from an assemblage of words, sounds, and reflections. There are undoubtedly some (negative) affective responses to music in worship that pull focus only to themselves, then, but not perhaps quite as straightforwardly as the language of distraction suggests. And so, musical experiences can be both affectively positive and negative, and neither affective response is necessarily avoidable or problematic, nor a distraction from the act of worship in any straightforward sense.

There is also a third type of affective experience – experiences which cannot be neatly categorised. Gabrielsson observes any number of ‘examples of mixed and contradictory feelings’ in his research which, perhaps unsurprisingly, are frequently related to ‘unhappy love and broken relationships’.<sup>56</sup> Closely related is the conscious choice to ‘listen to music in order to be in touch with emotions’ – even when those emotions may seem negative.<sup>57</sup> Affective experiences of music may be negative by accident – such as a performer experiencing stage fright – but they may also be negative by design, and the latter is more complicated to categorise than the former. It is also possible to suggest that the catharsis of listening to sad music might not be affectively negative at all, and might instead lead to experiences such as ‘consolation’, ‘communion’, or a sense of resolution to a challenging situation, each of which ‘bring about *greater positive affect*’.<sup>58</sup> This is also demonstrated by my conversations at St Michael and All Angels, St Nicholas’, and Christchurch. As Gary noted, there can be both ‘beauty’ and theological significance in sad hymns, given that

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<sup>56</sup> Gabrielsson, *Strong Experiences*, p. 143.

<sup>57</sup> Annemieke J. M. Van den Tol and Jane Edwards, ‘Listening to Sad Music in Adverse Situations: How Music Selection Strategies Relate to Self-Regulatory Goals, Listening Effects, and Mood Enhancement’, *Psychology of Music* 43.4 (2015), pp. 473-94 (p. 491), doi:10.1177.0305735613517410.

<sup>58</sup> Witchel, *You Are What You Hear*, p. 81, emphasis in original.

Christ is ‘a man of sorrows’.<sup>59</sup> But this is qualitatively distinct from frustration when ‘the singing is bad and the organ playing is slow’.<sup>60</sup>

There are also responses to music that are ‘far more complex [...] than contradictions at the level of emotions’ – and one of these is ambivalence.<sup>61</sup> Take, for example, Anthony’s reflection on attending funerals, where ‘you have the words printed out’ but many people ‘just don’t sing’.<sup>62</sup> It is impossible to know exactly what is going on here affectively: some congregants might have affectively positive reactions to the music even if they are unfamiliar with it; others might find the music a source of discomfort, whether because they do not like it, or because it heightens the emotional tenor of the service and they are worried about losing their composure; and still others might experience a contradictory combination of these, and other, responses. But there is also a possibility here of ambivalence, or, even more extremely, of disinterest or detachment: that some congregants are not particularly moved by the music at all. This is not to suggest that any such response would be entirely non-affective: Kassabian’s work suggests that all manner of expressions of music are involved in the circulation of affect.<sup>63</sup> But it is to suggest that some music in worship might not produce a *strong* or *discernible* affective response; that just because music in worship is a powerful gift for some, we should not assume that music always leads to salient affective reactions for others. In some instances, music may not produce anything so severe as harm or distraction (as defined above) simply because it may fail to move people to any form of strong affective response at all.

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<sup>59</sup> Gary, Focus Group 4.

<sup>60</sup> Sarah, Focus Group 3.

<sup>61</sup> Johanna P. Maksimainen, Tuomas Eerola and Suvi H. Saarikallio, ‘Ambivalent Emotional Experiences of Everyday Visual and Musical Objects’, *SAGE Open* (2019), pp. 1-17 (p. 6), doi:10.1177/2158244019876319.

<sup>62</sup> Anthony, Focus Group 4.

<sup>63</sup> Kassabian, *Ubiquitous Listening*, p. 11.

Finally, it is important to note that affective experiences – even of the same piece of music – are profoundly variegated. In a sense this is obvious: given substantive differences in aural experience, personal history, taste, association, and musical training, two people walking into a shop may have profoundly different experiences of the Christmas song that is playing in mid-November.<sup>64</sup> It concurs with evidence that preference, personality, and training all have an impact on the likelihood, experience, and nature of ‘musical imagery’ – of how music is perceived.<sup>65</sup> It also concurs with Tanya Luhrmann’s work on absorption, with the variegated capacity or disposition of an individual towards ‘having moments of total attention that somehow completely engage all of one’s attentional resources – perceptual, imaginative, conceptual, even the way one holds and moves one’s body.’<sup>66</sup> There is no need to be essentialist about an individual’s absorptive capacity – while absorption is often treated as a ‘character trait’, Luhrmann’s research into prayer suggests that, to varying degrees of success, it ‘can be trained.’<sup>67</sup> But it does mean that, for any given event of music, there are likely to be a wide range of affective responses – some positive, some negative, and no two the same.

This means that any given act of music *in worship* may prompt a vast variety of different affective responses. It is perfectly possible that what is totally absorptive for one congregant may prompt boredom for another, and it is perfectly possible that, even if two congregants both have a positive experience of the same hymn, *the nature of that experience* might be significantly different. And while I do not want to suggest that *all* affective experiences are

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<sup>64</sup> For a concise discussion of d/Deaf experiences of music, see Jessica A. Holmes, ‘Expert Listening beyond the Limits of Hearing: Music and Deafness’, *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 70.1 (2017), pp. 171–220, doi:10.1525/jams.2017.70.1.171.

<sup>65</sup> Roger E. Beaty and others, ‘Music to the Inner Ears: Exploring Individual Differences in Musical Imagery’, *Consciousness and Cognition* 22.4 (2013), pp. 1163–73 (p. 1171–72), doi:10.1016/j.concog.2013.07.006.

<sup>66</sup> Tanya M. Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), p. 199.

<sup>67</sup> Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back*, p. 202.

useful, or doing valuable work in the body of Christ and in the life of faith, I do, however, want to initially propose that this variegation is not surprising nor indeed a problem. As Lash suggests, ‘The oneness, friendship, harmony, created by the Spirit’s gift, *requires* and does not threaten or obliterate diversity. It is not difference that is ruled out by God’s gathering but discord; not richness that is incompatible with the Spirit’s beauty, but division; not mutual interchange and education requiring (and not inhibiting) disagreement, but exclusion, domination and neglect.’<sup>68</sup> And, I want to suggest, there is good reason to explore this range of affective experiences, without presupposing in advance which are of the greatest value for the worship of the church.

### **Mysticism and Glossolalia**

There are any number of theological questions to be asked about the range of affective experiences I have described so far: how do ordinary and extraordinary experiences of music in worship relate to one another? How might each of these experiences be either an aid to or a distraction from worship? Or, as asked by my participants in chapter 4, does music have to feel a certain way to be worship? While there are many ways to approach these questions, I want to suggest – as in the previous chapter – that there is value in drawing on theological accounts of other practices: specifically, here, mysticism and glossolalia. In accounts of these two sets of practices, I suggest, we can find a way of discussing both extraordinary and ordinary experiences, and their interrelation – and from there begin to answer the questions of this chapter. Needless to say, the accounts given here of mysticism and glossolalia are not comprehensive; there is much more to be said about both in their own right. I present here simply a few claims made about these practices, so as to find resource to comment upon musical experience.

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<sup>68</sup> Nicholas Lash, *Believing Three Ways in One God: A Reading of the Apostles’ Creed* (SCM, 1992), p. 19, emphasis in original.

First, it is worth qualifying the terminology used in this section. I will, here, refer to both “ordinary” experiences and “extraordinary” experiences – or experiences that are perceived to be “other” to everyday human experience. However, it is worth noting, with John Swinton and Christopher Cook, that it is both difficult and ethically problematic to neatly classify experiences – religious or otherwise. As Cook observes, it is commonplace to draw a distinction between ‘pathological’ and ‘spiritual’ experiences.<sup>69</sup> However, voice hearing (among other phenomena) is common to both – in fact, ‘it is estimated that between 5 and 28 percent of any general population hear voices that other people do not.’<sup>70</sup> It is also commonplace to draw a distinction between spontaneous experiences and experiences induced by ‘religion’s chemical substitutes’, even though both may be received as spiritually significant.<sup>71</sup> And each of these three categories of experience can, of course, be distinguished from an implicit fourth: those deemed “ordinary” – neither pathological, nor spiritual, nor induced, but rather, accepted, customary, and normative. Yet these are clearly not neutral categories: if voice hearing is common to between 5 and 28% of a general population, is it not immediately obvious whether it is extraordinary or not.

None of this is to make ‘an argument against the *actual* presence of God in the life of Christian devotion, nor is it a reduction of the phenomenon of hearing the voice of God to purely psychological processes.’<sup>72</sup> Rather, ‘It is simply to observe something of the psychospiritual (and neurospiritual) procedures in which humans engage, wherein the voice of God is foregrounded and experienced as present, personal, and intentional.’<sup>73</sup> And

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<sup>69</sup> Christopher C. H. Cook, *Hearing Voices, Demonic and Divine: Scientific and Theological Perspectives* (Routledge, 2019), p. 37.

<sup>70</sup> John Swinton, *Finding Jesus in the Storm: The Spiritual Lives of Christians with Mental Health Challenges* (SCM Press, 2020), p. 135.

<sup>71</sup> Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell* (Penguin Books in Association with Chatto & Windus, 1971), p. 55.

<sup>72</sup> Swinton, *Finding Jesus in the Storm*, p. 137, emphasis in original.

<sup>73</sup> Swinton, *Finding Jesus in the Storm*, p. 137.

it is to suggest that there is not a sharp distinction to be drawn between some people's "ordinary" experience of the world – by whatever metrics are applied – and the either castigated or idealised "extraordinary" experiences of others.<sup>74</sup> This does not mean we should 'romanticize suffering', as if all experiences should be acceptable to those who have them, but it does mean that we should be careful about drawing and maintaining distinctions which are more arbitrary than they first appear. While I will use the terms "ordinary" and "extraordinary" in this section, then, to convey the difference between experiences that seem either consistent with an individual's general experience of life, or other to it, my intention is not to draw a sharp or definitive line between the two. Later in this chapter (as in chapter 5) I will flatten this distinction, following a discussion of the practices of discernment.

It is also worth providing some further rationale for moving to mysticism and glossolalia here – aside from as a continuation of my interest in what resources on other Christian practices might offer to accounts of music. Some parallels have already been drawn: Joseph Ratzinger describes singing as 'the true *glossolalia*'; Brown suggests music can 'sometimes function like silent contemplative prayer'.<sup>75</sup> And yet, Ratzinger and Brown are only talking about a small number of experiences – extraordinary experiences – of music: singing is 'the surpassing of ordinary speech'; music 'break[s] down the barrier that customarily exists between our world and the heavenly reality that is God's universal place of presence.'<sup>76</sup> Singing and music, for both, are worthy of comment in the places where they seem most other to that which is ordinary – ordinary speech, and our ordinary experience of the world.

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<sup>74</sup> See Anastasia Philippa Scrutton, 'Two Christian Theologies of Depression: An Evaluation and Discussion of Clinical Implications', *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology* 22.4 (2015), pp. 275-89 (p. 277), doi:10.1353/ppp.2015.0046.

<sup>75</sup> Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (Ignatius Press, 2000), p. 140, emphasis in original; Brown and Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, p. 150

<sup>76</sup> Ratzinger, *Spirit of the Liturgy*, p. 140; Brown and Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, p. 150.

Given that this chapter is concerned with all manner of experiences of music, it should be no surprise that my interest in mysticism and glossolalia comes from a different place.

The first thing it is worth saying is that mysticism and glossolalia can be valuably considered together. As Daniel Castelo suggests, on Pentecostalism more generally but with considered attention given to glossolalia in particular:

Pentecostalism can be [...] thought of as a mystical tradition of the church catholic, given that Christian mysticism has a long history of cultivating an apophatic sensibility in the theological task, one that points precisely to expressing the limits of speech and thought so as to point to dimensions beyond them.<sup>77</sup>

Both are concerned with limits (itself an expression of the relationship between ordinary and extraordinary): the limits of prayer and language, the limits of human experience, and the limits of our capacity to understand, comprehend, or talk about, the divine. As Smith observes, ‘tongues-speech’ is a ‘liminal case’; as Turner suggests, ‘It is in the profusion of our affirmations that we encounter the limits of language, and then break through them into the [...] dark silence of the transcendent.’<sup>78</sup> Both are also often misconceived, particularly (although not exclusively) in the popular imagination. As Smith notes, ‘glossolalia is often thought to be a quintessentially unmediated, divinely given, ecstatic discourse that bypasses the conditions of interpretation – a kind of pure conduit from God, without the static or supposed distortion of semiotic medium.’<sup>79</sup> And, as Jantzen observes, ‘Contemporary philosophers of religion have a clear idea that mystical experiences are private, subjective, intense psychological states.’<sup>80</sup> Neither view stands up to scrutiny:

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<sup>77</sup> Daniel Castelo, *Pentecostalism as a Christian Mystical Tradition* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017), p. 128.

<sup>78</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Thinking in Tongues: Pentecostal Contributions to Christian Philosophy* (William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2010), p. 123; Turner, *Darkness of God*, p. 32.

<sup>79</sup> Smith, *Thinking in Tongues*, p. 138.

<sup>80</sup> Jantzen, *Power, Gender, Mysticism*, p. 4.

An appreciation of the conclusions of hermeneutics must challenge and mitigate such claims: no revelation is ever unmediated. Notions to the contrary would be a kind of neo-Gnosticism of the sort that Paul decidedly rejected in the hermeneutic conditions specified in 1 Corinthians 14.<sup>81</sup>

And, as Mark McIntosh observes, ‘the mystical is not completed in a given moment of experience’ but was first conceived as ‘communal, practical and oriented towards the activity of God in the church’s midst.’<sup>82</sup> In fact, even talking about ‘mysticism’ at all is plagued with difficulty: it is ‘a social construction’ and ‘has been constructed in different ways at different times.’<sup>83</sup> The term ‘mysticism’, though useful in denoting a series of practices and experiences, is ‘something of an academic invention; earlier eras referred to the most intimate and transforming encounter with God as “contemplation”.’<sup>84</sup>

And it is from *this* starting point, I suggest, that we can find a parallel with music. As we saw in Hoffmann’s account of music in chapter 2 – ‘Music discloses to man an unknown kingdom, a world having nothing in common with the external sensual world’ – the understanding that music gives experiential, and direct, access to the transcendent, that music allows us to reach beyond our limits, also has a significant history, as does the notion that ‘music is an individual matter.’<sup>85</sup> And, as with glossolalia and mysticism, these understandings are misconceptions, giving limited account of the roles of materiality, communality, and sociality in musical experience. Music, mysticism, and glossolalia may involve experiences – and powerful ones at that – yet all are mediated, none are divorced from corporate practices, and, as we will see, these practices do not have a straightforward relationship with such extraordinary experiences.

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<sup>81</sup> Smith, *Thinking in Tongues*, pp. 138-39.

<sup>82</sup> McIntosh, *Mystical Theology*, pp. 31 and 44.

<sup>83</sup> Jantzen, *Power, Gender, Mysticism*, p. 12.

<sup>84</sup> McIntosh, *Mystical Theology*, p. 11.

<sup>85</sup> Hoffmann, ‘Beethoven’s Instrumental Music’, p. 127; Small, *Musicking*, p. 6.

Both mysticism and music have also fallen into similar discursive difficulties. As Amy Hollywood contends,

Modern scholars [...] tend to divide mysticism into two general types: the feminine – affective, emotional, visionary, and often erotic; and the masculine – speculative, intellectual, and often explicitly antivisionary.<sup>86</sup>

Music has frequently been divided, and indeed gendered, in a similar way. The study of musical experience is often caught between two poles: one which treats music as embodied and affective, and the other which sits within the legacy of Kantian disinterestedness. From Roland Barthes' famous discussion of the 'grain' of the voice – 'the body in the voice as it sings, the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs' – to McClary's discussion of the contemporary significance of castrati – musicology is rich with accounts of music as visceral, bodily, and sensual.<sup>87</sup> But musicology has also produced 'structural listening' – a series of idealised and intellectualised practices concerned with the inner order, structure, and rationality of works of music.<sup>88</sup> It scarcely needs to be said that such distinctions are dualistic, problematic, and obstructive. But they are still operative in the ways in which mysticism is understood and studied, and operative in these diverging musicological tendencies. And, if perhaps more implicitly, similar distinctions can be operative, too, in the ways we talk about ordinary and extraordinary musical experiences: ordinary, lived, breathed, embodied hymn-singing, as opposed to extraordinary, ineffable, timeless, profound music. I will return to this idea in dialogue with Lash later. For now, however, the parallels I have drawn here suggest that – even with different motivations to Ratzinger

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<sup>86</sup> Amy M. Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History* (University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 18.

<sup>87</sup> Roland Barthes, 'The Grain of the Voice', in *Image, Music, Text*, ed. by Stephen Heath (Fontana, 1977), pp. 179-89 (p. 188); McClary, *Making Sense of Music*, pp. 260-78.

<sup>88</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, 'Little Heresy', in *Essays on Music*, pp. 318-24 (p. 318).

and Brown – there may be valuable resources in the theological studies of mysticism and glossolalia for the theological study of music.

One of the most important observations to be made about mysticism and glossolalia is that they are comprised of practices. Smith suggests that glossolalia is one of the ‘practices’ that ‘implicitly “carry” a worldview or social imaginary’.<sup>89</sup> As Coakley notes on ascetical and mystical theology, ‘the undertaking of ascetic “practice” is not one that comes with instant, commodifiable effects.’<sup>90</sup> Rather, ‘one starts from “practices” that one might be tempted to regard as entirely self-propelled, but they are joined over time by “practices” that involve deeper and more demanding levels of response to divine grace, and which uncover by degrees the implications of our fundamental reliance on that grace as initiated in baptism.’<sup>91</sup> Coakley is keen to emphasise that this is not a short-term endeavour: ‘ascetic formation, properly understood, involves a demanding integration of intellectual, spiritual and bodily practice over a life-time, sustained by a complete vision of the Christian life and its “ends”.’<sup>92</sup> Such a process is tangibly described by Luhrmann in relation to practices such as ‘crying in the presence of God’, ‘seeing from God’s perspective’, and ‘practicing love, peace, and joy’, which, over time, are designed to help practitioners ‘become confident that the God you imagine in the privacy of your mind exists externally in the world, talking back.’<sup>93</sup> Coakley and Luhrmann agree: ‘faith practices change people.’<sup>94</sup>

It is, however, important to be careful in describing the relationship between practices, experiences, and in this case, too, knowledge and understanding. Coakley observes that the

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<sup>89</sup> Smith, *Thinking in Tongues*, p. xviii.

<sup>90</sup> Sarah Coakley, *The New Asceticism: Sexuality, Gender and the Quest for God* (Bloomsbury Continuum, 2015), p. 101.

<sup>91</sup> Coakley, *The New Asceticism*, p. 105.

<sup>92</sup> Coakley, *The New Asceticism*, p. 18.

<sup>93</sup> Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back*, pp. 111, 113, 117 and 131.

<sup>94</sup> Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back*, p. 132.

explicit rhetoric of ascent common to many contemplative practices – from ‘purgative’ to ‘illuminative’ to ‘unitive – ‘may still [...] smack suspiciously of elitist progressivism’.<sup>95</sup> Whether ascending towards higher forms of knowledge, or deepening in response to divine grace, there is a hierarchy of experience at play here. There is also an insistent linearity and causality which simply does not happen in practice. As Luhrmann notes, ‘Nearly a quarter of the people I interviewed systematically at the church [...] told me, sometimes with discouraged voices, that they just didn’t hear God the way other people did.’<sup>96</sup> Bialecki’s research concurs: ‘some are unable at a practical level to speak in tongues, have no special capacity for healing, have no prophetic gifts, and cannot have the kinds of sensory experiences during prayer that constitute what is understood as hearing from God.’<sup>97</sup> And, as I suggested in chapter 5 and will return to in chapter 7, it is also important to recognise the realities of sin in any Christian practice; as Winner notes: ‘good Christian practices sometimes will not foster intimacy with God and growth in Christlikeness, but will rather perpetuate damage.’<sup>98</sup> There is not, therefore, a linear, nor universal, connection between particular practices and experiences. While it is important to observe the close relationship between the two, it is also important not to propound ‘the intrinsic spiritual superiority of any particular vocation [...] let alone the necessity of high-point “experiences” of the divine’.<sup>99</sup>

Secondly, it is important to observe that these practices are social. As Luhrmann notes, ‘People learn to recognize God’s voice through rules that are socially taught and collectively shared’.<sup>100</sup> They do not learn on their own. And where people do have powerful

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<sup>95</sup> Coakley, *The New Asceticism*, p. 126.

<sup>96</sup> Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back*, p. 155.

<sup>97</sup> Bialecki, *Diagram for Fire*, p. 26.

<sup>98</sup> Winner, *Dangers of Christian Practice*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>99</sup> Coakley, *The New Asceticism*, p. 126, emphasis in original.

<sup>100</sup> Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back*, p. 66.

experiences, these experiences are interpreted collectively. As we observed earlier with Swinton and Cook, extraordinary experiences are often demarcated as either spiritual or pathological – and distinguished again from those which are induced. But these demarcations and understandings vary from context to context. Abby Day’s research into belief in northern England in the early 2000s observes that a third of her informants, including many atheists, ‘related experiences that may be described as “supernatural”, or “metaphysical”, or “paranormal”’, although most ‘did not use these terms.’<sup>101</sup> Instead, they recounted ‘feeling the presence of a named, deceased relative’, often in ways that were ‘deeply embodied’ and ‘materially present’.<sup>102</sup> And these experiences were recounted not in the form of ‘belief statements’ but rather in the language of ‘continuing relationship.’<sup>103</sup> Without suggesting these experiences are identical to those of the participants in Bialecki or Luhrmann’s research, there are parallels between them – such as the emphasis on relationship – and significant interpretative differences: Day’s informants did not perceive these experiences to be of God; Bialecki and Luhrmann’s informants ascribed at least some of their experiences to divine action. This suggests that there are collectively acceptable ways to make sense of extraordinary experiences, and that these norms and expectations differ from one context to another.

But going further, these practices are social because they are oriented towards the other. As McIntosh suggests, spirituality may be rightly understood ‘as a discovery of the true “self”’, precisely because it involves ‘*encountering* the divine and human other – who allows one neither to rest in reassuring self-image nor to languish in the prison of a false social construction of oneself.’<sup>104</sup> He continues, ‘Individuals are not so much seeking to discover

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<sup>101</sup> Abby Day, *Believing in Belonging: Belief and Social Identity in the Modern World* (Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 98.

<sup>102</sup> Day, *Believing in Belonging*, pp. 98 and 104.

<sup>103</sup> Day, *Believing in Belonging*, pp. 110 and 108.

<sup>104</sup> McIntosh, *Mystical Theology*, pp. 5-6, emphasis in original.

their own feelings as to live into the knowledge and love of God through the hard work of being members one with another of the Body of Christ.<sup>105</sup> Ratzinger concurs: ‘To open oneself to God, to surrender oneself completely to him, is at the same time – the two things cannot be separated – to devote oneself to one’s neighbor.’<sup>106</sup> Along similar lines, Smith contends that glossolalia can be considered ‘a discourse of resistance.’<sup>107</sup> He continues, ‘perhaps we should say that tongues-speech is the language of faith communities that are marginalized by the powers-that-be, and that such speech can be indicative of a kind of eschatological resistance to the powers.’<sup>108</sup> Whether or not tongues-speech is always associated with marginalised communities, Smith is making a significant point about sociality: glossolalia is not simply social in *origin*, but social too in *orientation*. The work of these practices is not privatised but inherently corporate.

The third important observation to be made about these practices is that, while they are often associated with extraordinary, “other”, experiences, and indeed incorporate them, they do not possess a straightforward relationship with such experiences. This can be demonstrated particularly acutely through Turner’s account of medieval mysticism. As Turner notes, while there may be ‘a common, informal view around that the “mystical” had something to do with the having of very uncommon, privileged “experiences”, many mystics make ‘no mention at all of any such experiences’; he continues, ‘whereas our employment of the metaphors of “inwardness” and “ascent” appears to be tied in with the achievement and the cultivation of a certain kind of experience [...] the medieval employment of them was tied in with a “critique” of such religious experiences and practices.’<sup>109</sup> This is because there is a profound difference between, on the one hand, ‘*the*

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<sup>105</sup> McIntosh, *Mystical Theology*, p. 7.

<sup>106</sup> Ratzinger, *Spirit of the Liturgy*, pp. 203-04.

<sup>107</sup> Smith, *Thinking in Tongues*, p. 147.

<sup>108</sup> Smith, *Thinking in Tongues*, p. 147.

<sup>109</sup> Turner, *Darkness of God*, pp. 2 and 4.

*experience of negativity*' – a powerful experience or awareness of absence or darkness – and, on the other, '*the negativity of experience*' – a form of detachment 'not merely from a particular self-of-experience, but of the *need* for a self-of-experience of any kind.'<sup>110</sup> Only the second, so Turner contends, is truly apophatic: 'negative language about God is no more apophatic in itself than is affirmative language. The apophatic is the linguistic strategy of somehow showing by means of language that which lies beyond language.'<sup>111</sup> And therefore, to read these mystics and their understanding of negativity faithfully, so Turner suggests, is to recognise that they were not so much concerned with pursuing *particular experiences*, but rather with understanding, and ultimately critiquing, *experience itself*.

Turner's observations have been rightly criticised for their narrowness. As Hollywood notes:

What Turner misses is the place of medieval women mystics and their religious experience – visionary, auditory, and sensory in response to the demands of their contemporaries for some authorizing, divine agency, yet also increasingly interiorized in an attempt to escape from the externalizing demands of male-defined female sanctity. Women's writings from the thirteenth century are both visionary and apophatic; often there is an unproblematic movement between the two, the visionary moment serving as the material that is subsequently negated in a union without distinction between the soul and the divine.<sup>112</sup>

It is also worth bearing in mind Jantzen's observation that there is no singular essence of mysticism – Turner's discussion of medieval mysticism cannot stand for all mystics in every time and place.<sup>113</sup> However, it is still fair to note that 'there is in the contemporary

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<sup>110</sup> Turner, *Darkness of God*, pp. 264 and 244, emphasis in original.

<sup>111</sup> Turner, *Darkness of God*, p. 34.

<sup>112</sup> Amy Hollywood, 'Inside Out: Beatrice of Nazareth and Her Hagiographer', in *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters*, ed. by Catherine M. Mooney and Caroline Walker Bynum (University of Pennsylvania Press Inc, 2016), pp. 78-98 (p. 97).

<sup>113</sup> Jantzen, *Power, Gender, Mysticism*, p. 323.

preoccupation with mysticism as “experience” an implied theological positivism’, even if there are subtler arguments to be made than Turner achieves when it comes to visionary and visceral experiences and their significance in the mystical tradition.<sup>114</sup> It is also fair to note that the relationship between abundance and negation is indeed highly complex, as writers on silence have observed. As Sara Maitland caustically suggests on her studied engagement with silence: ‘to describe these experiences in terms of “lack” or “absence” is simply stupid.’<sup>115</sup> There is good reason, with Turner, to be suspicious of both positivism and easy dichotomies between abundance and negation.

Such concerns are articulated particularly clearly by Karl Rahner, who suggests it is not surprising that classical mysticism ‘is so indifferent towards, and even critical of, imaginative visions, even in the supposition that they come from God.’<sup>116</sup> He continues,

To repel or disregard even a genuine imaginative vision is neither to reject nor hinder what God is really doing; rather what is disregarded is a reflex, in the sphere of the senses, of the real thing and this attitude directs the attention of man and his personal decision to the one thing necessary, to the work which the mystical grace of God does in infused contemplation in the depths of a person, to pure faith and love of the God who transcends all images.<sup>117</sup>

This is not, so Rahner contends, simply a Neoplatonic concern about the sensual, but rather a recognition ‘that God is always greater than any image of himself and wishes to communicate himself as thus greater, in mystical experience.’<sup>118</sup> And so there may be an important experiential thread within mysticism – as, we might say, extraordinary experiences of music may be significant for some in the life of faith. But there is another

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<sup>114</sup> Turner, *Darkness of God*, p. 262.

<sup>115</sup> Sara Maitland, *A Book of Silence* (Granta, 2008), p. 78.

<sup>116</sup> Karl Rahner, *Visions and Prophecies* (Burns & Oates, 1963), p. 57.

<sup>117</sup> Rahner, *Visions and Prophecies*, p. 58.

<sup>118</sup> Rahner, *Visions and Prophecies*, p. 58.

thread too: one which calls to attention not just the limits of our understanding of the divine in a positivist frame, but the limits of our experience as a whole. This is an understanding which points towards ‘the God who transcends all images.’ And this understanding points to the possibility that some extraordinary experiences may be deceitful, idolatrous, or capable of absorbing participants in ways that do not ultimately point to their Creator.

Similar claims can be made about glossolalia. Smith asserts that the practice of glossolalia sits at the limits of language, so much so that it ‘constitutes a limit case for available modes of philosophical analysis’.<sup>119</sup> These practices, Smith suggests, lie at the very edge of ordinary human experience because they are anticipating that which humans are destined for but cannot see: ‘It is a language of an eschatological imagination that imagines the future otherwise – the foreign speech of a coming kingdom.’<sup>120</sup> While Smith is primarily concerned with the way in which glossolalia might provide ‘an opportunity for rethinking, expanding, and revising these philosophical methodologies and lexica of concepts’, the notion that, as a practice, glossolalia sits at the limits of ordinary language, is worth interrogating.<sup>121</sup> As Nicholas Harkness suggests, in reference to glossolalic practices in South Korea:

For the linguist, the speech is untranslatable because, like *lorem ipsum*, it is semantically empty, devoid of meaning, a mere graphic-phonetic container without content. It is nonsense. For an evangelist of glossolalia like Cho Yonggi, the opposite is true – if glossolalic speech is uninterpretable and untranslatable, it is because it contains an abundance of meaning, a surplus of signification that coincides with the speaker’s infilling of the Holy Spirit and exceeds normal human linguistic faculties.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Smith, *Thinking in Tongues*, p. 125.

<sup>120</sup> Smith, *Thinking in Tongues*, p. 150.

<sup>121</sup> Smith, *Thinking in Tongues*, p. 125.

<sup>122</sup> Nicholas Harkness, *Glossolalia and the Problem of Language* (University of Chicago Press, 2021), p. 2.

For Harkness, it is legitimate to ask whether glossolalia can be considered a language at all – after all, it ‘is treated as if it has no referential content’.<sup>123</sup> And this question calls us to observe the same tension between positive and negative knowledge of God, and between negation and abundance, as we saw above – tensions which bring us face to face with our limits.

Finally, writings on mysticism and glossolalia point towards the importance of discernment. As I noted earlier, there is a close integration between practices and experiences – while it is important to be realistic the complexity of this relationship, and realistic about the varying likelihood of these practices yielding the desired results for different people in different contexts. The other side of this observation, then, is that powerful experiences are not ends in themselves, but should be associated with particular practices, actions, and outcomes. As Turner and Rahner insist, there is good reason why classical mysticism exhibits a concern about imaginative visions. At play here is a practical realism that powerful experiences are not ‘the real thing’, and, while they may direct ‘the attention of man and his personal decision to the one thing necessary’, they may also become objects in their own right.<sup>124</sup> This is why there is such interest in that which results from mystical experiences. As Prevot suggests, when writing about the mystical theology of Adrienne von Speyr and Hans Urs von Balthasar, ‘their point is that a mysticism defined by loving intimacy with Christ ought to manifest itself in social action, which is the proper “fruit” of such union.’<sup>125</sup> McIntosh concurs, describing ‘the mystical life as essentially a corporate journey into the depths of meaning implicit in all the works of God’s outgoing love’; a journey that ‘leads the theological community beyond its concepts and into God’s

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<sup>123</sup> Bialecki, *Diagram for Fire*, p. 139.

<sup>124</sup> Rahner, *Visions and Prophecies*, p. 58.

<sup>125</sup> Andrew Prevot, *The Mysticism of Ordinary Life: Theology, Philosophy, and Feminism* (Oxford University Press, 2023), p. 88.

own supra-conceptual form of understanding, namely unitive *relationship with the other*.<sup>126</sup> Such concern not simply for experiences but *for their effects* is closely related to practices of discernment, to attempts to assess both the validity and efficacy of mystical experiences. As Cook suggests, ‘In discerning whether a voice is truly God’s, the concern is thus not merely with rational and critical evaluation of the words heard, but with evaluating the impact of the voice in human lives and in Church and society.’<sup>127</sup>

### **Experiencing Music in Worship**

From this account of mysticism and glossolalia, it is possible to construct an associated account of music in worship. Such an account will be grounded in the observation that extraordinary experiences may be contextualised in the regular, persistent worship of the church – and may indeed be inseparable from it – thus connecting the previous chapter to the present. But such an account will also stem from the observation that patient attendance to musical worship may rarely, or even never, yield particular forms of affective experience for some people, even while such experiences may be of great significance to others. Such an account will assume that music in worship is ‘inherently relational’ – that ‘the social relationships we embody through musical listening and participation [allow] us to (imaginatively) encounter others in emotionally profound ways.’<sup>128</sup> And such an account will also look to the possibility that music can, in some places and in some ways, be a form of resistance; that music should be tied to action; and that careful discernment should look not simply to the nature of the experience, but to the fruits of such experience.

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<sup>126</sup> McIntosh, *Mystical Theology*, p. 56, emphasis in original.

<sup>127</sup> Cook, *Hearing Voices*, p. 209.

<sup>128</sup> Myrick, *Music for Others*, pp. 48 and 61.

There are two sides to the account I will give here: one negative, and one positive. Negatively, I want to suggest that extraordinary experiences of music might not be doing useful work for the church, or not for everyone, all the time. They are not always indicative of special divine action and must be subject to discernment. Positively, I want to propose that the profoundly grainy, creaturely, variegated nature of musical experience might be meaningfully implicated in the act of worship. In sum, the account I will give here of music in worship as it is experienced will flatten the distinction between ordinary and extraordinary, pointing instead to the family resemblances between them, and pointing to three possibilities: that both may be involved in worship; both may do work in the body of Christ; and both may also be capable of harm.

First, not all extraordinary experiences of music are doing productive work in the body of Christ. From this reading of the mystical tradition and glossolalia, it is possible to derive both a general experiential scepticism and a practical concern. The general experiential scepticism comes from Turner's warning against the 'implied theological positivism' that often accompanies discussion of experience.<sup>129</sup> This is something I observed earlier in this chapter, where I noted a positivist account of powerful musical experiences – that music 'obliges us to rethink time' and allows us to '[feed] on reality' – and observed that it would be just as legitimate to suggest that the temporality of music might confront some people, in some contexts, with the limits of their experience.<sup>130</sup> But the broader point to be derived from this reading of mysticism and glossolalia is that powerful experiences are neither necessary, nor privileged, in the life of faith – so much so that some mystics have been more concerned with the 'critique' of such experiences over and above their 'cultivation'.<sup>131</sup> And this general experiential scepticism is closely related to a practical concern, which stems

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<sup>129</sup> Turner, *Darkness of God*, p. 262.

<sup>130</sup> Williams, 'Keeping Time', p. 248.

<sup>131</sup> Turner, *Darkness of God*, pp. 2 and 4.

from Rahner's observation about 'the God who transcends all images.'<sup>132</sup> Powerful musical experiences may be a gift, but they may also be capable of serving as a distraction (in all the complexity of the term) from their Creator.<sup>133</sup>

Neither this general experiential scepticism nor practical concern means we should seek to underplay the significance of affective experience, nor call for the banishing of all affectively powerful music in case it leads to idolatry. Any general attempt to undermine affective experience can easily tend to dualism, or indeed to a rejection of any connection between 'concrete experiences that take place in bodies and in time' and pneumatology.<sup>134</sup> The high affective potential of music – the reality that it seems to afford, or make space for, experiences of particular affective significance – is, of course, part of its gift, and part of the generous abundance of creation. But, from writings on mysticism and glossolalia, I do want to call into question the perceived close connection between music, affectivity, and right worship, as indeed between music, affectivity, and particular forms of divine action; I want to raise concerns about the idea, as Bialecki characterises the discourse of music in worship in Vineyard contexts, that sometimes 'the Holy Spirit will come', and at other times worship is simply 'a pleasant musical exercise'.<sup>135</sup> This discourse is one part of a line of thinking whereby 'certain behaviors are considered essential to bringing about the presence of the Holy Spirit' – behaviours such as 'a particular mode of worshiping practice, such as worship led by a worship group that presents the "conditions" for the descent of the Spirit', but also 'the purity of the lives of the faithful who are gathered', or 'assent to a particular set of doctrines'.<sup>136</sup> Without accepting Brown's general theory of musical experience, I want to suggest that there is good reason to accept a distinction between

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<sup>132</sup> Rahner, *Visions and Prophecies*, p. 58.

<sup>133</sup> See pp. 226-27.

<sup>134</sup> Zahl, *Christian Experience*, p. 232.

<sup>135</sup> Bialecki, *Diagram for Fire*, pp. 37 and 31.

<sup>136</sup> Tom Greggs, *Dogmatic Ecclesiology* (Baker Academic, 2019), pp. 6-7.

powerful ‘aesthetic experience’ and ‘engagement with the divine’, as indeed between extraordinary experiences and worship.<sup>137</sup> Such a distinction both reinforces the created integrity of music and expresses the same practical realism discussed in the previous section – that powerful experiences of music may be, in some instances, a distraction, and, in others, capable of genuine harm.

But more than that, such a distinction – in combination with the general experiential scepticism and practical concern – allows us to understand and appreciate extraordinary experiences of music properly. These experiences are gifts given to some, that, if used appropriately, may build up the body of Christ, but they are not of first importance in the act of worship, nor the most desirable aspiration. This is consistent with the Augustinian account of musical idolatry presented in the introduction to this chapter, with the recognition that, in the face of the high affective potential of music, it is possible to worship that which is created, and not its Creator. And it is also consistent with this reflection from Rahner which, although about prophecy, has striking evocations with the argument being made here:

Prophecy, according to 1 Corinthians 13:9, is a mere fragment in comparison to charity, which alone has the strength to embrace even the perpetual darkness of the future, which no prophecy could so illumine as to banish all dangers from it.<sup>138</sup>

More positively, however, I want to suggest that ordinary, grainy experiences of music in worship – experiences of contentment, sorrow, or annoyance – may also be caught up in the act of worship and do meaningful work in the body of Christ. Experiencing frustration when the pianist is inconsistent but singing anyway; experiencing sadness as a hymn brings up painful memories of a loved one who has recently died; experiencing ambivalence

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<sup>137</sup> Brown and Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, p. 35.

<sup>138</sup> Rahner, *Visions and Prophecies*, p. 106.

during sung worship, year after year, but still persistently turning up, might all, in some cases, build up the body of Christ and facilitate its worship. This is not to suggest that the nature of affective experiences of music is entirely arbitrary, or that there are no patterns or norms of affective experience in the life of faith. As Zahl notes, ‘the Christian gospel is understood to be genuinely transformative for human beings who find themselves trapped in a web of painful and disordered affects.’<sup>139</sup> It is not to cast out the need for careful discernment about musical practices under the claim that all affective experiences might be doing sanctifying work. If a certain musical expression affords, or makes space for, valuable reflection, for some people, in some contexts, that can be received straightforwardly as a gift; conversely, if a choir director rehearses a choir carelessly, and they perform erratically, that can be straightforwardly acknowledged as a problem. While these experiences – unlike the extraordinary ones – might be less prone to idolatry, they may build resentment and apathy in the worshipping community.

But it is to acknowledge, both negatively and positively, that there are many affective responses to music – from absorption to frustration – at play when congregations sing together. It is to acknowledge that none of these experiences are sufficient, in and of themselves, to an event being an act of worship (and nor are they evidence of special divine action). And, without wanting to valorise forms of harm, many mundane – and even negative – affective responses may not be a barrier to an event being an act of worship, either. From the mystical tradition, it is possible to argue that strategies of discernment should not look first to affective experience, but, properly, to the effects of such experience; that, with Hopps, ‘the criteria of evaluation should be at the other end of the interpretive process, *after* rather than before the experience, in light of its fruits.’<sup>140</sup> This is because absorptive experiences of music are not ends in themselves. They may – if received properly

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<sup>139</sup> Zahl, *Christian Experience*, p. 176.

<sup>140</sup> Hopps, ‘Negative Capability’, p. 83, emphasis in original.

– be a building block in human growth and formation, just as years of handing out hymn books or singing in a genre that provokes little affective response may be a building block in human growth and formation; but powerful absorptive experiences can also draw individuals inward, or become the object in themselves – and thus not be formative at all. There may be productive work in learning how to sing next to someone who is out of tune, just as extraordinary experiences may not help the community of faith to grow in Christlikeness. This is consistent with a dual understanding of worship: as both liturgical participation, and as the shape and character of the life of faith.

And ultimately, such an understanding of music in worship allows us to flatten the distinction between ordinary and extraordinary experiences that I have maintained so far in this chapter. Clearly, there are variegations between people’s experiences of music in worship and their understanding of such experiences – it would be a negation of my conversations at St Michael and All Angels, St Nicholas’, and Christchurch, as well as the first half of this chapter, to suggest that all experiences of music are qualitatively the same. However, these experiences need not be viewed hierarchically, as if extraordinary experiences are the pinnacle of ordinary ones. Both types of experience, on this reading, may be meaningfully implicated in (or indeed a barrier to) worship. Both are intricately linked to one another – as Luhmann suggests, it is through repeated, persistent, and learned practices of prayer that the congregants she is studying experience ‘sensory perceptions of something not materially present.’<sup>141</sup> Experiences that seem at odds with the material world are thereby inseparable from material practices and realities. And both have shared effects: both may, in some cases and in some ways, be implicated in worship and formation.

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<sup>141</sup> Luhmann, *When God Talks Back*, p. 153.

In fact, as Lash shows, distinctions between ordinary and extraordinary experiences are often discursively constructed and maintained. As he suggests:

In most contexts in which we talk about our “experience,” we are talking about whatever it is that we have undergone and done, and of the ways in which we have *learned* something from what we did and underwent: *experientia docet*.<sup>142</sup>

He continues:

For some reason, we usually talk quite differently about *religious* experience. In this area (not uniquely, perhaps, but characteristically) the talk tends to be of experiences, in the plural; of brief and isolated moments of heightened awareness or profound emotion, moments which occur unexpectedly, interrupting the ordinary conduct of our affairs and having little directly to do with it.<sup>143</sup>

In talking in this way, we are creating an account of extraordinary experiences, or in his case, religious experiences, ‘which is quite at variance with our healthier and more sensible habits of speech in regard to other aspects of our existence.’<sup>144</sup> His concern here lies in distinctions between ‘firsthand’ and ‘secondhand’ religion; between ‘pattern setters’ and ‘followers’; between ‘personal’ and ‘ritual’.<sup>145</sup> These distinctions, so Lash suggests, do not stand up to scrutiny, and can obscure the range of ways in which the Christian life is experienced.

But, more constructively, Lash’s account shows us that it is viable to start speaking differently. As Lash observes, it is possible to imagine an alternative context, one ‘in which relation to God is considered in terms of the ways in which our human experience – construed as whatever it is that human beings achieve and suffer, feel, think, enact, and

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<sup>142</sup> Lash, *Easter in Ordinary*, p. 91, emphasis in original.

<sup>143</sup> Lash, *Easter in Ordinary*, p. 91, emphasis in original.

<sup>144</sup> Lash, *Easter in Ordinary*, p. 92, emphasis in original.

<sup>145</sup> Lash, *Easter in Ordinary*, pp. 46 and 54.

undergo – is shaped, disciplined, informed, and transformed by particular traditions of practice and symbolism.<sup>146</sup> This is a discursive context, he suggests, which recognises that ‘it is not the case that all experience of God is necessarily religious in form or content’, and also ‘that not everything which it would be appropriate to characterize as “religious” experience would thereby necessarily constitute experience of God.’<sup>147</sup> For our purposes, this is a discursive context which suggests that there is not a category divide between feeling lost in, or transported by, a hymn, and feeling frustrated by a pianist who struggles to keep time. There is not a category divide between the experience of utter joy and pleasure during an organ voluntary, and the panic of a lead singer as they struggle through a song announced by the pastor which is different from the one they had planned. There is not a category divide between standing awkwardly, having decided on doctrinal ground not to sing a verse of a hymn, and singing that verse with reckless abandon. Rather than one being considered the high-point of the other, these can all be considered as forming a family of experiences of music in worship, each of which is ‘shaped, disciplined, informed, and transformed’ by particular ecclesial practices, and by individual human experiences. And it might not be as straightforward as we expect to identify which experiences are “religious” and which are not.

Ultimately, such an account also makes good pneumatological sense. As Coakley observes on the practices of glossolalia, it is perfectly possible to hold together both a theology of the Holy Spirit as ‘*eternally* active, ceaselessly “indwelling” the “saints”, to use Pauline language’ with ‘*particular* goadings of the Spirit, too, the divine freedom to direct and prompt in special or dramatic ways, as is more characteristic of the Lukan theology of the New Testament.’<sup>148</sup> This is not to map powerful and mundane experiences of music

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<sup>146</sup> Lash, *Easter in Ordinary*, p. 105.

<sup>147</sup> Lash, *Easter in Ordinary*, p. 289.

<sup>148</sup> Sarah Coakley, ‘Charismatic Experience: Praying “In the Spirit”’, in *We Believe in the Holy Spirit: A Report*, ed. by Church of England (Church House Publishing, 1991), pp. 17-36 (p. 35), emphasis in original.

uncritically onto special and general divine action – which would of course undermine my argument here. But it is to say that the sustaining work of the Spirit in and through the ordinary and variegated experiences of life, and the salvific work of the Spirit breaking in upon this life, are not oppositional. It is consistent to suggest that ‘The Spirit not only blows like a hurricane but like a *prevailing* wind.’<sup>149</sup> And rather than focusing on the ordinary at the expense of the extraordinary, or the extraordinary at the expense of the ordinary, or indeed trying to map certain musical experiences onto certain acts of the Spirit, it makes good pneumatological sense instead to focus on where music in worship is ordered towards Christlikeness; and indeed on what sort of life the Spirit is forming by a range of musical means.

In the following chapter I will explore further the nature of formation. But for now, I want to suggest that there is a created integrity which makes the gift of music powerful in the many ways in which humans receive it – some of which feel entirely consonant with everyday experience, and some of which do not. And, I want to suggest, too, that all manner of experiences of music may help an individual to participate ‘within God’s gracious moving towards another’, just as all manner of experiences of music may do the opposite.<sup>150</sup> My intention is not to negate the qualitative distinctions between different experiences of music, but rather to suggest that we can look more closely, and talk more flatly, about the range of places where the Spirit may be at work in and through music in worship.

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<sup>149</sup> Eugene F. Rogers, *After the Spirit: A Constructive Pneumatology from Resources Outside the Modern West* (SCM Press, 2006), p. 198, emphasis in original.

<sup>150</sup> Greggs, *Dogmatic Ecclesiology*, p. 307.

## Conclusion

At the start of this chapter, I presented two distinct accounts of musical affectivity: those of Sarah and Pauline. Sarah's account maps music, emotion, and worship onto one another; Pauline, by contrast, suggests that hymns do not exist simply for our benefit; they do not exist to make us feel a certain way. In a sense, both claims capture something of the account of musical experience I have developed here. The high affective potential of music is a gift. It is part of the excess of creation and the generosity of God. Its role in the corporate worship of the church cannot be negated nor ignored. And yet, worship does not depend on particular forms of affect. The high affective potential of music is a far more variegated and nuanced gift than is often recognised. There is no easy correlation between particular affective experiences and the worship of the church.

I have not, of course, answered each of the questions around music, affectivity, and worship posed by my conversations at St Michael and All Angels, St Nicholas', and Christchurch. There is much that could still be said about the gift of musical experience, and the nature of its use in the worship of the church. Nonetheless, I have constructed here a theological account of music as experienced. I have started from the premise that musical experience is temporal, dialogic, and excessive; that, consistent with music being an assemblage, musical experience is consonant with other forms of creaturely experience. I have suggested that musical affectivity can be ordinary and extraordinary, positive and negative, mixed and ambivalent, and that it is always variegated. I have suggested, in dialogue with writings on mysticism and glossolalia, that extraordinary experiences of music are not the high-point of more ordinary experiences – they are one part of a whole family of experiences associated with music. I have suggested that even the most mundane experiences may be doing important work in the worship of the church. And I have suggested, from here, that there

is no straightforward relationship between worship and particular forms of affective response.

This chapter may seem to have undermined, or underplayed, the powerful and felt experience of music in worship. In response to the language of transport and contemplation, I have discussed instead the mundane and creaturely. But I want to contest that I have not, in fact, undermined the powerful and felt experience of music in worship (for some people, some of the time). While I have expressed a critique of positive experientialist tendencies when it comes to the analysis of music in worship, I have nonetheless maintained throughout that the high affective potential of music is a generous gift given in creation. And, since the affectivity of music is a generous gift, it is therefore important to examine it thoroughly: not to give an account of idealised experiences, or an account based on the experience of some, but rather to give an account of music as we receive it, in ways that are cognisant with theological reflection on other practices. In so doing, I have demonstrated that a huge diversity of affective experiences of music may indeed build up, and facilitate the worship of, the body of Christ.

## 7 – Music, Meaning, and Knowledge

One can make notes say what one will, grant them any power of analogy: they do not protest.<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

Music in worship is something that people do and something that people feel: a risky, fallible, finite gift, and a gift with high affective potential. Music in worship is both a given and a response, an assemblage of created things shaped in service of the church and in praise of its Creator. Music in worship is both excessive and profoundly variegated: powerful and remarkable, ordinary and mundane, and implicated in the building up of the body of Christ. Each of these claims I have made so far. But implicit throughout the previous chapters is a further claim about music in worship: that music *means* something, and, specifically, that music in worship might *mean* something about God.

By the idea that music *means* something, I am suggesting that music is interwoven with stories, with acts of sense-making, with claims made about ourselves, others, the world, and God.<sup>2</sup> Music in worship is imbued with memories of people and places: Henry's wife coming down the aisle to 'Here comes the bride' rather than 'Holy, Holy, Holy!'; Roger's uncle subtly altering the words of 'When I survey the wondrous cross' to emphasise a call to personal commitment to Christ; and Heather's recollection of singing hymns while driving with her parents.<sup>3</sup> Music in worship also helps its participants to embody theological narratives and claims: Gary's recognition that 'some hymns are sad' and this is

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<sup>1</sup> Jankélévitch, *Music and the Ineffable*, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> While I will address semiotic approaches to music in the following section, this is not the primary method associated with "meaning" in this chapter.

<sup>3</sup> Henry, Focus Group 5; Roger, Focus Group 1; Heather, Focus Group 5.

in keeping with Christ as ‘a man of sorrows’; Rebecca’s love of ‘My Jesus, my Saviour (Shout to the Lord)’, and the way it ‘tells me that Jesus is so powerful and every time I need him he’s going to be there’; Robert’s suggestion that hymn-singing is an act of ‘keeping in contact with home.’<sup>4</sup> And music in worship is associated with meaning-filled experiences of God: Sue’s experience of ‘peace’ and ‘presence’ through the provision of ‘How sweet the name of Jesus sounds’ at a time of distress.<sup>5</sup> Music embodies, takes on, and constructs meaning – about the world, about people and places, and, for some people, some of the time, about God.

Closely linked to – although not identical with – this claim is the idea that music has epistemological significance: that music teaches, informs, reveals; that music might not only *mean* something, but *tell* us something. This is a knottier proposal, particularly in relation not just to knowledge of the world, but to knowledge of God. It may not seem controversial for Brown to suggest: ‘there seems [...] no good grounds for excluding the possibility of religious experience through music as yet another way in which religious faith might be informed and developed.’<sup>6</sup> And indeed the first four types in his typology of experiences – ‘the strong sense of order’, ‘a feeling of transcendent otherness’, a recognition of ‘the divine as immanent’, and ‘incorporation’ – do not immediately seem surprising, even if they may be contested.<sup>7</sup> But ‘music that appears to generate specific perceptions, for instance on the question of suffering’ alludes to a stronger possibility: that music might, at least in some contexts, be an epistemological partner for theological investigation and in the life of faith.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Gary, Focus Group 4; Rebecca, Focus Group 3; Robert, Focus Group 5.

<sup>5</sup> Sue, Focus Group 3.

<sup>6</sup> Brown and Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, p. 39.

<sup>7</sup> Brown and Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, p. 82.

<sup>8</sup> Brown and Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, pp. 82-83.

Yet, although one proposal is knottier than the other, it makes good theological sense to explore them together. It makes theological sense because those involved in music in worship routinely cross the barrier between meaning and knowledge: Sue's account of divine presence and peace could just as easily be explored in a discussion of revelation as of meaning-filled experience – the designation here is largely arbitrary. Similarly, if hymns can help congregants learn and tell theological narratives, it is at least worth exploring the possibility that they might be involved, too, in the construction of such narratives. And it makes sense because, if knowledge of God is closely tied to formation – to inhabiting the love of God for humanity and indeed all of creation – then the stories people tell, the hymns they sing, and their knowledge of God are inextricable; such bifurcation of meaning and knowledge cannot hold. This final claim will be developed later in this chapter, where I discuss more closely of and in what the knowledge of God consists. As such, the conclusions of this chapter should at least justify its premises.

Before I reach this conclusion, however, I will first explore some claims commonly made about music (in worship), meaning, and knowledge. I will start by briefly addressing the idea that 'people learn theology, not from Bible readings, creeds, pulpit utterances or liturgical formulae, but from hymns they sing', with reference to literature on affect theory, liturgical theology, and dual coding theory.<sup>9</sup> I will suggest that, while important, this line of thinking fails to get to the heart of meaning and knowledge *in relation to music*. After all, 'Philosophers, artists, and theorists from the time of Pythagoras have wrestled with the concept of musical meaning, always to come up short.'<sup>10</sup> Musical meaning is far more intractable and volatile than such accounts recognise. I will then move to address the ways

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<sup>9</sup> Michael Sadgrove, 'Foreword: Music, Theology and Enchantment', in *Creative Chords*, ed. by Jeff Astley, Timothy Hone and Mark Savage, pp. xi-xix (p. xiii).

<sup>10</sup> Byron Almén and Edward Pearsall, 'The Divining Rod: On Imagination, Interpretation, and Analysis', in *Approaches to Meaning in Music*, ed. by Byron Almén and Edward Pearsall (Indiana University Press, 2006), pp. 1-10 (p. 1).

in which – at least theologically speaking – music, meaning, and knowledge are most routinely addressed: through analogy and metaphor. With reference primarily to Begbie I will suggest that analogies and metaphors drawn from musical analysis can lead to fresh understanding and appreciation of certain kinds of doctrinal claims, but note that this is only a partial (and in some sense quite unusual) answer to the question of how participating in music-making might teach us of God.

From here I will propose an alternative approach to the same question, one which takes as its basis the claim that ‘the heart of the Christian faith is not something simply conceptual: it is a fact, or even better, an action – the action, the movement, of the Son sent into the world for our sakes to draw us back to the Father.’<sup>11</sup> This, in combination with theological reflections on liturgy, leads us to a simultaneously more modest and yet expansive approach to music in worship, and what it means, through it, to know anything of God.

### **Memory, Enactment, and Meaning**

Perhaps the most frequently noted idea around music in worship, meaning, and knowledge is that hymn-singing has a didactic function: that ‘the lyrics of hymns and songs tend to lodge far more securely in the memory than texts that are merely spoken.’<sup>12</sup> Singing hymns or songs, in other words, is more productive as a way of learning, and indeed embodying, biblical narratives and theological ideas than the spoken and written word alone. While this idea does not get to the heart of questions of the questions of this chapter, there are nevertheless important insights to be examined here and as such I will address it first.

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<sup>11</sup> Andrew Louth, *Discerning the Mystery: An Essay on the Nature of Theology* (Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 89.

<sup>12</sup> Sadgrove, ‘Foreword’, in *Creative Chords*, ed. by Jeff Astley, Timothy Hone and Mark Savage, p. xiii.

The claim that sung texts are more memorable than spoken or written ones should not be an immediate surprise. Recent work on dual coding theory suggests that ‘most literal text wording is rapidly forgotten, and most of what we remember is in the form of our internal verbal and nonverbal evocations.’<sup>13</sup> Mark Sadoski, for example, suggests that we can generally expect texts associated with images to be more memorable than texts without.<sup>14</sup> We can also expect concrete texts – those texts which relate to recognisable objects and lived experiences – to be more memorable than abstract ones, which are harder to relate to other aspects of ordinary life.<sup>15</sup> In short, either receiving ideas in multiple media, or being able to relate ideas across media, increases the likelihood of their being remembered. It follows that hymns and songs, combining music and text, are a particularly good way of learning and remembering narratives and ideas, particularly if they are embodied in the act of singing. There is nothing specific to music here: it is simply another medium with which ideas can be associated. But this research still confirms the basic observation that hymns and songs are more memorable than texts alone.

There are some significant limitations to this account, however. For a start, it is much harder to separate out music and text than we commonly suppose – as I will expand later in this chapter. And, more significantly, memory is not the same as knowledge. It is perfectly possible to recall a text or image without attaching any particular understanding, significance, or indeed belief, to it, and it is possible to recall texts or images without agreeing with their theological claims – particularly when it comes to congregational music-making. As Wolterstorff observes, ‘The words of the hymns are so diverse in theology, imagery, sentiment, and the like that almost all who participate faithfully over a length of time find themselves confronted, on occasion, with thoughts and images that

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<sup>13</sup> Mark Sadoski, *Imagery and Text: A Dual Coding Theory of Reading and Writing*, 2nd edn. (Routledge, 2013), p. 68.

<sup>14</sup> Sadoski, *Imagery and Text*, p. 73.

<sup>15</sup> Sadoski, *Imagery and Text*, p. 73.

they find unacceptable.<sup>16</sup> Hymns and songs may be memorable, but that does not tell us a great deal about meaning or knowledge.

This account can be taken further, though, via studies of ritual and embodiment. Wolterstorff, for example, acknowledges that ‘we do not fully grasp the meanings and references of the words we are voicing, the significance of the images and metaphors, the meaning of the gestures we make’ – in other words, ‘we do not fully understand the acts of worship we are performing.’<sup>17</sup> However, he suggests that, over time, ‘we have to live with the words we speak, with the psalms and hymns we sing, with the gestures we make.’<sup>18</sup> And ‘By living them we eventually grow into them.’<sup>19</sup> Through singing hymns, Wolterstorff suggests, congregants may become able to inhabit their claims: memorability may be a necessary component, but it is only one part of a broader pattern of learning and formation. Zahl’s work is also instructive here, moving away from memorability towards salience. He notes that ‘an idea communicated through a hymn might be more compelling than the same idea communicated in an academic paper’.<sup>20</sup> This is because we cannot ‘avoid being shaped implicitly by our experiences as embodied human beings with emotions, brains, and histories, who are always embedded in social and material environments.’<sup>21</sup> Ideas are not simply received; they are experienced. And the high affective potential of music may be one mechanism among many in the shaping of the experience of ideas: in the shaping of whether such ideas seem attractive; in the shaping of whether or not we hold onto them, and in the shaping of whether or not we ascribe them value. For

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<sup>16</sup> Wolterstorff, *Acting Liturgically*, p. 109.

<sup>17</sup> Wolterstorff, *Acting Liturgically*, p. 54.

<sup>18</sup> Wolterstorff, *Acting Liturgically*, p. 54.

<sup>19</sup> Wolterstorff, *Acting Liturgically*, p. 54.

<sup>20</sup> Zahl, *Christian Experience*, p. 14.

<sup>21</sup> Zahl, *Christian Experience*, p. 15.

both Wolterstorff and Zahl, music is not simply a memory aid, but rather a formative force in the creation of theological imaginations.

There is much to recommend these ideas, and indeed the work on formation later in this chapter will draw upon them substantially. However, they are asking a slightly different sort of question from the one I am concerned with in this chapter. For Wolterstorff, singing can help its participants to understand the meanings of words and gestures, and embody and ascribe significance to images and metaphors; for Zahl, music is an affectively powerful bearer of ideas. For both, music is a means of conveying, or allowing congregants to inhabit, a text, a thought, or a claim. And, indeed, it is crucial to pay close attention to the texts of hymns and songs and the imagery they contain.<sup>22</sup> But while texts and ideas are certainly part of musical meaning, I am interested in whether music might convey meaning in more pluriform ways: might music, for example, significantly supplement, alter, extend, or critique the meaning we find in non-musical texts? Can music convey meaning that is in some way different from the meaning associated with texts and images?

In fact, once we move away from vocal or texted music – and beyond the claim that music is a carrier of words – the question of musical meaning becomes incredibly fraught. This observation is not to advocate for a distinction between music with and without words: as I noted in chapter 3, theories of absolute music do not stand up to scrutiny, and discourse is always a constituent part of the musical assemblage.<sup>23</sup> As Kendall Walton notes, ‘Music stands ready to take on an explicit representational function at the slightest provocation’, and even the name of an otherwise seemingly textless pieces of music produces

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<sup>22</sup> See Daniel Johnson, “‘Wash the Ethiop White’: Whiteness and Salvation in the Hymns of Charles Wesley”, in *Hymns and Constructions of Race*, ed. by Erin Johnson-Williams and Philip Burnett, pp. 73-90 (p. 75).

<sup>23</sup> See pp. 109-10.

associations.<sup>24</sup> Conversely, where music has a set text, it would be a mistake to assume that every constituent part of the musical assemblage submits to the text's authority; this would make it very difficult to account for musical irony. I am interested here, then, in what musical meaning – as an assemblage of sounds, texts, ideas, cultural references, histories – *is*. I want to suggest that there are a huge number of questions to be asked about the ways in which music communicates meaning, beyond being a carrier of text or idea.

## Theories of Musical Meaning

As Byron Almén and Edward Pearsall ask:

Is meaning entirely mediated by culture, or are there identifiable universals? Is meaning communicable from one person to another, given the vagaries of subjective response? For music to communicate, must it also be beautiful? Does music convey anything at all beyond its play of sounds? What, indeed, does “meaning” mean? What methodological tools are appropriate? Is music like a language, a natural object, an article of faith? Or is meaning more like a subjective confession, an idiosyncratic recognition of meaningful patterns? Is there any common ground at all on which to lay a foundation for a theory of meaning?<sup>25</sup>

While at least some of these questions might seem esoteric, they are implicated in many of the day-to-day ways in which we talk about music. To use a classic example, what does it mean to say that some music is sad?<sup>26</sup> Is it sad because we associate it with sad events? Is it sad because we associate certain musical patterns with the idea of sadness? Is it sad for everyone? Is it sad for everyone in the same way? And if not, are some people right about

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<sup>24</sup> Kendall Walton, ‘Listening with Imagination: Is Music Representational?’, in *Music and Meaning*, ed. by Jenefer Robinson (Cornell University Press, 2018), pp. 57-82 (p. 58).

<sup>25</sup> Almén and Pearsall, ‘The Divining Rod’, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> While this might seem a banal example, ‘It has become more or less tradition to approach [the question of how instrumental music expresses emotion] through attempting to make sense of the claim “the music is sad”.’ Derek Matravers, ‘Expression in Music’, in *Philosophers on Music: Experience, Meaning, and Work*, ed. by Kathleen Stock (Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 93-110 (p. 95).

its sadness, and others wrong? Is it sad because we recognise sadness in it? Is it sad because it makes us feel sad? How does music make us feel sad?

There are a number of grand theories of musical meaning which respond to these questions. It is worth noting that research in this area is predominantly concerned with western tonal music, and it often operates under the assumption that we can locate, isolate, and examine absolute, or “pure”, music. Even more concerningly, it sometimes assumes that studying “pure” music is the *only* way to approach questions of meaning – once we include word and image, we are no longer dealing with music proper. This may be an antidote to the theory of music as a simple carrier of text and idea, but will inevitably need to be problematised in due course. Nevertheless, this research raises interesting questions about the mechanisms of musical meaning and – more importantly – about the complexities of any attempt to pin it down.

Take for example, Deryck Cooke’s *The Language of Music*. Written in the late 1950s, *The Language of Music* contends that western tonal music can be understood and interrogated as a language, suggesting: ‘If only we could come to understand the language better, we might find ourselves agreeing more and more as to what any given piece expresses.’<sup>27</sup> In a profoundly positivist move, Cooke suggests that, through study of internal musical properties – ‘movement’, ‘phrasing’, and, most importantly of all, ‘harmony’ – we can come to understand the internal grammar of musical meaning.<sup>28</sup> Western tonal music, here, is derived from harmonic patterns found in nature, and its meaning inherent and objective. Note that experience and performance are not necessary to such an account.

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<sup>27</sup> Deryck Cooke, *The Language of Music* (Oxford University Press, 1959), p. xi.

<sup>28</sup> Cooke, *Language of Music*, pp. 37 and 38, emphasis removed from original.

Written only a few years earlier, Leonard Meyer's *Emotion and Meaning in Music* offers a different view. Meyer rejects – among other things – ‘the error of universalism’, contending instead that ‘the particular organization developed in Western music is not universal, natural, or God-given.’<sup>29</sup> And, for Meyer, ‘Meaning is not a property of things’, but is developed in cultural context.<sup>30</sup> Meyer is concerned here with the distinction between ‘absolute meanings and referential meanings’ – between those meanings which lie ‘exclusively within the context of the work itself’ and those meanings which ‘refer to the extramusical world of concepts’.<sup>31</sup> This longstanding debate between absolutists and referentialists has ‘centered around the question of whether music can designate, depict, or otherwise communicate referential concepts’: can music, in other words, communicate ideas, or does it simply become associated with them?<sup>32</sup> And while Meyer suggests that the two views are not, in fact, mutually exclusive, he is nonetheless more concerned with the former than with the latter, with the relationship between ‘a series of musical stimuli and an individual who understands the style of the work being heard’ – an individual who understands the formal patterns at play, appreciates the organisation of successive notes and motifs, and recognises deviations from them.<sup>33</sup> Where music takes on other forms of meaning outside its formal organisation, this is through connotation between the musical organisation and ordinary life. As he summarises, ‘Music presents a generic event, a “connotative complex,” which then becomes particularized in the experience of the individual listener.’<sup>34</sup> There is absolute meaning, for Meyer, and it lies in the formal aspects of a piece of music – but music can nonetheless connote other, subjective, meanings besides.

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<sup>29</sup> Leonard B. Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (University of Chicago Press, 1956), pp. 5 and 6.

<sup>30</sup> Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning*, p. 34.

<sup>31</sup> Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning*, pp. 2 and 1.

<sup>32</sup> Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning*, p. 32.

<sup>33</sup> Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning*, p. 250.

<sup>34</sup> Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning*, p. 265.

More recently, Davies' *Musical Meaning and Expression* has offered a different sort of formalist account, looking more specifically at how music conveys emotion. Davies explores and ultimately rejects analogies between music and language, music and pictures, and music and symbols: music is not 'capable of generating meaningful utterances', 'music is not a depictive artform', and 'we do not understand or appreciate the music merely as a vehicle for reference'.<sup>35</sup> Davies is not suggesting that such analogies between music and language are useless: some music is 'dramatic, vocal, or programmatic' – clearly engaged with texts and narratives, say – and other music, perhaps through audible imitation of a bird singing or a babbling brook, depicts.<sup>36</sup> It is simply to say that music's capacities in both regards 'are severely limited', and that such explanations do not account for music which is not explicitly engaged with texts or imitation.<sup>37</sup> He, too, seeks to locate 'the significance of music as internal to the work, as residing in intrinsic properties'.<sup>38</sup> Looking at expressiveness rather than representation – since music's capacity for representation is limited – Davies suggests that 'we experience the dynamic character of music as like the actions of a person; movement is heard in music, and that movement is heard as purposive and as rationally organized'.<sup>39</sup> This is one of a few theories which assume that we are 'imagining the music, or imaginatively conceptualizing the music, in such a way as to provide a reason to apply an emotion term to it'.<sup>40</sup> In such theories, the composer is able to convey and communicate emotion, and those emotions are shared not just between the composer and listener, but also between listeners, even though 'the emotions expressed are not felt by the music'.<sup>41</sup> For Davies, just as two readers might empathise with one literary

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<sup>35</sup> Stephen Davies, *Musical Meaning and Expression* (Cornell University Press, 2019), pp. 48, 52 and 165.

<sup>36</sup> Davies, *Musical Meaning and Expression*, pp. 49 and 121.

<sup>37</sup> Davies, *Musical Meaning and Expression*, p. 121.

<sup>38</sup> Davies, *Musical Meaning and Expression*, p. 201.

<sup>39</sup> Davies, *Musical Meaning and Expression*, p. 277.

<sup>40</sup> Matravers, 'Expression in Music', p. 100.

<sup>41</sup> Davies, *Musical Meaning and Expression*, p. 277.

figure, two listeners can empathise with one musical character, bringing to bear their own personal experiences towards a (broadly) shared emotional response.

To return to the question of how we can describe music as sad, each would propose a different answer. Cooke might point to the minor third, which he suggests ‘has a “depressed” sound’; since ‘it does not form part of the basic harmonic series’, it has the quality of an aberration.<sup>42</sup> Perhaps through consistent use of this interval, music can communicate sadness. Meyer might point to the way in which ‘music is able to evoke tendencies’ through repeated cultural patterns – causing us to associate some musical patterns with sadness.<sup>43</sup> For Davies, the composer’s control of movement enables us to empathise with an imagined, and sad, musical character. Now, obviously, the ontological premise of these accounts – that we can strip back all text and other phenomena to study “the music itself” – has been thoroughly rejected in this thesis (with the premises of Cooke’s universalist account being critiqued especially substantially). This causes various problems for each of these three answers. But I have nonetheless included them here because, together, they demonstrate the complexity of talking about music and meaning. Does music connote, or can it only truly express emotion? Is music like language? What is the role of experience in the circulation of meaning? What, if anything, might be imagined when listening to music? What is the relationship between such imaginings and meaning? *How* can some music be sad? In a sense, this complexity should not be surprising: as Kramer observes, ‘the problem of speaking of music is the same problem as the problem of speaking of anything.’<sup>44</sup> The limits of our capacity to effectively verbalise our experience, and the meaning we ascribe to it, are not unique to music.

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<sup>42</sup> Cooke, *Language of Music*, p. 57.

<sup>43</sup> Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning*, p. 25.

<sup>44</sup> Kramer, *Thought of Music*, p. 24.

Common to each of these accounts is also an assumption that there are correct meanings, and correct ways to listen for them. For Cooke, reaching this correct meaning comes through close consideration of musical grammar; for Meyer, it is through imbibing a particular cultural context; for Davies, it is through attending ‘to the music in the appropriate way’ – namely, through ‘close and repeated attention’, and, presumably a particular sort of musical education.<sup>45</sup> But there are other types of musical sadness, too: music listened to in the car on the way to a funeral, say; music once positively associated with a person but now complicated by relationship breakdown; music with seemingly inexplicable sad evocations that others do not share. It is not that Cooke, Meyer, or Davies explicitly deny these sorts of meanings. It is rather that they are secondary, not worthy of close investigation – whereas those meanings that stem from correct listening are. They may be implicit in Meyer’s ‘generic event’, or in the personal experiences brought to bear in empathising with Davies’ character, but they are not worthy of study on their own. As Boyce-Tillman asserts, ‘intrinsic meaning – that is, expressive meaning drawn from the listener’s own previous experiences – is an immensely important component [...] that has often been ridiculed or ignored by classical musical theorists.’<sup>46</sup> And, in this way, analysis is not simply a tool, but a normative force in the construction of meaning. As Cook observes, much analysis of Beethoven’s music – analysis which has had a formative impact on the discipline of musicology since – ‘aimed less to reflect a prevailing way of hearing Beethoven’s music than to change how it was heard’.<sup>47</sup> Nattiez concurs: ‘Analysis is no pure reflection of the object’.<sup>48</sup> And therefore, even where there are insights from these formalist accounts – particularly those of Meyer and Davies – as explanations they are neither

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<sup>45</sup> Davies, *Musical Meaning and Expression*, pp. 321 and 379.

<sup>46</sup> Boyce-Tillman, *Women in Christian Music*, p. 44.

<sup>47</sup> Nicholas Cook, ‘Uncanny Moments: Juxtaposition and the Collage Principle in Music’, in *Approaches to Meaning in Music*, ed. by Byron Almén and Edward Pearsall, pp. 107-34 (p. 110).

<sup>48</sup> Nattiez, *Music and Discourse*, p. 134.

objective nor complete; they are rather a constituent part of the generation of musical meaning, within this particular repertoire.

There is, however, research on music and meaning that emphasises, instead, partiality and plurality. For Kramer, ‘Music both *attracts* and *enacts* understanding.’<sup>49</sup> He expands: ‘As an aesthetic medium it does so through sensory, bodily events; as an imaginary or symbolic medium it does so through cultural tropes and hermeneutic windows.’<sup>50</sup> By hermeneutic windows, Kramer is referring here to ‘textual inclusions’, ‘citational inclusions’ (such as texts), and ‘structural tropes’ which function ‘as a typical expressive act within a certain cultural/historical framework.’<sup>51</sup> For Kramer, in other words, musical meaning involves the viscosity of sound, inherited cultural patterns of understanding, and allusions to other forms of meaning. If this does not sound immediately dissimilar from some of the claims of Meyer and Davies, the conclusions Kramer reaches are very different: ‘Interpretation [...] cannot be regimented, disciplined, or legislated – at least not successfully. As a practice, it is opportunistic, unruly, and contestatory’.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, for Nattiez:

Musical symbolism is *polysemic*, because when we listen to music, the meanings it takes on, the emotions that it evokes, are multiple, varied, and confused. These meanings, these emotions, are the object of an interpretation that is thus always *hazardous*. Given the looseness of the associations between music and what it evokes, we can no longer say with certainty what constitutes the expressive, the natural, the conventional, the analogical, the arbitrary association.<sup>53</sup>

And for Almén and Pearsall, too, ‘music is a complex phenomenon, one that involves many interacting factors on many levels’, ‘musical meaning is emergent, subject to inter- and

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<sup>49</sup> Kramer, *Thought of Music*, p. 16, emphasis in original.

<sup>50</sup> Kramer, *Thought of Music*, p. 16.

<sup>51</sup> Kramer, *Music as Cultural Practice*, pp. 9 and 10.

<sup>52</sup> Kramer, *Music as Cultural Practice*, p. 14.

<sup>53</sup> Nattiez, *Music and Discourse*, p. 37, emphasis in original.

intra-subjective experience’, and ‘music is experienced in relation to culture.’<sup>54</sup> While they suggest it is possible to ‘identify certain methodological similarities’ between scholars, their emphasis is on dialogue rather than grand narratives.<sup>55</sup> Such a view emphasises that musical meaning may not be simply objective or subjective, but rather arise in the space between the two, evading ‘an either/or relationship between material culture and narrative construction.’<sup>56</sup> Such a view also emphasises that meaning is complex not singular – that patterns of sound, histories, texts, and associations may assemble and converge in any number of ways.<sup>57</sup>

This is consonant with the range of experiences of music mapped out in the previous chapter. As Jamshed J. Bharucha, Meagan Curtis and Kaivon Paroo note:

there is extraordinary variability in the reported conscious experience of music. The plagal cadence is sometimes characterized as warm, and timbres are often described as bright, dark or even sweet. Some claim to experience keys or other musical structures as emotions.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Almén and Pearsall, ‘The Divining Rod’, p. 10.

<sup>55</sup> Almén and Pearsall, ‘The Divining Rod’, p. 3.

<sup>56</sup> Cook, ‘Uncanny Moments’, p. 115.

<sup>57</sup> This is not to cast out all singular theories of musical meaning, but simply to note their partiality. Take, for example, topic theory. As Leonard G. Ratner expands, eighteenth-century western tonal music ‘developed a thesaurus of *characteristic figures*’, containing reference to particular dances – the minuet, sarabande, gigue – as well as marches, and other styles: singing style, *Sturm und Drang*, *fantasia*. These figures seem to be acknowledged as musical codes for a certain audience. Ratner’s observation has led to Agawu’s rich semiotic analysis of topics as ‘musical signs’ – namely, musical expressions consisting of ‘a signifier’ and ‘a signified’. Crucially, however, while Agawu’s research does suggest there are particular, identifiable, and even perhaps correct interpretations of certain topics, the scope of this observation is narrow: it is that we might ‘acquire competence in an eighteenth-century idiom’. This is a theory about one type of music, not about “music itself”. In this way, what makes some eighteenth-century western tonal music sad might involve topics, and what makes some jazz sad might involve something else entirely. See Leonard G. Ratner, *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style* (Schirmer, 1980), pp. 9, 19, 21 and 24, emphasis in original; V. Kofi Agawu, *Playing with Signs: A Semiotic Interpretation of Classic Music* (Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 49.

<sup>58</sup> Jamshed J. Bharucha, Meagan Curtis and Kaivon Paroo, ‘Varieties of Musical Experience’, *Cognition* 100. 1 (2006), pp. 131-72 (p. 143), doi:10.1016/j.cognition.2005.11.008.

When considering musical meaning it is always worth remembering, to state the obvious, that ‘our internal experience of reality can be somewhat different’ from the experience of someone else.<sup>59</sup> One commonly noted example of such difference is music-colour synaesthesia – a varied phenomenon including ‘not only tone-colour synaesthesia elicited on hearing individual tones, but a complex and idiosyncratic mixture of phenomenological experiences often mediated by timbre, tempo, emotion and differing musical style.’<sup>60</sup> But other forms of difference exist too: from congenital amusia (more frequently known as tone-deafness) to the effects of musical training, it should be no surprise that listeners and performers experience music in varied ways, or that they derive different meanings from the music with which they engage. Ironically, the diversity of perspectives offered by Cooke, Meyer, and Davies point in this direction too: cumulatively, they betray profound differences in how people listen to music, and conceive of that listening.

And so, musical meaning is complex and plural: volatile, disputed, and difficult to pin down. This does not answer the question of why some music is sad, let alone of how music in worship relates to meaning and knowledge. But it does demonstrate two points that are useful for our purposes. The first is that we cannot treat music as a simple accompaniment or bearer of texts and ideas. Music is caught up in far too many constructions and perpetuations of meaning to be limited in this way. This means that the account of music I developed in relation to Sadoski, Wolterstorff, and Zahl, of memorability, inhabitation, and salience, although an important component to the argument of this chapter, is insufficient to answer questions of music, meaning, and knowledge. We will have to look elsewhere to consider how music might both *mean* something and *tell* us something. The second point is that it is difficult to derive clear or straightforward meanings from music.

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<sup>59</sup> David Eagleman, *The Brain: The Story of You* (Canongate Books Ltd, 2015), p. 59.

<sup>60</sup> Caroline Curwen, ‘Music-Colour Synaesthesia: Concept, Context and Qualia’, *Consciousness and Cognition* 61 (2018), pp. 94-106 (p. 103), doi:10.1016/j.concog.2018.04.005.

As I noted in chapter 2, Kramer suggests that music cannot make a ‘truth claim’ and ‘it never makes propositions.’<sup>61</sup> I will come back to the question of whether music can be involved in truth-telling, but broadly, from this survey of approaches to music and meaning, Kramer’s point stands: it is very difficult to make a causal link between music and propositions, assertions, and even depictions (except where music is treated as a simple carrier of texts and ideas). This is not to say that language or images are straightforward bearers of meaning, but it is to note the particular inscrutability of music. And this leads to an important observation not just for this section but for the chapter as a whole: music is a very complex source for theology indeed.

### **Analogy and Metaphor**

There is, however, another approach to questions of music (in worship), meaning, and knowledge – one largely associated with Begbie. This is an approach concerned with efforts to ‘think together’ or find areas of ‘resonance’ between music and theology.<sup>62</sup> Or, as I will contend later in this section, even if Begbie does not describe his work in such a way, this is an approach concerned with musical analogy.

As I noted in chapter 2, Begbie is concerned, among other things, with the connection between musical patterns – those gleaned largely through analysis of western tonal music – and areas of theological concern. Begbie is clear that these connections have significance for theological knowledge. He contends that ‘music can serve to enrich and advance theology’, providing ‘conceptual tools’ which ‘enable theology to do its job better.’<sup>63</sup> And he specifies that, not only do the arts ‘convey truth’, but they convey that ‘which cannot be

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<sup>61</sup> Kramer, *Music as Cultural Practice*, p. 5. See pp. 55-56 of this thesis.

<sup>62</sup> Begbie, *Theology, Music, Time*, p. 98; Begbie, ‘Sound Mix’, p. 147.

<sup>63</sup> Begbie, *Theology, Music, Time*, pp. 3 and 271.

attained in any other way.’<sup>64</sup> This, at least on the surface, and acknowledging once again the western emphasis, appears to be a promising series of answers to the questions of this chapter: how music *means* something, and how music might *tell* us something of God.

In this section, I will explore some of the key analogies Begbie draws between music and theology. Having noted some of these analogies in chapter 2, and indeed some of the critiques levelled against them, I will not re-examine them in much detail here.<sup>65</sup> Rather, I will investigate here what such analogies are doing, and what they enable us to do, theologically – and how they might thereby provide insight into the questions of this chapter. I will also contextualise the work of Begbie in relation to analogies between music and theology that emerge in other places: Williams’ *Christ the Heart of Creation* and Evelyn Underhill’s *Concerning the Inner Life*, as well as within Soskice’s work on theological metaphor more broadly. This will allow me to suggest that analogical thinking between music and theology can lead to new understanding, appreciation, and experience of doctrinal claims. However, I will ultimately suggest that Begbie’s approach both operates within a fundamentally cognitivist account of knowledge, and within a similarly limited account of musical meaning. It is thus also insufficient as an answer to the questions of this chapter.

As I have already noted, there are many analogies drawn between music and theology in Begbie’s work. Some are concerned with the interplay of different pitches in the same space, and how they might provide us with non-competitive ways of conceiving of the Trinity.<sup>66</sup> Others are concerned more explicitly with harmonic patterns in western tonal music, and how movements from ‘equilibrium’ to ‘tension’ to ‘resolution’ map onto

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<sup>64</sup> Begbie, *Voicing Creation’s Praise*, p. 247.

<sup>65</sup> See pp. 63-64 and 68.

<sup>66</sup> Begbie, ‘Sound Mix’, p. 147.

patterns of ‘creation-fall-redemption’ and ‘promised land-exile-return’.<sup>67</sup> Some are concerned with the relationship between music and time, and with how the temporality of music resonates with eschatological themes: ‘delay and patience, fulfilment and hope, the prefiguring of final resolution, the delay of the Parousia, and the character of the final resolution.’<sup>68</sup> Still others are concerned with the practices of music: between musical improvisation and ‘the shape of Christian freedom’, say – although these are less common than his formal analogies.<sup>69</sup> And such an approach has been adopted by other scholars, too – in particular Chelle Stearns, who examines the relationship between ‘space’ in music and ‘freedom, being, and unity’ in the work of Colin Gunton.<sup>70</sup>

There are critiques of these analogies – some of which I have noted already.<sup>71</sup> For Hopps, for example, they betray an ‘insidious essentialism’, and fail to treat music as a serious conversation partner, subjecting it always to doctrinal knowledge gained from text and image.<sup>72</sup> But, for now, I want to put aside this critique – and others like it – and observe that, while Begbie’s work might be the most extensive treatment of the analogous relationship between music and theology, it is not, at least in its premises, unique. Rather, it represents a *formalisation* of a series of quite varied and casual analogies between theology and music. These, in turn, can be read in the light of theological work on analogy and metaphor more broadly, and thus bring us closer to the questions of music, meaning, and knowledge that underpin this chapter.

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<sup>67</sup> Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, pp. 278 and 279. More detailed discussion of Begbie’s method can be found on pp. 63-64 of this thesis.

<sup>68</sup> Begbie, *Theology, Music, Time*, p. 99.

<sup>69</sup> Begbie, *Theology, Music, Time*, pp. 244 and 245.

<sup>70</sup> Chelle L. Stearns, *Handling Dissonance: A Musical Theological Aesthetic of Unity* (Pickwick Publications, 2019), p. 2.

<sup>71</sup> See p. 68.

<sup>72</sup> Brown and Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, p. 198.

Take, for example, *Christ the Heart of Creation*, where Williams uses the analogy of a tune. When we come to recognise that a series of notes is a tune, Williams observes, we have not identified ‘an extra item in the sum total of sense data’, but rather ‘an organizing formal principle that connects the data.’<sup>73</sup> This, he suggests, helps us to see that the infinite and finite in the person of Christ ‘do not “add up”’.<sup>74</sup> Just as a tune is not an extra item, so too ‘Jesus is not part of the divine life, nor the Word an element in the composition of Jesus.’<sup>75</sup> This is highly evocative both of Begbie’s account of music as combining sounds, and Stearn’s discussion of music as that which demonstrates ‘how simultaneity and particularity can exist well together’.<sup>76</sup>

Or, as a different kind of example, take Underhill’s *Concerning the Inner Life*. She suggests:

The world is full of jangling noises. You know that there are better melodies. But you will never transmit the heavenly music to others unless you yourselves are tuned into it[.]<sup>77</sup>

At first glance, this seems to be a fairly off-hand analogy. ‘Noises’ and ‘melodies’ are used here to draw a distinction between the creaturely and the divine, and participation in the divine life is a case of being ‘tuned’ in. But, here, it is easiest to see how musical analogies are not always what they seem. Taking a step back, Underhill is writing about the human experience of participating in the divine life; the subject matter is how to ‘transmit the heavenly music’. Music is an analogy for participation and anticipation. Yet, as I addressed in chapter 5, music is also a means of this very participation and anticipation.<sup>78</sup> The “real” and “symbolic” are, in other words, blurred. In this instance, music is engaged with that

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<sup>73</sup> Rowan Williams, *Christ the Heart of Creation* (Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2018), p. 37.

<sup>74</sup> Williams, *Christ the Heart*, p. 37.

<sup>75</sup> Williams, *Christ the Heart*, p. 36.

<sup>76</sup> Stearns, *Handling Dissonance*, p. 209.

<sup>77</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *Concerning the Inner Life with the House of the Soul* (Methuen, 1947), p. 14.

<sup>78</sup> See pp. 180-81.

which it helps us, theologically, to comprehend.

A similar claim could be made about the analogies of Williams and Stearns, and some of those of Begbie – taking his description of improvisation as an example. In these accounts, music is an effective means to help us conceive of human and divine agency. Yet, as I contended in chapter 5, music in worship is also a participation in that which is given, and a meaningful reformation and recreation of this givenness.<sup>79</sup> In these instances, too, there is a blurring between music as an analogical tool and music as it performs the analogical claims being made about it. In some sense, this should not be a surprise musicologically, if practices, traditions, theories, and discourses are interwoven with interpretation, meaning, and knowledge; it logically follows that music might be fruitful grounds for interpretation of other practices and of itself. And, in some sense, it should not be a surprise, theologically, either. For a start, any distinction between “real” and “symbolic” is hard to maintain, particularly – although not exclusively – in a sacramental context, as Eugene Rogers’ work on ‘metaphorical’ and ‘biological’ blood demonstrates.<sup>80</sup> And, as I will go on to discuss, such a distinction is also hard to maintain within a broader theological account of metaphor and analogy. While I do not have space in this thesis for a thorough-going account of theological analogy, I do want to briefly suggest here how Begbie’s claims can be usefully contextualised in the work of Soskice, and, thereby, how analogical thinking between music and theology can lead to fresh insight into doctrinal claims.

In *Metaphor and Religious Language*, Soskice observes that ‘A good metaphor may not simply be an oblique reference to a predetermined subject but a new vision, the birth of a new understanding, a new referential access.’<sup>81</sup> Defining metaphor, against a range of

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<sup>79</sup> See pp. 204-06.

<sup>80</sup> Eugene F. Rogers, *Blood Theology: Seeing Red in Body- and God-Talk* (Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 11 and 12.

<sup>81</sup> Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, pp. 57-58.

alternative theories, as ‘a speaking about one thing or state of affairs in terms which are suggestive of another’, and analogy as ‘language that has been stretched to fit new applications, yet fits the new situation without generating for the native speaker any imaginative strain’, Soskice suggests that both have the capacity to generate fresh insight.<sup>82</sup> The book as a whole rejects the notion that metaphor is an example of ‘vulgar anthropomorphism’ and defends the Christian’s ‘seemingly paradoxical conviction that, despite his utter inability to comprehend God, he is justified in speaking of God and that metaphor is the principal means by which he does so.’<sup>83</sup> This is because there is a close relationship between speech and knowledge: ‘the task of saying the unsayable is aligned to that of knowing the unknowable.’<sup>84</sup>

There are two reasons to be cautious about applying this theory uncritically to the work of Begbie. The first is that ‘metaphor is a mode of language use’ and therefore ‘the study of metaphor should begin in a linguistic setting.’<sup>85</sup> It is one thing to examine language about music and language about God, using the terms of one to give a new vision of the other. It is another thing to treat *music* as a metaphor for creaturehood, or indeed for the nature of the divine. It is worth noting this distinction and the concomitant caution: Soskice is *not* talking about an experience of a piece of music and what it might tell us of God. The second reason for caution is that, as Soskice notes, discussion in the area of theology and metaphor has often suffered from ‘a terminological imprecision’; ‘metaphor’, ‘model’, ‘analogy’, and ‘myth’ are often insufficiently distinguished.<sup>86</sup> This is an imprecision from which my discussion has also suffered, at least in part because of Begbie’s terminology. As I noted earlier, he discusses his efforts to ‘think together’ music and theology, and draws upon the

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<sup>82</sup> Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, pp. 53 and 64.

<sup>83</sup> Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, pp. 148 and x.

<sup>84</sup> Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, p. 63.

<sup>85</sup> Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, p. 16.

<sup>86</sup> Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, p. x.

language of resonance, but his terminology does not clearly or neatly fit within the framework of metaphors, models, analogies, and myths.<sup>87</sup> I have opted to describe his resonances in this chapter specifically as analogies, on the basis of Soskice's definition: that they stretch language between applications without causing imaginative strain. I am aware that using this description may unhelpfully interpret or predetermine such resonances, foreclosing other ways of understanding Begbie's work. If I were not to use this description, however, it would be much more difficult to draw substantive comparisons between Begbie's work and similar theological pursuits: those which examine how we might use one thing to speak of another – and particularly, how we might use something that is not God to speak of God. In order to read Begbie's work in the light of Soskice's, then, some interpretation of Begbie is required.

This interpretation being done, what Soskice's work demonstrates is that speaking figuratively about music, and about God, may meaningfully contribute to theological knowledge. As she observes, 'There are many instances where, if we do not speak figuratively, we can say very little', and 'there is no particular virtue in literal language for literal language's sake'.<sup>88</sup> In this way, analogies between music and theology may indeed open out new conceptual understandings, fresh perspectives, and previously undisclosed insights. Soskice's work, in other words, supports Begbie's claim that 'there seems no prima facie reason to suppose that the practices of music-making and music-hearing, together with the distinctive types of cognition they involve and the language they entail and generate, cannot contribute to the formation of doctrinal concepts'.<sup>89</sup> So long as we are discussing music 'in, with, and through language', Soskice's conditions hold.<sup>90</sup> And, in this way, Begbie's work seems to provide an account of the way in which music *means* and *tells*

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<sup>87</sup> Begbie, *Theology, Music, Time*, p. 98.

<sup>88</sup> Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, pp. 96 and 95.

<sup>89</sup> Begbie, *Music, Modernity, God*, p. 207.

<sup>90</sup> Begbie, *Music, Modernity, God*, p. 205.

us of God.

The problem is the connection between music-making, music-hearing, and the language that is entailed and generated. Begbie is, certainly, using language about music and language about God to provide fresh insight – as are Williams and Underhill. But where their work diverges is that, for Williams and Underhill, music valuably illustrates a theological claim they are already making; for Begbie, going one step further, these musical analogies *reflect back on music*. If music can serve to enrich theology, then these analogies implicitly say something about the nature of music and its capacity to illuminate the divine – these analogies become, in some sense, the theological point of musical meaning. And it is in this further step that problems emerge, because there is not a straightforward link between *music*, conceived in the fullest sense as an assemblage, and the sorts of linguistic claims that Begbie is making. Music-making and music-hearing do, absolutely, entail and generate language, and it would be foolhardy to try to separate out musical meaning from linguistic meaning – both because of the theory of musical meaning I have espoused above, and because of the way in which music seems, at least sometimes, to perform the analogical claims made about it. But the language entailed and generated is profoundly pluriform and diverse, and musical meaning is vast and volatile. Talk of tension and resolution, multiple pitches in a space, improvisation, and freedom, might be entailed and generated by music-making and music-hearing. And, perhaps, for some people, some of the time, these ways of thinking about music might seem consonant with their experiences of music or become a normative force in their appreciation of such experiences, helping them to envisage and imagine new theological possibilities. But they are not the sorts of claims around music and meaning made by Henry, Roger, Heather, Rebecca, Robert, and Sue. Such claims can neither contend with the vastness and variety of musical meaning, nor take us very far in an explanation of Sue’s experience of ‘How sweet the name of Jesus sounds’, and what it may or may not have told her about God.

There is, in other words, a profound narrowness in the claims Begbie is making. This is not to negate the idea that music may be a source of theological knowledge – indeed, as Prevot notes, ‘Cone articulates the major features of his black liberation theology nearly on the basis of the spirituals alone.’<sup>91</sup> But it is to refocus our attention on what we mean when we talk of music. As Prevot continues, ‘when [Cone] discusses the songs of the slaves, he does not do so as an outside observer but rather as an internal participant in their ongoing vitality.’<sup>92</sup> While Begbie is also undoubtedly a participant in the music he studies, his claims neither acknowledge nor reflect this participation. It may seem implicit in the subject matter, but Begbie does not explore, in any meaningful sense, knowledge as it might be found through embodied, participative engagement in a tradition full of the generation of meaning, not all of which can be articulated through reference to text and idea. Ultimately, then, he is operating within a limited account both of musical meaning, and of the knowledge of God.

So, like the account of memorability, inhabitation, and salience I developed in the previous section, this account of metaphor and analogy is also partial and limited when it comes to questions of musical meaning. Begbie’s work may go some way to answering the question of how music might mean anything, and from there tell us anything about God, but it ultimately falls short in its cognitivist leanings. While music can certainly illuminate doctrinal claims – as Williams and Underhill make clear – there is a problem if these analogies become the point of musical meaning. In the following section, then, I will offer an alternative to both of the approaches discussed so far. I will contend that the knowledge of God is not primarily conceptual, and from there point to different possibilities for the relationship between the embodied realities of the musical assemblage and what they might tell us of God.

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<sup>91</sup> Prevot, *Thinking Prayer*, p. 293.

<sup>92</sup> Prevot, *Thinking Prayer*, p. 293.

## The Knowledge of God

The premise of this account, as summarised by Andrew Louth, is that ‘the central truth, or mystery, of the Christian faith is primarily not a matter of words, and therefore ultimately of ideas or concepts, but a matter of fact, of reality.’<sup>93</sup> In other words, ‘Christianity is not a body of doctrine that can be specified in advance, but a way of life and all that this implies.’<sup>94</sup> In this section, I will first expand upon Louth’s claims through reference to a varied set of resources concerned with knowledge, formation, and desire, demonstrating how this one thesis can be substantiated from a range of disciplinary perspectives. Along the way, I will construct an account of what it means to know God – and why such knowledge is not fundamentally propositional. And, from there, I will be able to develop an account of music in worship and Christian formation, suggesting that music is a means by which Christians may be able grow into greater love, and thereby knowledge, of God.

The first set of approaches to consider in relation to Louth’s premise are those of affect theory and embodied cognition theory. Both have already been adopted for theological and philosophical ends and have gained a degree of familiarity in these disciplines. At the very least, such accounts posit that thoughts, ideas, and concepts are necessarily shaped by bodies, experiences, and individual and corporate lives. As Zahl suggests, ‘given the complex inseparability of cognition and emotion, it would appear that most forms of theological reasoning are implicitly “experiential” in some minimal sense, in that the influence of mood states and affective factors on such reasoning cannot be avoided, at least not in any direct way.’<sup>95</sup> Wynn concurs: ‘perception, conception, and feeling are bound together inseparably.’<sup>96</sup> This is not to say that ‘there is no such thing as truth that exists

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<sup>93</sup> Louth, *Discerning the Mystery*, p. 74.

<sup>94</sup> Louth, *Discerning the Mystery*, p. 86.

<sup>95</sup> Zahl, *Christian Experience*, p. 45.

<sup>96</sup> Wynn, *Emotional Experience*, p. 194.

independently of our experience’, but it is to note that ‘the theological meaning of texts, claims and doctrines is always fluid until it becomes temporally, affectively and psychologically embedded in lives and in experience.’<sup>97</sup> Expressed more strongly, with George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, ‘the very structure of reason itself comes from the details of our embodiment.’<sup>98</sup> As opposed to the information processing model, accounts of embodied cognition theory suggest that ‘mind comes about through bodily interactions with the world.’<sup>99</sup> And, although it is important to be cautious about drawing more expansive conclusions in support of these theories than the relatively new field of neuroscience can reasonably carry, at the very least, ‘neuroscience seems to provide a strong underpinning that experience shapes people.’<sup>100</sup> There is, then, in the confluence of these theories, an inseparability of experience and idea – or, to use Louth’s language, ‘a way of life’ and ‘concepts’.

These theories also find a theological conversation partner in accounts of formation, and indeed liturgy – providing a second approach to Louth’s claim. Hauerwas is particularly instructive here, suggesting that it is a mistake to ‘reproduce Christianity as a set of beliefs that one may or may not have.’<sup>101</sup> As he suggests, there is no question of ‘whether or not Christianity is culturally embodied’.<sup>102</sup> Gifford Grobrien concurs: the language used in liturgy ‘is never only ideal or instrumental, for it expresses and shapes a structure of life.’<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Zahl, *Christian Experience*, p. 46; Simeon Zahl, ‘Tradition and Its “Use”: The Ethics of Theological Retrieval’, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 71.3 (2018), pp. 308-23 (p. 316), doi:10.1017/S0036930618000340.

<sup>98</sup> George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (Basic Books, 1999), p. 4.

<sup>99</sup> Brad D. Straw and Warren S. Brown, ‘Christian Education as Embodied and Embedded Virtue Formation’, in *Neuroscience and Christian Formation*, ed. by Mark A. Maddix and Dean Blevins (Information Age Publishing Incorporated, 2017), pp. 87-98 (p. 90).

<sup>100</sup> Dean Blevins, ‘Neuroscience and Christian Worship: Practices That Change the Brain’, in *Neuroscience and Christian Formation*, pp. 99-110 (p. 101).

<sup>101</sup> Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them*, p. 158.

<sup>102</sup> Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them*, p. 160.

<sup>103</sup> Gifford A. Grobrien, *Christian Character Formation: Lutheran Studies of the Law, Anthropology, Worship, and Virtue* (Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 149.

This leads him to suggest that ‘All of the activity of the Church in worship – not just the speaking – is supportive of the formative activity of God.’<sup>104</sup> Both Hauerwas and Grobien make the point that the performative, enactive, and embodied, nature of liturgy is part of Christian formation. The question, as Hauerwas notes, is not about embodiment *per se*, but about the results of this embodiment – or, in ‘what kind of culture Christian practices produce.’<sup>105</sup> For all the positive claims to be made about liturgy and formation, ‘worship as communal style of life is worship only insofar as all its common expectations and processes of socialisation (for both good and ill) are governed by and continually altered by apprehensions of and dealings with God.’<sup>106</sup> It is also important to confront the reality, as Winner suggests, that ‘when a Christian practice goes wrong, often it does so not incidentally but rather in ways that have to do with the practice itself.’<sup>107</sup> This means that, when considering the nature of the Christian faith – with Louth – we should be asking questions not simply about beliefs and propositions, but rather about cultures, practices, and desires, and, most importantly, on the outworkings of such cultures, practices, and desires.

Such an emphasis on embodied formation can seem to negate the significance of propositions – something of which Hauerwas is well aware. As he suggests, ‘Of course Christians believe such things as God created the world, that God called Abraham, worked through the prophets, chose Mary, and raised Jesus from the dead.’<sup>108</sup> It is simply to note that it would be strange to suppose that ‘believing any of these things as true could be

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<sup>104</sup> Grobien, *Christian Character Formation*, p. 153.

<sup>105</sup> Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them*, p. 160.

<sup>106</sup> Craig R. Dykstra, ‘The Formative Power of the Congregation’, in *Theological Perspectives on Christian Formation: A Reader on Theology and Christian Education*, ed. by Jeff Astley, Leslie J. Francis and Colin Crowder (Gracewing and W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1996), pp. 252-69 (p. 260).

<sup>107</sup> Winner, *Dangers of Christian Practice*, p. 1.

<sup>108</sup> Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them*, p. 5.

abstracted from the kind of life commensurate with holding such beliefs.<sup>109</sup> And it is to suggest that ‘We learn such stories, and discern their truth and adequacy, by being participants in cultural contexts which entertain them and, perhaps, endorse them, embodying them in social practices.’<sup>110</sup> This can be demonstrated through reference to anthropology and sociology as well as theology: Day’s study of belief in northern England in the early 2000s, discussed in the previous chapter, suggests that ‘content’ is important, but so are ‘sources, practice, salience, function, place, and time’.<sup>111</sup> She also notes the profoundly social nature of belief, contending that ‘in conditions of late modernity, belief to many people is an expression of how they belong to each other.’<sup>112</sup> This is consistent with the relationship between theology and experience espoused above, and recognises – once again, and from a different perspective – the complex interrelationship between the two. As Wynn suggests, ‘to speak in general terms, religion depends on discursive thought and also on feeling; and to speak of particular cases, it is sometimes thought which comes first, sometimes feeling, and sometimes neither.’<sup>113</sup>

And this, in turn, is consonant with the third account to substantiate Louth’s claim, surrounding the role of Christian doctrine in the life of the church and in the life of faith. The first thing to note here is that doctrine is ‘*creatively* dependent upon churchly discourse and practice, a constitutive factor in the speech and performance of the church.’<sup>114</sup> It is not, in other words, separable from the worship of the church, an isolated epistemological pursuit. This claim can be made normatively – as Kavanagh notes, on theology as ‘a

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<sup>109</sup> Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them*, p. 5.

<sup>110</sup> Nicholas Lash, *Holiness, Speech and Silence: Reflections on the Question of God* (Ashgate, 2004), p. 87.

<sup>111</sup> Day, *Believing in Belonging*, p. 172.

<sup>112</sup> Day, *Believing in Belonging*, p. 27.

<sup>113</sup> Wynn, *Emotional Experience*, p. 147.

<sup>114</sup> Gerard Loughlin, ‘The Basis and Authority of Doctrine’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, ed. by Colin E. Gunton (Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 41-64 (pp. 55-56), emphasis in original.

sustained dialectic’:

Its *thesis* is the assembly as it enters into the liturgical act; its *antithesis* is the assembly’s changed condition as it comes away from its liturgical encounter with the living God in Word and sacrament; its *synthesis* is the assembly’s adjustment in faith and works to that encounter.<sup>115</sup>

But this claim can also be made through the very fact that, as Higton notes, ‘There is one tangled life, in which all are involved’ and ‘doctrinal theologians do not stand apart, looking on; they are involved, as dirty handed as any.’<sup>116</sup> Doctrine is not an isolated pursuit, in theory or in practice. I also want to suggest here, in a separate but related move, that doctrine can be conceived of as a boundary practice – that, for example, Chalcedon defines the limits of acceptable speech about Christ ‘but without any supposition that this linguistic regulation thereby *explains* or *grasps* the reality towards which it points.’<sup>117</sup> Rather, ‘The main thrust of Christian doctrine [...] lies in its power to transform, by weaning human beings off idolatry.’<sup>118</sup> This is not to negate, but rather to accurately describe, the role of doctrine, not as an explanatory tool but rather as a practice that, at its best, emerges from, and serves, the life of the church. Both these moves support the idea that ‘Christianity is not a body of doctrine that can be specified in advance, but a way of life and all that this implies.’

What I have identified here, then, are a range of sources which substantiate Louth’s claim. Namely, cognition is embodied – inseparable from, and even emerging out of, experience

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<sup>115</sup> Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, p. 76, emphasis in original.

<sup>116</sup> Higton, *Life of Doctrine*, p. 118.

<sup>117</sup> Sarah Coakley, ‘What Does Chalcedon Solve and What Does It Not? Some Reflections on the Status and Meaning of the Chalcedonian “Definition”’, in *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God*, ed. by Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall and Gerald O’Collins (Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 143-63 (p. 161), emphasis in original.

<sup>118</sup> Susannah Ticciati, *A New Apophaticism: Augustine and the Redemption of Signs* (Brill, 2013), p. 51.

and feeling. Faith is performative and enactive, located primarily in practices. And doctrine is not an isolated epistemological pursuit, but instead mutually dependent on the worship of the church as it is embodied and enacted. At the convergence of these ideas, we find a central claim: propositions and concepts can only take us so far when it comes to the knowledge of God. And this should not be a surprise, given that the knowledge of God ‘is not the *kind* of knowledge at which scientists and historians aim, as they put some feature of the world, or some episode from human history, under the microscope of academic scrutiny’, that God is not ‘inert, picked up with tweezers, inspected, classified, conceptually controlled.’<sup>119</sup> For this reason, ‘what we learn in catechesis is not so much a systematic understanding of “what” God is, but rather we learn “that” God is’.<sup>120</sup>

What these sources point to, instead, is that to talk of the knowledge of God is necessarily to talk of invitation and inhabitation, of relationship and trust, of the formation of desire, of transformation, and of love. As Higton suggests, ‘Christians are called to acknowledge and explore God’s love’, and it is precisely a Christian’s ‘discovery and inhabitation of this love’ which ‘is their knowledge of God’.<sup>121</sup> This love and knowledge is *partly* verbally communicable: as Susannah Ticciati observes, ‘To say that God is wise, that God is good, and above all that God is love, is to tell you where to look in order to find God: God is there where creaturely wisdom, goodness and love are to be found.’<sup>122</sup> But this love and knowledge is not *exclusively* verbally communicable. It exists in ‘our material embodiment in the habits and practices of a people that makes possible a way of life that is otherwise impossible.’<sup>123</sup> And this love and knowledge is intimately related to worship, which is by

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<sup>119</sup> Lash, *Holiness, Speech, Silence*, p. 85, emphasis in original.

<sup>120</sup> Carol Harrison, ‘Charismatic Catechesis’, in *Rooted and Grounded: Faith Formation and the Christian Tradition*, ed. by Steven J. L. Croft and Sarah Foot (Canterbury Press Norwich, 2019), pp. 37-51 (p. 37).

<sup>121</sup> Higton, *Life of Doctrine*, p. 111.

<sup>122</sup> Ticciati, *A New Apophaticism*, p. 242.

<sup>123</sup> Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them*, p. 74.

its nature catechetical.<sup>124</sup> To talk of the knowledge of God is, necessarily to talk of ‘a mode of understanding which is at once both cognitive and practical – one in which perception, conception, and feeling are bound together inseparably.’<sup>125</sup>

This means that to ask whether music can tell us anything of God is neither to ask a question primarily about concept, proposition, or idea, nor to ask a question about the analogical relationship between music and doctrine. Rather, the questions to be asked are: does music in worship invite its participants into greater love of God? And if so, how? It is to these two questions that I will turn in the following section.

### **Music and the Love of God**

Here I will explore four indicative and idiosyncratic – if neither comprehensive nor unique – aspects of music in worship, and discuss whether and how they might allow Christians to grow in love of God and knowledge of God’s love for them. I will do so with particular reference to ordinary practice, as detailed by my conversations at St Michael and All Angels, St Nicholas’, and Christchurch. Music in worship, I will contend, can, for some people, some of the time, form imaginations, shape desires, and act as training in hospitality towards the other. Music in worship is also, I will suggest, a creaturely good, not simply a means to an end (no matter how valuable the end). In these ways, music in worship can be said to invite its participants into greater love and knowledge of God.

It is worth noting that there is considerable overlap between imagination, desire, and hospitality, and in some places the designations between them exist simply for ease of

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<sup>124</sup> Simon Jones, ‘Worship Transforming Catechesis: Catechesis Transforming Worship’, in *Rooted and Grounded*, ed. by Stephen J. L. Croft and Sarah Foot, pp. 21-36 (p. 29).

<sup>125</sup> Wynn, *Emotional Experience*, p. 194.

presentation. There is considerable overlap, too, with the subject matter of the previous chapters, and indeed with some of the earlier material of this one. The discussion of music forming theological imaginations will not be exclusively concerned with analogies between music and doctrine, but will nonetheless incorporate them; the discussion of music and the formation of desire will draw upon the affective and experiential dimensions of music discussed in the previous chapter; and the discussion of music and hospitality is closely aligned with concerns about how music performs the body of Christ, as explored in the chapter before that. This is, following the logic of this chapter, necessarily the case: there is no sharp line between practices, experiences, and knowledge. What music is, what music does, and how music feels are intimately connected with what music might tell us of God.

So, first, music in worship plays a formative role in Christian imaginations. This was made eminently clear through my discussions at St Michael and All Angels, St Nicholas', and Christchurch. Particular hymns and songs were routinely ascribed meaning, related both to theological claims and to their salience, and connected to the plausibility or reality of belief. Whether it was Ann's discussion of how 'All my hope on God is founded' encapsulates her faith, or the way in which a childhood hymn helped to make more 'real' Sarah's 'relationship with Jesus', these ordinary ecclesial expressions of music seemed to help congregants forge, develop, and inhabit theological imaginations.<sup>126</sup> There is necessarily here an emphasis on text, concept, and idea – for Rebecca, 'My Jesus, my Saviour (Shout to the Lord)' is linked to the idea 'that Jesus is so powerful', and 'Great is the Lord' reminds her 'that there is a heaven.'<sup>127</sup> Unsurprisingly, these theological claims are related to the texts of 'My Jesus, my Saviour' and 'Great is the Lord'. But Rebecca is not suggesting that, by singing these ideas, she is learning them for the first time, or being reminded of

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<sup>126</sup> Ann, Focus Group 1; Sarah, Focus Group 3.

<sup>127</sup> Rebecca, Focus Group 3.

them as if she might have forgotten – rather these familiar ideas, through music, are becoming more palpable to her. This is consonant with the accounts of Wolterstorff and Zahl discussed earlier in this chapter, and the way that music may lend salience to concepts and ideas. Going further, though, Sarah’s claim that a hymn could make more palpable and felt a *relationship* rather than a theological idea speaks to a form of meaning well beyond text. Not only can music in worship make *texts salient*, then, but it might also, for some people, some of the time, make *beliefs* (in all their forms) *more real*.

It is also worth saying that there are people for whom analogies around music and doctrine may have a similar effect. It is plausible that Begbie and Stearns’ insights may help their readers not just to understand theological claims, but to experience these claims afresh – with renewed interest, particular meaning, or greater salience. And there is not a sharp line between Ann and Sarah’s claims and those of Begbie and Stearns, either. Underhill’s analogy suggests that the act of thinking on jangling noises and heavenly music may help broaden someone’s eschatological imagination; participating in music in worship may well do the same. A hymn text such as ‘So, our hearts and voices raising through the ages long, ceaselessly upon you gazing, this shall be our song’, narrativizes the very participation in the worship of the angels that is occurring and anticipated when the hymn is sung.<sup>128</sup> Or, as demonstrated by Ingalls’ discussion of the eschatological discourse at the Urbana and Passion conferences, discourse around music in worship may provide ‘interpretive lenses through which participants [are] invited to interpret their musical actions’.<sup>129</sup> Music in worship, whether performed, listened to, reflected upon, ascribed many and varied meanings – or indeed all of these in interaction with one another – can broaden

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<sup>128</sup> Michael Seward, *Christ Triumphant*, arr. by John Barnard (Michael Seward/Jubilate Hymns and John Barnard/Jubilate Hymns), in *Anglican Hymns Old & New*, no. 103.

<sup>129</sup> Monique Ingalls, ‘Singing Heaven Down to Earth: Spiritual Journeys, Eschatological Sounds, and Community Formation in Evangelical Conference Worship’, *Ethnomusicology* 55.2 (2011), pp. 255-79 (p. 260), doi:10.5406/ethnomusicology.55.2.0255.

imaginations and make faith more plausible, more lived, and more real. It is not a great stretch to suggest that these aggregations of ‘perception, conception, and feeling’ may, in some places and in some ways, help a congregant to grow into greater awareness of the love of God.<sup>130</sup>

This broadening of imaginations and awareness is not, it is important to add, an insular, individualistic, or self-serving pursuit. As Trevor Hart notes, ‘Imagination [...] seems to be a pervasive feature of our humanity, which is to say, in theological terms, of the sort of creatures God has made us and calls us to be.’<sup>131</sup> While individual imaginations may be distinctive, the act of imagining is part of our common humanity. Imagination is also closely linked to possibility, plausibility, and action; there is a relationship between imagination and the ‘fostering and enhancing [of] community in the midst of difference’, between what we can imagine and what we can do.<sup>132</sup> When music helps to shape theological imaginations, it helps to shape the action of the church. To say that music in worship may help its participants to grow into greater awareness of the love of God is to recognise its capacity to shape both imagination and action – and, when properly realised and directed, to shape them towards love for the other, and love for God. And it is in this way that music has a role to play, for some people, some of the time, in shaping theological imaginations, thereby inviting its participants to know more of the love of God.

Similar claims can be made of the way in which music can form and direct desire. Desire, here, is defined with Coakley as ‘an ontological category belonging primarily to God, and only secondarily to humans’.<sup>133</sup> Although human desire involves lack, divine desire

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<sup>130</sup> Wynn, *Emotional Experience*, p. 194.

<sup>131</sup> Trevor A. Hart, *Between the Image and the Word: Theological Engagements with Imagination, Language and Literature* (Ashgate, 2013), p. 4.

<sup>132</sup> Hart, *Image and the Word*, p. 97.

<sup>133</sup> Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, p. 10.

‘connotes that plenitude of longing love that God has for God’s own creation and for its full and ecstatic participation in the divine, trinitarian, life.’<sup>134</sup> The shaping of love, attention, and desire is thereby of the utmost importance for the Christian life: as Soskice notes, ‘to be fully human and to be fully moral is to respond to that which demands our response – the other, attended with love.’<sup>135</sup> And such shaping happens, as I noted earlier, through ordinary practices: as Smith contends, ‘our most fundamental orientation to the world – the longings and desires that orient us toward some version of the good life – is shaped and configured by imitation and practice.’<sup>136</sup> For this reason, ‘liturgies are pedagogies of desire’.<sup>137</sup> Or, as Wolterstorff suggests, ‘It is, in good measure, by manifesting love that liturgical assemblies are formative of love.’<sup>138</sup> There is a close relationship between liturgical practice, worship, and desire – and, when properly directed, between liturgical practice, worship, desire, and right love of God and of neighbour. And, I want to suggest, there is a relationship between music and desire – a particular relationship that stems from the high affective potential of music, as well as its practical nature.

This is something Julian Perlmutter explores – also with an epistemological focus, but without an emphasis on love – in *Sacred Music, Religious Desire and Knowledge of God*. His concern here is with the phenomenon of ‘an interested non-believer’ for whom ‘the deep appeal of sacred [choral] music can be a way of growing in religious openness’.<sup>139</sup> As he notes, emotions ‘combine elements of our general experience, including propositional thought, non-propositional thought and affect’, and desire is no different.<sup>140</sup> Desire has

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<sup>134</sup> Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, p. 10.

<sup>135</sup> Janet Martin Soskice, *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender, and Religious Language* (Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 7.

<sup>136</sup> James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Brazos Press, 2016), p. 19.

<sup>137</sup> Smith, *You Are What You Love*, p. 163.

<sup>138</sup> Wolterstorff, *Acting Liturgically*, p. 249.

<sup>139</sup> Julian Perlmutter, *Sacred Music, Religious Desire and Knowledge of God* (Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2020), p. 1.

<sup>140</sup> Perlmutter, *Sacred Music*, p. 37.

*direction* and *purpose*, driving towards the ‘knowledge of what something would be like in the capacity of providing satisfaction.’<sup>141</sup> And, so Perlmutter contends, ‘in order to have this sense of what satisfaction would be like, one must have experienced at least something like the projected satisfaction.’<sup>142</sup> This means that an attraction towards, or aesthetic interest in, forms of sacred choral music – or what Perlmutter describes as ‘musically elicited forms of desire’ – might not only be part of an ‘ordinary desire for God’ directed in a musical direction, but may be a form of ‘contemplative practice’, and from there grow into ‘love and knowledge of God as he is in himself.’<sup>143</sup> It is worth acknowledging the problems with this account: whether or not Perlmutter sufficiently deals with the realities of self-deception within musical (and religious) experience, for example; or the suggestion that contemplative prayer elicits superior forms of knowledge compared to other Christian practices – something I have strongly disputed in the previous chapter.<sup>144</sup> There is also the question of whether the subject matter of non-believers with an interest in sacred choral music is too esoteric a concern to be applied to music in worship more broadly – although the chart success of the Benedictine Monks of Santa Domingo De Silos in 1994 suggests it is a phenomenon worth exploring in its own right.<sup>145</sup> However, there are two important and transferable insights in this account: that the high affective potential of music can be related to ordinary desire, and that this desire may be purposive and directional, perhaps even (with sufficient caution) related to desire for God.

These two insights find an echo in my conversations at St Michael and All Angels, St Nicholas’, and Christchurch. For a start, these conversations noted music’s practical nature: that music involves interaction with others, and that there are concomitant joys and

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<sup>141</sup> Perlmutter, *Sacred Music*, p. 56.

<sup>142</sup> Perlmutter, *Sacred Music*, p. 56.

<sup>143</sup> Perlmutter, *Sacred Music*, pp. 131 and 148.

<sup>144</sup> See pp. 244-49.

<sup>145</sup> Billboard 200 <<https://www.billboard.com/charts/billboard-200/1994-05-28/>> [accessed 15 May 2025].

frustrations associated with such interaction. Music may, then, be one way in which we are schooled outwards, trained to ‘see other people as created and loved by God’.<sup>146</sup> Discussion of the ‘murder’ of not being able to sing together during the Covid-19 pandemic, too, or the visceral non-verbal reactions to the musical choices of others, suggests there is a relationship between music and desire – that some people’s experience of music involves active and embodied willing, wanting, and longing. And, from here, there is a connection to be drawn between musical desire and desire for God. Unlike other forms of desire – those such as hunger and thirst – musical longing is not clearly satiated. It may, for some people, some of the time, be intensified rather than diminished through the acts of singing or listening, driving a worship leader to repeat the final chorus of a song multiple times, or driving a hymnwriter to further composition. And, for such people, some of the time, this unsatiated musical longing may be an analogue for the endless desire for God.

But more than this, music may be a way in which desire for God finds expression. As Coakley observes:

it seems that to step intentionally into the realm of divine, trinitarian desire, and to seek some form of participation in it through a profound engagement with the Spirit, is both to risk having one’s human desires *intensified* in some qualitatively distinct manner, and also to confront a searching and necessary *purgation* of those same human desires in order to be brought into conformity with the divine will.<sup>147</sup>

If musical desire can be intensified not diminished through satiation, and musical desire can be properly directed towards the other, then it may not simply be an analogue for the endless desire for God, but rather a means of it. Music may sometimes direct its participants’ desires towards God, or may sometimes form a part of how their desire for God is experienced, or may sometimes help them to know and understand themselves as

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<sup>146</sup> Soskice, *Kindness of God*, p. 19.

<sup>147</sup> Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, p. 13, emphasis in original.

desiring God. And this is consonant with my conversations at St Michael and All Angels, St Nicholas', and Christchurch. The potent idea that, through music, it is possible to praise God 'with your whole *being*', speaks to an alignment of the act of singing and rightly ordered desire for God.<sup>148</sup> And the idea that music is a way 'to really sort of give yourself up to what you're doing' also speaks to music as a means of focusing outside the self, properly directing attention towards the divine.<sup>149</sup> As I noted in chapter 4, these two claims seems to be a contradiction: music in worship is grounding, concrete, and embodied, but it is also transportive, a loss of self.<sup>150</sup> Yet, held together with the high affective potential of music, this might not be quite so inconsistent. It might, instead, point to the shaping and orientating of action and desire that music can elicit – a shaping and orientating that is highly affective and embodied. It might point to the way such shaping and orientating should (when properly directed) draw its participants outwards, towards the other and to God. And, as such, we can suggest that music can, in some instances, plays a role in ordering desire, and may also be, in some instances, a means by which desire for God takes expression.

In this way, there is a close entanglement between the shaping of imagination and desire. There is also here a close connection between music and hospitality. As Prevot suggests, prayer 'provides unparalleled training in the ways of hospitality and responsibility', and similar claims can be made of music.<sup>151</sup> When properly directed, Quash notes that 'A self-subverting intention to sing praises to one who cannot be praised is a performed ascription of total agency to God, which is nonetheless a transformative human act.'<sup>152</sup> It is an act that

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<sup>148</sup> Robert, Focus Group 5.

<sup>149</sup> Jean, Focus Group 6.

<sup>150</sup> See pp. 146-47.

<sup>151</sup> Prevot, *Thinking Prayer*, p. 26.

<sup>152</sup> Ben Quash, *Found Theology: History, Imagination and the Holy Spirit* (Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), p. 50.

can draw its participants out of themselves, and towards the other – transforming the community in its midst. Or, as Janet articulated:

I mean in the pandemic [...] someone sent me [...] a person singing in one place, and then another one joined, and then it was like a choir but it was one, and then another and then another [...] and it was so comforting [...] And it was powerful[...] [...] Each voice added to it, and I think that's right 'cause it's a community[.] [...] [W]e've got faults and everything but [...] we're building a community.<sup>153</sup>

Music is not, of course, the only act that does this. But, in the decisions about style, genre, and instrumentation, in the interpersonal conflict and power struggles, in the child joyfully playing a tambourine and the adult frustratedly trying to focus on the lyrics, and in the joining together of many voices on a Sunday morning, music provides a particularly significant opportunity for hospitality.<sup>154</sup> It is precisely because music has high affective potential, precisely because music relates strongly to memories, people, places, and beliefs, precisely because music matters so profoundly to many of its participants, that learning to do it together is both generative and costly. It is precisely because musical meaning is diverse, plural, and volatile, precisely because all manner of experiences, ascriptions, practices, and memories are brought to bear on the act we call music, precisely because we cannot pinpoint, or agree, on what or how music means, but yet its meaning potently matters, that music can, in some contexts, and for some of its participants, be so 'unselving'.<sup>155</sup> And participating in the unselving of music in worship is not simply a work of negation, but may provide active training in '[u]nderstanding how Christ exists radically and exhaustively *for the other*', teaching its participants both more of the congregant next to them in the pew, and of the God who created them.<sup>156</sup> In the places where music extends imaginations and desires beyond the self, allowing its participants to see more clearly the

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<sup>153</sup> Janet, Focus Group 4.

<sup>154</sup> See p. 217.

<sup>155</sup> Soskice, *The Kindness of God*, p. 25.

<sup>156</sup> Williams, *Christ the Heart*, p. 11, emphasis in original.

other as known and loved by God, a remarkable act of hospitality is taking place.

So far, then, I have suggested that music in worship can, for some people, some of the time, be related to imagination, desire, and hospitality. There is, however, a risk in this account – that of instrumentalising musical practices. This is a risk I expressed particular concern about in chapter 5, in the discussion of how music in worship can be both a series of practices, mediations, and assemblages, and serve the purposes of praise, formation, devotion, and sanctification. In this context, I argued that a participatory account – one which sees the first set of claims as a means of participation in the second – risks downplaying the significance of musical practices which do not obviously share in the divine life.<sup>157</sup> A similar critique could be levelled at the account I have given so far in this chapter: that the complex assemblage of music has been tidied into an account of imagination, desire, and hospitality, and is no longer allowed to be investigated on its own unruly terms. There are some critical distinctions between the participatory approach explored in chapter 5 and what I am suggesting here, however. First, my account incorporates a greater range of (unruly) means and ends – from personal memories to interpersonal conflict – and, secondly, it is not my intention that these means and ends are viewed linearly or hierarchically, or taken to be comprehensive. This is because, if knowledge is necessarily related to practice and experience, then the current chapter is not the pinnacle of the thesis. I have made a number of theological claims about music in worship in the previous two chapters, and those presented here are simply a few proposals as to how music in worship might, in some places, some of the time, relate to theological knowledge. But these claims are not superior to the claims made in chapters 5 and 6, and they are not the final theological conclusion on what music in worship is for.

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<sup>157</sup> See pp. 184-85.

I am nonetheless aware that the account I have drawn here, in parallel with the participatory account described in chapter 5, can make music seem an instrument to be utilised, rather than a gift to be appreciated. It may also give disproportionate weight to the formative aspects of music. As Winner observes:

We participate in the Eucharist neither because it forms us in particular ways nor because it habituates us in particular norms. We know this because of the kind of Eucharist we anticipate in heaven. Eschatologically, we will partake of a Eucharist, and – since we will already be perfected – we will be freed from any hope or expectation that it will form us in any way at all.<sup>158</sup>

Although I am wary of drawing a close connection between music and the Eucharist, the same logic can be extended – if music in worship will one day be perfected, it will one day serve no formative function, and therefore formation cannot be its exclusive, or even primary, purpose. And therefore, the account I have drawn in this chapter must also be cautioned, or balanced, by the frequent reminder that music is, at root, a creaturely good. Most simply, with Soskice, ‘It is good for us to eat, laugh, swim, and play musical instruments.’<sup>159</sup> It is good for humans to exist in community together, to make music together, and to enjoy the music they make. Music is a gift, and can be appreciated as such without being instrumentalised, without becoming a means to an end. Doubtless, participating in the goodness of creation through the act of worship is not unrelated to learning more about God’s love for all that God has made. But music needs no purpose other than it being a creaturely good, and this must be implicit in each of the other observations we might wish to make about it.

Needless to say, there are many claims to be made about the nature of music. However, the few observations I have made here should be sufficient to demonstrate my point. Music

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<sup>158</sup> Winner, *Dangers of Christian Practice*, p. 46.

<sup>159</sup> Soskice, *Kindness of God*, p. 161.

can forge theological imaginations, inviting participants to know more of the love of God; music is a way in which some people's desire for God finds expression and plays a role in the right ordering of desire; music may train its participants in hospitality, inviting them into right relationship with one another; and music, most fundamentally, is a great gift, a creaturely good. In ordinary acts of congregational music-making, and indeed in the most extraordinary experiences of music too, there is an *invitation* for congregants to grow into greater awareness of God's love for them and for others, and to embody and inhabit this love towards all creation. And such formation is not secondary to the question of what it means to know God. Such formation is inherently epistemological.

### **Apophesis and Revelation**

Before I conclude this chapter, it is worth acknowledging that the account I have developed here may seem to be running in parallel, rather than in conversation, with the current theological work on music and knowledge of God. This is an inevitable outworking of my subject matter being the knowledge of God conceived as a growth into love, rather than being concerned specifically about doctrine (with Begbie) or with experiences of music that generate 'specific perceptions' in relation to theological questions (as I raised in the introduction to this chapter in relation to Brown and Hopps).<sup>160</sup> However, I do want to briefly note where my account fits in these discussions, and what it might say to the questions Begbie, Brown, and Hopps are asking. I will suggest here that my account is at once more modest, and more expansive, than the current discussion on music and the knowledge of God, and might provide a route out of the seeming impasse between Begbie's analogical approach and Brown and Hopps' advocacy of an experience-based natural theology of music.

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<sup>160</sup> Brown and Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, p. 82.

In a way, my proposal is a modest one. It acknowledges – against charges of specifically musical ineffability – that there is an abundance of meaning in the musical assemblage, from doctrinal resonances to personal memory. And it acknowledges that this range of meanings may have theological import, may be implicated in the processes of formation. What this account does not suggest, however, is that music is a good source for doctrinal knowledge, that music might, in some sense, be a more suitable conversation partner, *a better way of doing theology*, than language. To be clear, I am not opposed to the idea that music, with all its idiosyncrasies, can lend new insight to doctrinal claims, and I am deeply convinced that music is routinely caught up in theology, routinely caught up in the knowledge of God, and routinely caught up in the ways in which people learn more of God’s love for them and for all creation. But my account is, as much as possible in a discussion of knowledge, a theological account *of* music, not a theological account *through* music. This is in part because, in spite of the profound differences between Begbie’s approach and that of Brown and Hopps, both make strikingly positive claims about the nature of God from music.<sup>161</sup> For Begbie, there are clear links to be drawn between analytical claims and the doctrine of the Trinity; for Brown, music is capable of producing a ‘strong sense of order’, ‘a feeling of transcendent otherness’, a recognition of ‘the divine as immanent’, and ‘incorporation’ – each of also makes positive doctrinal claims about the nature of God.<sup>162</sup> And Brown also suggests that music is capable of generating ‘specific perceptions’ such as ‘on the question of suffering.’<sup>163</sup> For both, music is an active conversation partner in doctrinal discussion and in the life of faith, capable of communicating ideas, even ideas about God.

It is not that music cannot do these things *per se*. Although partial and limited in an account

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<sup>161</sup> The specific claims I am addressing in this section appear in Brown’s portion of *Extravagance of Music*, but are accepted by the portion of the book written by Hopps.

<sup>162</sup> Brown and Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, p. 82.

<sup>163</sup> Brown and Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, pp. 82-83.

of meaning, analogies between music and theology can illuminate doctrinal claims. And, while music is a poor conveyer of concept, claim, or idea – which causes problems for Brown’s account – it is nonetheless clear that music is involved in the circulation of meaning. Some of Brown and Hopps’ other claims about musical experience – such as its profound extravagance, and the possibility of incorporation – could also be reconciled with my account; these may indeed be ways in which some people, some of the time, engage with the complex assemblage of music, just as some people, some of the time, may find analogies between music and God theologically generative. But music can do so much more than these things; indeed – as my fieldwork suggests – routinely does more than these things.

In this way, Begbie, Brown, and Hopps are missing something of the vastness and complexity of music. And this is not just a limitation of their work; it is a theological problem. Karen Kilby is pertinent here, asking about ‘the way we ought to conduct ourselves in the presence of that which we cannot grasp.’<sup>164</sup> With reference to a different discipline, she notes that ‘pure mathematics does not offer calculation and control’ but is rather an articulation of ‘the uncontrollability, the non-manipulability, the incalculability, of things.’<sup>165</sup> When we talk of infinity in relation to pure mathematics, ‘it is not that something is grasped and domesticated, but that its ungraspability is intensified – its mysteriousness deepened’.<sup>166</sup> Consequently she asks, ‘Do theology and mystery stand in a competitive relationship, so that the more successful theology is, the smaller the realm of mystery, or perhaps the more *penetrable* the mysterious is; or in a non-competitive relationship, so that the more successfully theology performs its task, the more radically the mysteriousness of its subject matter can be acknowledged?’<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Karen Kilby, *God, Evil and the Limits of Theology* (Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2020), p. 17.

<sup>165</sup> Kilby, *Limits of Theology*, p. 145.

<sup>166</sup> Kilby, *Limits of Theology*, p. 147.

<sup>167</sup> Kilby, *Limits of Theology*, p. 148, emphasis in original.

While music is not pure mathematics, the same logic can be extended. Attempts to pin music down to analytical facts and relate these facts to doctrinal claims risk narrowing both music and the divine, allowing the mysteriousness of God to be in some sense domesticated. And even accounts which emphasise music being involved in divine revelation – whether special or general – risk doing the same, when they lend music *explanatory power*, or reduce music to the communication of ideas, or flatten the complexities of musical meaning. Music may be idiosyncratic, and it may be inscrutable – and depending on the theologian, it may then seem highly appropriate, or highly inappropriate, as a source for doctrinal formulation and as a conversation partner in the life of faith. But wherever music is narrowed to a sum of its parts, or wherever music is a means to a doctrinal end, or wherever the meaning of music is pinned down – wherever, in other words, the nature of God or of human experience becomes *more understandable* through music and musical experience – something has gone wrong, theologically speaking. It is not that music cannot do the things that Begbie, Brown, and Hopps claim; it is that it is very unusual to suppose that music’s primary theological purposes lie in making positive doctrinal claims about the nature of God or – among other things – in generating specific perceptions in relation to human experience. This does not seem consonant with the vast and volatile realities of music and meaning, or with the conversations I had at St Michael and All Angels, St Nicholas’, and Christchurch, or – following Kilby – with the task of theology. Music, as created, may point to its Creator, but only if we allow it to really be music.

My account is much more epistemologically modest in relation to doctrine and specific perceptions. It is an account of how music might be caught up in the life that God’s loving action generates in the world, while adopting a more cautious stance towards the relationship between music and the Trinity, music and divine timelessness, or music and the realities of suffering. But simultaneously, I want to suggest, my account is also much

more expansive than Begbie, Brown, or Hopps would allow – and this is how it can provide a way through their seemingly dichotomised approaches. This is because it incorporates all manner of music, experience, and meaning – going far beyond Hopps’ advocacy for the inclusion of popular music in theological discussion to include music that is out of tune, the process of choosing hymns for a baptism service, and the association between one popular congregational song and a difficult organist. And such an account also looks far more expansively at what it means to know anything of God. This account contends that music, when properly directed, forms part of ‘the primary theological enterprise of right worship or *orthodoxia*’.<sup>168</sup> It is not a secondary matter made significant only through its contributions to doctrine. From playing a hymn on a CD player at a crematorium, to singing action songs in a school hall, to listening to a visiting choir at a cathedral, music is both a creaturely good, and doing something of undeniable theological significance: inviting its participants to further know and inhabit the love of God.

It is in this way – returning slightly closer once again to the debate between Begbie, Brown, and Hopps – that music is capable of truth-telling, and related to revelation. I want to suggest that music need not sketch the outlines of the Trinity or intimate divine timelessness to be involved in truth. As Wynn observes, many recent theories of emotion have tackled the question of how ‘emotions can be “meaningful” (content-bearing) even if not “cognitive” (having a content which can be propositionally articulated).’<sup>169</sup> Music involves more than emotion, but similar questions can be asked about that which does not make propositions (with Kramer) but is nonetheless involved in the circulation of meaning. It is here that Williams’ discussion of truth and revelation – as addressed in chapter 5 – takes on full force in relation to music.<sup>170</sup> It is precisely because music is

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<sup>168</sup> Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, p. 82.

<sup>169</sup> Wynn, *Emotional Experience*, p. 117.

<sup>170</sup> See p. 194.

inscrutable, full of meaning, and capable of interpreting itself that it can tell the truth, in the sense of ‘telling the truth often by indirection, by the admission of difficulty and limitation, and by its own scrutiny of its working and its learning.’<sup>171</sup> As Williams suggests, it is in the ‘distinctively human’ practices of language, incorporating ‘dangerous levels of trust’ and ‘the possibilities of radical error’ that we encounter ‘what is not yet said, what is not sayable, what precedes our understanding and both confirms and challenges specific acts of understanding.’<sup>172</sup> I want to add that it is in the finite, contingent, and risky practices of music that we encounter the necessity and inadequacy of our worship, with Quash, praising the God who is beyond all praise.<sup>173</sup> And it is in this way that ‘the language of “revelation”’, the reality of ‘what we cannot ever in principle control or contain’ ‘*goes with the grain* [...] of our human speaking’, *and goes with the grain of our human music*.<sup>174</sup>

And so, the account I have developed here may at first glance seem to be operating on different terms to the debate between Begbie, Brown, and Hopps – and to some extent it is. But it nonetheless makes a contribution to their discussions. Its more modest contribution is in calling for greater caution, noting the complexities and idiosyncrasies of musical meaning and the risks of cognitivist accounts of theological knowledge. And simultaneously, its more expansive contribution is in a much broader vision, beyond the impasse, of what it means to participate in music and to know anything of God.

## Conclusion

The musical assemblage means something. It is imbued with stories, memories, and acts of sense-making: about ourselves, about others, about the world, and about God. Closely

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<sup>171</sup> Williams, *Edge of Words*, p. 167.

<sup>172</sup> Williams, *Edge of Words*, p. 184.

<sup>173</sup> Quash, *Found Theology*, p. 50.

<sup>174</sup> Williams, *Edge of Words*, p. 184.

related to this idea, but nonetheless distinct from it, is the claim that music tells us something: about ourselves, about others, about the world, and about God. Music does not do this, or at least not primarily, through the straightforward bearing of concepts, texts, or ideas; through the espousing of doctrines; through the generation of specific perceptions in relation to matters of human concern – although it may well be involved in all these areas. But, rather, through the shaping of imaginations, through the forming of desires, and through the provision of training in hospitality, music can invite its participants to perceive, inhabit, and participate further in the love of God for them, and for all creation. None of this negates the fact that music, most fundamentally, is a creaturely good, and nor does it negate the fact that music does not always do these things, or not for everyone, or all the time. But I do want to suggest that it is precisely because music is powerful, significant, and meaningful to us that it is epistemological: precisely because music routinely touches upon matters of human concern that it is so formatively rich. Music – at its most ordinary and extraordinary alike – can invite its participants to draw into greater intimacy with one another and with God, and it is in this learning of and formation in the love of God that knowledge lies.

## 8 – Conclusion

I feel as if I've been on a pilgrimage, or journey, just picking the three hymns, it's been quite amazing[.]<sup>1</sup>

### **Pilgrimage**

In the preceding three chapters of this thesis, we have encountered all but one of the main themes raised in my conversations at St Michael and All Angels, St Nicholas', and Christchurch. Chapter 5 addressed the communality of music in worship, and its materiality: that music in worship is an assemblage of activities, objects, and agents. It concluded that music in worship is a finite, fallible, and risky gift. Chapter 6 expanded on the physicality of music in worship, emphasising its high affective potential. It also considered the deeply personal nature of music in worship – that two congregants will experience one song in profoundly different ways from one another – providing some response to the differing accounts of the role of emotion presented by Sarah and Pauline, and to the observation that music in worship can powerfully assail, while being necessarily intertwined in ordinary life.<sup>2</sup> And chapter 7 examined the relationship between the vastness and variety of musical meaning and the knowledge of God, providing a response to the frequent links made in my fieldwork between music, worship, and normative theological claims. Although the constructive chapters have not been structured around the themes arising from my fieldwork *per se* – music in worship as corporate, personally significant, material, a source of normative reflection, and a gift – I have nonetheless sought

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<sup>1</sup> Janet, Focus Group 4.

<sup>2</sup> Sarah, Focus Group 3; Pauline, Focus Group 4. Sarah articulated the view that the emotional potential of music is central to its role in worship; Pauline contended that hymns do not exist for the benefit of those who sing them. See p. 208.

to give an account of music in worship that responds to them. This is part of providing an account that is recognisably related to ordinary practice.

I have not, however – or not explicitly – referred to the idea of ‘pilgrimage’, as presented by Janet.<sup>3</sup> In the fourth focus group, she told me how the process of choosing three hymns or songs had allowed her to find ‘connections in places that you don’t think’, and had taken her on a ‘pilgrimage, or journey’.<sup>4</sup> Music in worship was, she noted, woven through the ordinary things of life – family, career, and home. But, more than that, it was an *accompaniment* to her life of faith: both present to, and reflective of, a lifetime of experiences of God and all that God has made. The idea of pilgrimage may not have featured explicitly in this thesis, but Janet’s reflections provide some summary of the work of the previous three chapters. I have drawn many likely and unlikely connections between music and other Christian practices, such as language, liturgy, and prayer, and between activities as varied as singing, choosing hymns, and plugging in microphones. I have drawn upon Small, Kramer, Born, and DeNora; Williams, Soskice, Prevot, Turner, Coakley, Wolterstorff, Hauerwas, and Lash – as well as Bogost. And I have suggested that there are meaningful connections to be made between the worship of the angels and the power struggles of a small, but very committed, church choir. In so doing, I have suggested that music in worship has a profound role in the life of faith – at least for some people, some of the time – in its distinctive potential for enabling the body of Christ to perform its life before God, for sanctifying its members, and for allowing them to better inhabit the love of God for them, and for all creation.

Each constructive chapter of this thesis draws its own ‘connections in places that you don’t think’ and makes particular observations about how music in worship is deeply embedded

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<sup>3</sup> Janet, Focus Group 4.

<sup>4</sup> Janet, Focus Group 4.

in, and reflective of, the life of faith and the work of the church. Drawing upon the ontology of music given in chapter 3 – that music is a mediation, an assemblage, and a series of practices – chapter 5 makes connections between the many answers to the questions: what is music in worship? And what is it for? Via Bogost, it gives a flat account of the sorts of answers to these questions that are located in different contexts and disciplines: that it is an act of praise and a site of interpersonal conflict; a participation in the Son’s adoration of the Father and something for which the vicar needs to organise a rota; a form of eschatological anticipation and a sometimes entirely out-of-tune form of collective singing. It also draws connections with language, while asserting that music is nonetheless distinct. Although taking seriously the realities of sin in music in worship, it suggests that human practices like music may be theologically significant, not in spite of their frailty, but in some sense because of it. Music in worship is comprised of ordinary – and sometimes fraught – human activities, and yet plays a significant role in the worship of the church and the lives of many Christians. It is both a gift and ‘something that people do’.<sup>5</sup> It emerges from, and exemplifies, God’s abundant generosity, and fallible human response.

Chapter 6 draws different connections: those between music, glossolalia, and mysticism, and between experiences of total absorption, frustration, and apathy. Observing that music in worship is temporal, dialogic, and excessive, I note here that it is experienced in profoundly different ways by its many practitioners, that it is associated with negative and ambivalent, as well as positive, affect, and that it may seem entirely consonant with the realities of ordinary life, or totally other from them. In an echo of 5, this chapter suggests that the sanctifying work of music in worship is not a by-product of its variegated, creaturely, and affectively complex nature. Participating in congregational singing which

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<sup>5</sup> Small, *Musicking*, p. 2.

is not aesthetically pleasing, or listening to instrumental music with rapt attention, may both be doing productive work in the body of Christ – and, indeed, may both impede the church’s growth in Christlikeness. I also suggest here that experiences of music, whether ordinary or extraordinary, are inseparable from material practices and realities. And they reflect the diversity of human experiences of God: while it is easy to draw distinctions between different experiences, and consider some as the high-points of others, it makes good pneumatological sense to treat them (once again) *flatly*, considering the fruits of musical experiences rather than simply the musical experiences themselves.

Chapter 7 also shows how music in worship is embedded in – and, more explicitly than in chapters 5-6, reflective of – the life of faith and the work of the church. Drawing connections between music and liturgy, analytical approaches to musical meaning, and theological analogy, this chapter suggests that music in worship is associated with a vast array of pluriform meanings, and that these meanings go some way in helping its participants to know and inhabit the love of God. Music in worship, I suggest, can form Christian imaginations – making sense of, and making real, theological claims. Music in worship can also, I suggest, direct desire, providing an analogue for, and giving expression to, desire for God. It can train its participants in hospitality – teaching congregants more of the love of God for the person next to them in the pew as well as for themselves. And, most ultimately, music is a creaturely good. Music in worship may be, as I claim, an unusual source for doctrinal theology: its meanings so volatile and complex that giving it explanatory power does a disservice to both music and doctrine. And yet it is deeply implicated in the individual and corporate pursuit of the knowledge of God.

There are also connections between each of these chapters. After all, chapter 7 hinges on the idea that there is no sharp line between practice, experience, and knowledge: that growing further into the love of God is a practised, embodied, and affective pursuit. And

this is consonant with music in worship being an assemblage of activities, events, objects, and agents, incorporating and comprised by practices, experiences, and knowledge. It has made practical sense to separate these themes, so as to make clearer some observations about a profoundly complex object of study. The unlikely and likely connections between music, language, glossolalia, mysticism, and liturgy; and between theology, musicology, and ordinary practice, form a very messy whole. However, these chapters are not designed to be understood individually or linearly, as if we have ascended through chapters 5-7 from human practice, to experience, to the knowledge of God. They are, perhaps unsurprisingly, designed to be viewed flatly. Musical practice is shaped by and forged through diverse forms of knowledge and experience. Experiences of music – and the way in which they are conceptualised and rationalised – are in some ways the product of knowledge and practice. And it is through practices and experiences of music of many different kinds that Christians learn to inhabit the love of God. These practices and experiences are not overcome or surpassed by knowledge – they are an integral part of the musical whole that makes such knowledge possible, and they are informed by such knowledge.

### **Methodological Reflections**

One methodological outworking of this observation is that – in spite of its usefulness throughout this thesis – it really is very difficult to entirely sustain a distinct theology *of* music, as opposed to a theology *through* music. I have used the distinction to distance myself from analytical claims about music used as analogies for doctrinal propositions, and from the suggestion that music is a straightforward conveyer of ideas, although I have never suggested that the distinction is a clear one. It was perhaps easier to sustain in chapter 5 than in chapter 6, and certainly easier than in chapter 7, where I examined the relationship between music and knowledge explicitly. Yet, if there is an interdependence of practice, experience, and knowledge, then it is necessary to acknowledge the strain this distinction

was placed under throughout the constructive chapters. If practices and experiences are inextricable from knowledge, it follows that there is a necessary interplay between a theology *of* and a theology *through* music.

This has implications for the practices of theology. As Williams notes, ‘The minute calibrations of vocabulary by a sixth-century Byzantine writer [...] seem a long way from a congregation singing “Before the throne of God above”, or “Jesu, Lover of my soul” (or, for a Welsh Christian, “*Iesu, Iesu, ‘rywt ti’n ddigon*”)', and yet ‘To *act* towards Jesus in this way continually presses on us the question of how we are to *speak* – *about* as well as *to* him.’<sup>6</sup> After all, as Higton reflects, the theological tradition ‘is a cacophony of arguments conducted between people all of whom were and are as complex, all of whom were and are as mired in the unchartable marshes of ordinary believing, as anyone else.’<sup>7</sup> This means it is wise to give due recognition to the role of music in worship in theological method, insofar as it informs ordinary belief and animates theological concerns – rather than treating it as a ‘Cinderella subject’.<sup>8</sup> And it means that the current dialogue on theology and music, as represented by Begbie, Brown, and Hopps is profoundly limited. Any discussion of music (in worship) which fails to discuss the diverse objects, events, practices, and experiences of which music is comprised, or which fails to allow these diverse objects, events, practices, and experiences to comprise the discussion, will not only tend to abstraction, but ultimately produce a restricted account of theological knowledge.

This also has implications for the practices of music in worship. As I noted in the introduction, music in worship is called by many names: “liturgical music”, “congregational singing”, or “the worship”, and it is treated differently in different church

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<sup>6</sup> Williams, *Edge of Words*, p. xvi, emphasis in original.

<sup>7</sup> Higton, *Life of Doctrine*, p. 135.

<sup>8</sup> Brown, *Mystery in Words*, p. 73.

contexts, according to variations of style, theology, resource, emphasis, and expertise. But no matter what music in worship is called, the methodological observation I have made here suggests that it is of great theological (as well as personal and ecclesial) significance. This means, for a start, that the act of singing together *matters*, theologically speaking. And it also means, crucially, that the acts of choosing songs for a service, or practising a difficult bass line, or operating the sound system *matter*, theologically speaking. These practices are of importance, and they should be treated as such.

It is also worth mentioning two further methodological products of this thesis – both of which lie outside the scope of this study but nonetheless emerge from it. As I asserted in the introduction, this thesis draws upon musicological resources but answers questions of theological concern about music in worship largely through theological means. However, one fairly natural outworking of this dialogue between theology and musicology is the observation that these musicological resources may have significance for the study of other Christian practices – those which I have identified as having commonalities with music: language, liturgy, and prayer. The second outworking is that theology may be able to offer something *back* to musicology, particularly surrounding discernment.

Take, for example, prayer. As I observed in chapter 6, Turner, Coakley, Jantzen, McIntosh, and Luhrmann are keen to emphasise the practical and social nature of prayer and mysticism: that prayer is corporately learned and rightly directed towards the other; that mystical experiences are part of the fabric of prayer for some people, some of the time; that prayer and mysticism are wrapped up in all manner of ordinary phenomena. Following their lead, it would be possible to give an account of prayer using the framework of mediations and assemblages, as I have done with music. It would be possible to suggest that, when we talk about prayer, we are always talking about a wide range of mediatory phenomena: agents, objects, and activities; leaders, novices, companions, books, images,

liturgies, silence, speaking, listening, histories, discourses, and meanings. We cannot reach beyond them to the prayer itself, because prayer is comprised of these phenomena. And therefore, if we wish to give a theological account of prayer – as it is really enacted and experienced – we must engage with the power dynamics of a spiritual direction relationship, with the political commitments of the congregant leading the intercessions around the time of an election, with the materiality of prayer books and rosaries, as well as with the nature of supplication and the place of silence. In some ways, this would not be a radical departure from Turner, Coakley, Jantzen, McIntosh, and Luhrmann, but it would give them a different sort of language and framework for their concerns. And from this framework there would be all manner of possibilities of the things we could say about prayer; possibilities which bring mediatory phenomena into the theological foreground. This logic could also be extended to language and liturgy, with suitable adaptation. Far from being reductionist or utilitarian, the musicological resources from which I have drawn in this thesis might have rich significance not only to music, but to theological accounts of other Christian practices.

Conversely, theology might offer back to musicology the framework of discernment discussed again in chapter 6. Although sometimes controversial, there is musicological concern for the uses and misuses of music for various social and political ends. Suzanne Cusick, for example, defends the idea that considering music ‘as an acoustical medium for evil’ – focusing particularly on music used in detention settings where ‘music often functions as sheer sound’ – can rightly be considered musicology.<sup>9</sup> John Street writes more broadly on the relationship between music and politics.<sup>10</sup> And, as Kassabian, Witchel and DeNora note, all music does work – even music of which we are scarcely aware. This

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<sup>9</sup> Suzanne G. Cusick, ‘Musicology, Torture, Repair’, *Radical Musicology* 3 (2008) <<http://www.radical-musicology.org.uk/2008/Cusick.htm>> [accessed 5 July 2025], pp. 1-24 (pp. 4 and 5).

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, John Street, *Music and Politics* (Polity, 2012).

research could be extended by the rich set of theological resources discussed in chapter 6 that warn against experiential positivism and encourage a focus on the fruits of powerful experiences. Theology could offer to musicology a series of communal questions: what is music doing? To what (or whom) is it directing attention? What sort of people is it involved in forming? And it could offer a language and framework for, and corporate practices of, discernment. It is worth acknowledging that most musicologists would be likely to envisage very different creaturely ends from the ones I am proposing here. Nonetheless, there is still a possibility of meaningful dialogue between theology and musicology, at least in this area of musicological study.

**‘Can you imagine if we didn’t sing in church?’<sup>11</sup>**

But ultimately, while I believe there to be methodological outworkings of this thesis – and I am keen to emphasise the difference that new musicological contributions have made to this account – they are not my primary concern. My interest is in the observation that every Sunday, and often midweek too, Christians engage in a series of activities that might be described as music in worship. From chanting psalms to leading a worship set, through choosing songs and arguing about style, in churches, cathedrals, chapels, convents, and crematoria, Christians make music. These activities are not ubiquitous: not all Christians sing and not all services involve music – even if this fact might prompt some disbelief in contexts like St Michael and All Angels, St Nicholas’, and Christchurch. But where Christians do make music, it is often of the utmost importance to them: after all, it forms part of their worship.

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<sup>11</sup> Sarah, Focus Group 3.

The account I have drawn of music in worship has been rationalised in various ways over the course of the thesis: as more ontologically convincing than works-based approaches, as more ethically acceptable than the hierarchical accounts of music that have plagued musicology and theology alike; as closer to ordinary practice – as articulated by my conversations at St Michael and All Angels, St Nicholas’, and Christchurch. But even while this thesis makes most sense in relation to these rationales, my hope is that it does not need them: that the account I have given in chapters 5-7 makes a positive contribution to discussions of music in worship in its own right.

I have suggested here that music in worship is a finite and fallible assemblage, provoking a vast array of responses, and taking on a range of meanings. I have suggested it is comprised by some extraordinary activities, and some mundane ones – from singing together in one accord to arguing bitterly about employment practices in relation to the lead singer. I have suggested that it is not always enjoyable or easy – although, for some people, some of the time, it may be breath-taking. I have suggested that it is susceptible to sin. And I have suggested that it is of profound significance to the life of faith and the work of the church, at least in the contexts where it is found. However imperfectly, it is involved in helping the body of Christ to enact its life before God, in sanctification, and in helping those who participate in it to know more of the God whom they worship. It is little wonder that Sarah (from whom the title of this final section is taken) simply could not imagine the life of her church without music.

It is worth acknowledging that the sheer breadth of the subject matter of this thesis may, at some points, have felt slightly bewildering. There is frequent movement between musical styles and contexts, and between activities often perceived to be “musical” and those frequently (though mistakenly) regarded as “extra-musical”. The definitive statement of new musicology – McClary’s ‘I am no longer sure what MUSIC is’ – may have taken on

additional significance since it was introduced in chapter 3.<sup>12</sup> And yet, the conclusions of this thesis should not be a surprise, theologically speaking. Not only do they echo theological writings on other Christian practices, but they are also entirely consonant with Carol Harrison's summary of Augustine's theology of music. In this thesis, I have contended too, that music (in worship) 'is of God, from God and returns us to God.'<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> McClary, *Feminine Endings*, p. 19.

<sup>13</sup> Carol Harrison, *On Music, Sense, Affect and Voice* (T&T Clark, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2019), p. 43.

## Appendix 1 – Participant Information Sheet

**Project title: A Study of Congregational Singing in Church of England Parish Churches**

**Researcher(s):** Lydia Padfield

**Department:** Theology and Religion

**Contact details:** [...]

**Supervisor name:** Pete Ward

**Supervisor contact details:** [...]

You are invited to take part in a study that I am conducting as part of my PhD project at Durham University. I am looking at what congregational singing means to those worshipping in Church of England parish churches. This study has received ethical approval from the Arts and Humanities Ethics Committee of Durham University.

Before you decide whether to agree to take part it is important for you to understand the purpose of the research and what is involved as a participant. Please read the following information carefully. Please get in contact if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

For your information, the rights and responsibilities of anyone taking part in Durham University research are set out in our 'Participants Charter':

<https://www.dur.ac.uk/research.innovation/governance/ethics/considerations/people/charter/>

### **What is the purpose of the study?**

This study is looking at what congregational singing means to those worshipping in Church of England parish churches. I will be asking questions about your experiences of congregational singing. This is part of my broader PhD project which is looking at theologies of music in worship – an area that I think is hugely important to the worshipping life of the Church.

This study will take place between April and August 2022, and will be written up as part of my PhD thesis in 2025.

### **Why have I been invited to take part?**

You have been invited because you are a regular congregant at an average-sized Church of England parish church.

### **Do I have to take part?**

Your participation is voluntary and you do not have to agree to take part. If you do agree to take part, you can withdraw at any time, without giving a reason. Your rights in relation to withdrawing any data that is identifiable to you are explained in the accompanying Privacy Notice.

### **What will happen to me if I take part?**

If you agree to take part in the study, I will invite you and two other members of the congregation to meet for an hour in a building used by your church to discuss your

experiences of congregational singing. In order to start the discussion, I will ask you to bring with you three hymns or worship songs that are particularly special to you. There will be an option to sing these hymns and songs with piano accompaniment, but this is strictly optional. You will not be encouraged to share any more than you feel comfortable with, and you may omit answers to any questions. I will make an audio recording of the group discussion which will be stored securely – there is more information about this below.

Following this, I will ask some participants to expand on their experiences in a one-to-one interview lasting for approximately half an hour on a day and time of their convenience. The interview will be conversational, so there will be space for you to elaborate on the areas that you feel most comfortable in. I will also record this interview. You do not have to accept an invitation to the interview if I contact you.

Please note that there is no reimbursement for taking part.

### **Are there any potential risks involved?**

The small group and interview questions will ask about personal experiences of congregational singing and experiences of faith. If questions in these areas will make you feel uncomfortable, you are advised not to take part. If you do participate, there will be no encouragement to share more than you wish to, or pressure to answer any questions.

### **Will my data be kept confidential?**

Please be assured that all information obtained during the study will be kept confidential. If I publish any element of the interview in the final PhD, a pseudonym will be used. The

name of your Church will also be changed. During the research process, only my PhD supervisors Pete Ward, Mike Highton and Frances Clemson will be access to this information. Permission will be obtained to use direct quotes from interviews.

Before submitting my PhD for publication, I will also contact you with the draft, so that you can request edits, deletions or changes in my telling of our discussion. I will store your data throughout on a password protected computer, backed up on a password protect USB stick. Once the project is completed and revised, all the original records of the discussion will be destroyed, although anonymised data will be retained for 10 years.

Full details are included in the accompanying Privacy Notice.

### **What will happen to the results of the project?**

Results are expected to be published in the final PhD thesis. The predicted submission date is 2025.

No personal data will be shared, however anonymised (i.e. not identifiable) data may be used in publications, reports, presentations, web pages and other research outputs. At the end of the project, anonymised data may be archived and shared with others for legitimate research purposes.

All research data and records needed to validate the research findings will be stored for 10 years after the final submission (after corrections) of the PhD thesis.

Durham University is committed to sharing the results of its world-class research for public benefit. As part of this commitment the University has established an online

repository for all Durham University Higher Degree theses which provides access to the full text of freely available theses. The study in which you are invited to participate will be written up as a thesis. On successful submission of the thesis, it will be deposited both in print and online in the University archives, to facilitate its use in future research. The thesis will be published open access.

**Who do I contact if I have any questions or concerns about this study?**

If you have any further questions or concerns about this study, please speak to the researcher or their supervisor. If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please submit a complaint via the University's Complaints Process.

Thank you for reading this information and considering taking part in this study.

## Appendix 2 – Privacy Notice

Durham University's responsibilities under data protection legislation include the duty to ensure that we provide individuals with information about how we process personal data. We do this in a number of ways, one of which is the publication of privacy notices. This privacy notice provides a general description of the broad range of processing activity in addition there are tailored privacy notices covering some specific processing activity.

To ensure that we process your personal data fairly and lawfully we are required to inform you:

- Why we collect your data
- How it will be used
- Who it will be shared with

We will also explain what rights you have to control how we use your information and how to inform us about your wishes. Durham University will make the Privacy Notice available via the website and at the point we request personal data.

Our privacy notices comprise two parts – a generic part (ie common to all of our privacy notices) and a part tailored to the specific processing activity being undertaken.

### **PART 1 – GENERIC PRIVACY NOTICE**

**Please access our General Privacy Notice online.**

### **PART 2 – TAILORED PRIVACY NOTICE**

This section of the Privacy Notice provides you with the privacy information that you need to know before you provide personal data to the University for the particular purpose(s) stated below.

**Project Title:** A Study of Congregational Singing in Church of England Parish Churches

**Type(s) of personal data collected and held by the researcher and method of collection:**

Personal data will be collected through small group discussions and interview. This will include your name, your experience of congregational singing, and your experiences of faith/religious views. Audio recordings will be made of our discussions and interviews.

**Lawful Basis:**

Under data protection legislation, we need to tell you the lawful basis we are relying on to process your data. The lawful basis we are relying on is public task: the processing is necessary for an activity being carried out as part of the University's public task, which is defined as teaching, learning and research.

- *For further information see*

*<https://durham.ac.uk/research.innovation/governance/ethics/governance/dp/legalbasis/>*

Personal data revealing religious or philosophical beliefs is special category data. Explicit consent is the additional condition for processing this data.

### **How personal data is stored:**

All personal data will be held securely and strictly confidential to the research team, comprising Lydia Padfield (the researcher), Pete Ward, Mike Higton and Frances Clemson (supervisors).

Your data will be anonymised. You will be allocated an anonymous number for data collection. Information that identifies you will be kept separate from the anonymised data.

All personal data in electronic form will be stored on a password protected computer and backed up on a password protected USB stick. Any hardcopies will be kept in locked storage. Data will not be available to anyone outside the research team.

Discussions will be recorded and stored on an encrypted device until it has been transcribed by the researcher. No-one else will have access to the recording, and it will be erased once the transcript has been completed.

### **How personal data is processed:**

Personal data is being collected to understand what congregational singing means to those worshipping in Church of England parish churches.

Information will be entered into a database for analysis. After the PhD thesis is submitted and corrected, all the original records (including any information which can identify you personally) will be destroyed.

*Recorded conversations will be transcribed by the researcher, and personal information will be coded and anonymised. The original recording will then be erased.*

### Withdrawal of data

You can remove your consent at any time and your data will be withdrawn from the project.

### **Who the researcher shares personal data with:**

Personal data, such as direct quotes from interviews or summaries of views expressed, may be published in my PhD thesis. You will be given a pseudonym and identifying details such as the name of your Church, will be given a pseudonym too.

Permission for inclusion of quotes and summaries of views will be obtained via consent forms. Before the PhD thesis is published, you will be contacted and given the option to see how your data has been included. You may request revisions and deletions.

Please be aware that if you disclose information which indicates the potential for serious and immediate harm to yourself or others, the research team may be obliged to breach confidentiality and report this to relevant authorities. This includes disclosure of child

protection offences such as the physical or sexual abuse of minors, the physical abuse of vulnerable adults, money laundering, or other crimes covered by prevention of terrorism legislation. Where you disclose behaviour (by yourself or others) that is potentially illegal but does not present serious and immediate danger to others, the researcher will, where appropriate, signpost you to relevant services, but the information you provide will be kept confidential (unless you explicitly request otherwise).

### **How long personal data is held by the researcher:**

Personal data will be held until the PhD thesis is submitted and corrected. At the end of the project, anonymised data may be archived and shared with others for legitimate research purposes. All research data and records needed to validate the research findings will be stored for ten years after submissions and correction.

### **How to object to the processing of your personal data for this project:**

If you have any concerns regarding the processing of your personal data, or you wish to withdraw your data from the project, contact Lydia Padfield on [...]

### **Further information:**

Lydia Padfield (researcher)

[...]

Pete Ward (supervisor)

[...]

## Appendix 3 – Consent Form

**Project title:** A Study of Congregational Singing in Church of England Parish Churches

**Researcher(s):** Lydia Padfield

**Department:** Theology and Religion

**Contact details:** [...]

**Supervisor name:** Pete Ward

**Supervisor contact details:** [...]

This form is to confirm that you understand what the purposes of the project, what is involved and that you are happy to take part. Please initial each box to indicate your agreement:

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated ___/___/___ and the privacy notice for the above project.	
I have had sufficient time to consider the information and ask any questions I might have, and I am satisfied with the answers I have been given.	
I understand who will have access to personal data provided, how the data will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the project. I understand that anonymised (i.e. not identifiable) versions of my data may be archived and shared with others for legitimate research purposes.	
I agree to take part in the above project.	

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.	
I confirm that personal data revealing my religious or philosophical beliefs (special category data) may be collected.	
I consent to being audio recorded.	
I understand that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, and other research outputs. I understand that a pseudonym will be used.	

Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

(NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS) \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

(NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS) \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 4 – Debriefing Sheet

### Debriefing Sheet

#### **Project title: A Study of Congregational Singing in Church of England Parish Churches**

Thank you for taking part in this study. This research is into what congregational singing means to those worshipping in Church of England parish churches.

In writing the study all data will be anonymised, and your individual data will not be available to anyone outside the research team. I will contact you before submitting my PhD to discuss how I have used your data. You will be able to request revisions and deletions at this stage. You are also able to withdraw your data at any point before submission.

If you would like further information about the study or would like to know about what my findings are when all the data have been collected and analysed then please contact me at [...].

Thank you again for your participation.

## Appendix 5 – Transcript Excerpts

*Note: references to each hymn discussed in the excerpts can be found in the Musical Citations section, pp. 380-85.*

### **5a: Focus Group 1 – 13<sup>th</sup> July, 2022**

#### **Excerpt 1:**

Lydia: So, erm, would anyone like to kick us off by telling us one of their favourite hymns – erm – or songs, and we'll look it up in the hymn book and have a little look through. And why you've chosen it?

Ann: Well mine, my – erm – one of my favourite ones is number 19, 'All my hope on God is founded', which says it all I think.

[Pause]

Lydia: Let's find it, excellent...Amazing, why did you choose that today?

[Pause]

Ann: Well because it says everything.

Lydia: [Laughs]

Ann: Erm, you know – erm – 'All my hope on God is founded, he doth still my trust renew, me through change and chance he guideth, only good and only true. God

unknown, he alone, calls my heart to be his own'...Erm, so I think that, that says everything [Lydia: that says it all] about you know what, what I believe and how – erm – God guides me in my life.

**Excerpt 2:**

Julian: And the, I'm just thinking the words are all very well but without, sometimes without the music...the words don't altogether mean a lot, and you hear that, erm, what have I got here...[*singing*] 'Now is eternal life, if risen with Christ we stand'. And the music [Ann: mm] takes you to a place where the words themselves, you know, you may be poetically inclined, and able to delve into that, but somehow the music [Edith: mm] – as you say – goes straight somewhere else.

Edith: It's funny though, when I look back at school, 'cause we still had assemblies then every day...and the, and the hymns we sang like, you know, 'He who would valiant be', and 'Onward Christians soldiers', and 'The day thou [*Indistinguishable*; Julian: yes]' it's very often just one word you can remember from a hymn [Julian: yes]. I can remember pilgrim 'cause I thought that was, isn't it funny?

Ann: 'All things bright and beautiful'.

Edith: Ah, yeah, yeah

Ann: Think I'd like that at my funeral, I don't know why.

Edith: That's interesting Lydia...er, how, how many people choose it for a wedding [2: yeah] and somebody very cynically said to me [...] well it's probably because it's the only one they can remember from when they were [Julian: absolutely, yes you're right, yes].

Ann: Perhaps they've sung it at school [Edith: yes, yes, yes] and you know, 'cause [Lydia: yeah]-

**Excerpt 3:**

Ann: Mm, this is probably why in...you know, some of these free churches you get like hundreds of young people there with their hands in the air [Edith: mm] and, and, you know, there's guitars and the, you know, i- it's...the music doesn't seem like churchy music but they're praising God you know...umm...

Julian: But so often the words are straight biblical texts [Ann: yes, yeah] and then, you know, and in places that maybe, you know, a translation that we wouldn't necessarily be used to, but a biblical text. And it's absolutely brilliant [Ann: yeah], it's engaging-

Ann: That, that's it, and you get like...a lot of young people there don't you, where we don't [laughs] here, and you know, you think well why d...a, and I sometimes think it's, it's the music and...y'know the informality of, erm [Ann: yeah]...you know they seem to be able to sort of...like we sit in our pews with our hymn books but, y'know, their hands are in the air, they're jigging about and it's...it's a different way of praising God isn't it? [Edith: mm].

Julian: But it's also use of space, and they probably have all the words up on screens around the building [Ann: yes, yeah], whereas the buildings like this one...where would you put the screen, or three?

Ann: Well we have thought about it [laughs]...[Julian: sorry?] We have thought about it [Julian: I bet you have]...screens and that, but it's just...it would be a difficult place to,

erm, to put them. Erm, I mean, it would have to come up from up there somehow, and it would cost a lot of money [Edith: mm] to...to do it.

Edith: What you were saying about texts then...I'm still now sud-, suddenly realising that a, a piece of a hymn is a, is a text, still find new bits that I haven't [Julian: oh yeah] realised, yeah...It's nice, I like that.

## Appendix 5b: Focus Group 2 – 23<sup>rd</sup> July, 2022

### Excerpt 1:

Roger: Yeah right well erm, there's loads of hymns I enjoy singing in church but I was in a [...] choir and we, we sang some hymns there which sort of...meant I've sung them an awful lot. 'The Lord's my Shepherd' [Anthony: yeah; Lydia: mmm] but not to 'Crimond' [Lydia: yep]. Er, I can think of about four different tunes like [*singing*] 'The Lord's my shepherd I'll not want, he makes me'...Brother, 'Brother James' Air' I think [Lydia: mm]. Then there's the- the new, newer tune that came out. Erm, I can't just think of it, you probably can. [Pause]...Er...

Lydia: I can just only think of 'Crimond' now [laughter].

Roger: Yeah.

Lydia: It's the only one we ever sing at my home church but you're right there is a new one. I've sung it once.

Roger: And we have in the choir sung the Howard Goodmore tune [pause]...er, can't think of that either, I will do. [Pause] Then, er, going on to another one. Actually the, the, the three I've chosen all have multiple tunes [Lydia: mm], erm, and I've sung all four tunes in most cases. Er [pause] er, 'were the whole realm of nature mine'... 'When I survey' [Lydia: 'When I survey'] the wondrous cross, which you know to a tune Rimmington, I think. [*Singing*] 'The Lord...erm, when I survey [Lydia: yep] the wondrous cross'. Now we had a chap who [...] was mad keen on an alternative tune which nobody sings [Anthony: mm]. [*Singing, upbeat*] 'When I survey the wondrous cross, on which the prince of glory died' [Anthony: That's the Salvation Army one isn't

it] probably. [Anthony: Sounds like it]. [Laughter]...It's called Job. But in [...] choir we sang a Welsh tune called *Morte Christe*. [Pause]. [*Singing*] 'When I survey the wondrous cross, on which the prince of glory died'. It was just lovely [Lydia: yeah]. But we never sing that one [Anthony: yeah] in church.

Anthony: So what you're saying really is that you're going for the tune rather than the actual hymn.

### **Excerpt 2:**

Lydia: H-, how does it feel to sing hymns in church? Either when the church is full or when the church is quite empty [...] What does that feel like, I suppose?

Roger: Yeah it's good to be doing things together, it's, it's so sad though that harmony...well in, in the Anglican church harmony's almost gone, nobody seems to sing harmony [Anthony: no] We occasionally go to erm, a parish church [...] on the [...] coast [...] and yeah they've got a choir and they all used to sing harmony but not anymore [Roger: no].

Anthony: 'Cause it's not taught in chur-...schools now [*Indistinguishable*] [Roger: no]...and is it? I find it sad that you go for a funeral service and you have the words printed out and the number of people that just don't sing because they don't know how to...erm, that's if they do have hymns.

Roger: I, I have problems with some of these new ones, you know, they, they start straight away [Anthony: yes] 'we'll sing this', I don't know this [Anthony: yeah] you know. But sometimes you can join in and sometimes you can't.

Anthony: Yes. I think one of the ones I don't particularly like now is 'All things bright and beautiful'. I think it's...

Roger: You're not the only one! [Lydia: laughter]. We can always have the alternative tune.

Anthony: Yes.

**Excerpt 3:**

Lydia: Um, so my third question, which might develop out a bit, which is, if you had to explain to someone who doesn't go to church why we sing, what would you say?

[Pause, sigh, laughter].

Anthony: It's...it's to do I think with praising [Lydia: mm] the Lord, umm and letting your emotions sort of convey...the... well his creation and his love for us I think, thinking about it, there's a...and also, it, it's nice to [Anthony or Roger: belt out?]

Roger: And it's, it's singing and where do you sing nowadays [Anthony: yeah] you know....

Anthony: Yeah I think that's...[Pause] No I, you know, I, I, I do enjoy especially when it goes to a tune that I can remember from years ago [Roger: of course] and a hymn from years ago, erm, and it took some while to get used to sort of the Methodist hymns [...]

Roger: Oh when we came here, we had the Church of England people, the Methodist people, and the organist was a Baptist! [Laughter] So we often think, sometimes nobody knew the tunes [Anthony: yeah].

## Appendix 5c: Focus Group 3 – 23<sup>rd</sup> July, 2022

### Excerpt 1:

Rebecca: Erm, and my next favourite hymn is ‘My Jesus’ ‘cause I always, I often sing that to myself and I think when I’m singing that I want to be close to Jesus. Erm, ‘Lord there is none like you’ [general: yeah], so I often sing that, I sing it in the shower, ‘cause I mean I can’t sing, you know [Sarah: *whispering* she can, *louder*, she can; general laughter]. So I do, and I lo-, I love that hymn and it, it, it tells me that Jesus is so powerful and every time I need him he’s going to be there, er, and the power that it brings. And I feel when I need Jesus I sing that hymn to myself, and the words, I can remember quite a lot of the words. Erm, so that, that’s good. So I, I do treasure that hymn, I would like, when I, at my funeral I would like that hymn.

Sue: Ooh! [*Indistinguishable*; general laughter]. I won’t be there!

Rebecca: I do like that one. Erm, and the next one is ‘Great is the Lord’. I love that hymn as well. Erm, and the words to that always remind me that there is heaven, erm, ‘the city of the God, my holy place, the holy place.’ [General: mmm] And that kind of tells me that this is heaven, the gates of heaven, the gates to heaven. So, I, I sort of really cherish that hymn, I love the-, the lyrics to it, and that I’m thankful to God for everything, erm, but yeah, it’s the gates to heaven, and that, that kind of brings heaven to me, when I hear that hymn [Sue: mm]. So they’re my favourite hymns, I have other, loads of other hymns that I, I do like, but they’re my three favourites. I do like ‘The Lord’s Prayer’, especially Andrea Bocelli [Sarah and Sue: ooh] singing that, I find that very moving [Sarah and Sue: yeah]. Erm, yes, so I do love that one [...] and the other one I’m particularly fond of but I can’t remember the name of it, it’s a very ancient hymn. It was played during the early, the early Christians erm, you know way back, anci-, ancient hymn. We have sung it in

church, we don't sing it very often; I can't remember the name of it but I find it quite moving [Sue: *indistinguishable*]. I tried to google it this morning and I couldn't find it but it's a very ancient hymn.

Sarah: Can you remember any of the words?

Rebecca: No, no I can't remember the words.

Sarah: You've got me thinking now! [General laughter; *indistinguishable*]

Rebecca: It's the tune, it's a hau-, a haunting type of tune, erm.

### **Excerpt 2:**

Sue: An expression of joy and praise. Praise really [Lydia: yeah] isn't it, giving glory to God. But they wouldn't understand that, erm...[sigh]

Sarah: It's just an essential part of *worship* [Sue: yeah]. I, I don't know how you could worship God without [Rebecca: singing; John: mm] without singing music [general: yeah] because it sort of generates all those emotions [Lydia: yeah] and, and for me it makes me feel more connected to God I think? You know.

John: One of the things in our last church [...] they used to use a lot of modern stuff and they had a band and everything, er, and er one of the things that got me [...] after the first hymn they would be really...the atmosphere would be so intense [general: mmm] and so like, emotional you know what I mean? [Sarah: yeah].

Sue: But that's hard to explain to people [John: it is] who don't go to church [John: yeah] isn't it?

John: Yeah it, it drums up this atmosphere that you just feel as though you're all one [Rebecca: yeah], and, and God's with us and yeah, it's a...

Sarah: But if you understand the power of music, which I think, I don't know many people that don't, then you can translate that I suppose. 'Cause if you go to, if you go to a concert for example [Sarah?: yeah] I'd got, it was a Meat Loaf...thing on Meat Loaf by candlelight and it was really good 'cause I like rock music. So I was up dancing, everyone was up dancing [...] singing 'Bat Out of Hell' [general laughter] and it, and it was great. Do you know what I mean? It was great. But you could see everyone was enjoying themselves [John: yes], everybody knows the words, so, if you can understand...[Rebecca: that] that feeling [general: yeah], you can translate it into a religious context [general: yeah].

Rebecca: That's a good way of putting it [*Indistinguishable*, general agreement].

Sue: So we could say it's an expression of joyful praise to God?

Sarah: Yeah!

Sue: Yeah, that's what we'd say.

### **Excerpt 3:**

Lydia: [...] If we have about five minutes left can I ask, this is a subsidiary question which I know we've talked a bit about, but erm we don't always have time for in the

discussions, but I think we might have time for. Which is, do you sense God when you sing in church? And can you say a little bit about what that feels like? I know that's a much harder question to answer, and it might be a lot more personal, so don't, don't share if you don't want to. But if we, since we have five minutes I thought I would ask it, if you might be happy to comment on it.

*Simultaneously and immediately* Sarah: Def-; Sue: Not always

Sarah: S-, sometimes [Rebecca: yes!], it depends! [John: yeah] If the singing is bad and the organ playing is slow, *no!* [General laughter] 'Cause I just get irritated! [Sue: well it depends on-]

Rebecca: If everything's just right [John: yeah] and the words are there [Sarah: yeah! Sue: yes!] it hits, yeah, you feel it, yeah [Sarah: *yeah*].

Sue: We, we had that lovely hymn on Sunday 'To sit at your feet Lord' [John: yes; Sarah: yeah; Rebecca: yeah that's nice; *Indistinguishable*] that's, that's real presence of God time and it's lovely. And I like hymns that I can sing with my eyes closed. 'Dear Lord and Father of mankind' [general: yeah] – I sing that one when I'm at the dentist. [*singing with mouth closed:*] 'Dear Lord and Father' [General laughter]. Because it calms me, and I sing that again I know the verses to that 'cause I sung it for so many years [Sarah: yeah, yeah] erm I can sing that with my eyes closed, and 'O sabbath rest by Galilee' yeah, [Sarah: yeah] then it really, I can feel God's presence then. Erm, but not, not every time by any means for me [Sarah: no, no] [*Indistinguishable*] everybody else.

Rebecca: Not every time. No, no.

Sarah: I think I get easily distracted, like I say if I think, 'cause I think 'oh that's, that's not going quick enough, that's not what's written in the music [Sue: yes] I get too drawn into the detail of it, and I think 'oh why's the singing rubbish this morning?' [General laughter].

## Appendix 5d: Focus Group 4 – 24<sup>th</sup> July, 2022

### Excerpt 1:

Gary: I, I think one of my favourite hymns is er ‘Morning has broken’ [Lydia: mm, Pauline: oh yes]. ‘Cause I think Cat Stevens put that on the, on the radio and records and stuff didn’t he, and er at the age when I was [Lydia: mm] very vulnerable to that sort of thing. Erm, and I-, at first I thought it was a pop song, and only subsequently I found it’s actually a hymn. And it also I think it speaks a lot about, er to me now, the earth [Lydia: mm], you know, ‘morning has broken, [erm] [door slamming] blackbird has spoken [tearing up] you know’, bringing [Lydia: yeah, yeah, yeah], sorry I get teary when I think about it [Janet: it is emotional; it is emotional; Pauline: yes, yes].

Janet: I feel as if I’ve been on a pilgrimage [Lydia and Gary: yeah], or journey, just picking the three hymns [Gary: yes; Lydia: laughs], it’s been quite amazing [Lydia: yeah; Pauline: difficult] yeah, amazing, amazing [Gary: yeah].

Lydia: And they often have different resonance at different times, and they pick up resonance don’t they, I think [Gary: yeah; Janet: yes, yeah, yes that’s right], yeah.

Janet: Yes it’s part of your childhood, it’s part of who you are [Lydia: yeah; Pauline: yes]. Just think back and you, especially in the pandemic I think but, but before then, even before then, it, it is, it is joyful to sing, it is, it is [Lydia: yeah]. It’s something about singing [Gary: mm] that’s fundamental. I think the Greeks have that word, er *theos* means God I think, and enthusiasm, when I feel enthusiastic about something I feel God’s presence. Singing [Pauline: yeah] is important [Pauline: yeah; Gary: mm, mm; Lydia: yeah, yeah, yeah], not just in church but outside of church [Lydia: mm], yeah.

Lydia: That's one of my later questions so thank you [laughs] [Janet: yes]. I might close that door so we won't be disturbed.

Gary: There, there's another hymn that er, I don't know what the words are but the tune I cannot get out of my head [Janet: oh right]. Which is [*humming*]...what's the first line? [Janet: bit more? Bit more?] [*humming*]. Now what's the first line [Lydia: not sure] is it not Christ by something or other, [*humming*] 'by heaven adored' is that? Something like that? I'm amazed [laughs].

Pauline: The tune rings a bell [Gary: yes] I can't quite [Lydia: sounds familiar]

### **Excerpt 2:**

Lydia: What do you think the difference is between singing in church and singing outside of church? What do you think makes singing in church different, perhaps? Or, or perhaps it's exactly the same.

Janet: Well 'cause you feel you belong, 'cause you, you're with people who are like-minded I suppose [Lydia: yeah].

Pauline: That would apply to other situations [Janet: situations, that's right] wouldn't it [Janet: yeah]. That sort of belonging [Janet: yes].

Gary: I suppose the acoustics of the church might make a difference?

Janet: Yes, yes [Pauline: mm]. I mean in the pandemic erm someone sent me er...a person singing in one place, and then another one joined, and then it was like a choir but it was one, and then another [Pauline: yes] and then another [Pauline: yes], well it built

up, built up, and it was so comforting [Pauline: yes]. ‘Cause people were together, that was the way that they found [Pauline: yes], somebody was strong wanted to get that choir, and they di-, they were determined to do it [general: yes]. And it was powerful, it, it was powerful. Each voice added to it [Gary: yeah], and I think that’s right ‘cause it’s a community [Pauline: yes, yeah], we’re all, we’ve got faults and everything but w-, we’re building a community. Good or bad and...[Gary: yeah] and as long as we’re together, I think we need to be together in some shape or form [Pauline and Gary: yeah] to...I think look after each other.

Pauline: I think that, yes, applies in other contexts [Janet: yes] *as well* sort of to do [Lydia: yeah] with the power of *music* itself [Janet: yes]. You know, there’s nothing that [*Indistinguishable*] that hasn’t got music [Lydia: yeah, yeah, yeah] and music and singing is a thing we can all [Lydia: yeah]...do [Janet: yes], we all can’t play an instrument [Lydia: mm] but we can sing. It’s a form of music-making.

Janet: Well our voice is an instrument isn’t it...our, our, is an instrument.

Pauline: Yes, something we’ve all got.

Janet: It’s like [*Indistinguishable*] monks chanting [Pauline: yeah] didn’t they, they began to chant that’s what they did, they’re chanting [Pauline: yeah, yeah; Gary mm]. *Chanté*, to sing yeah [Lydia: yeah, yeah].

Lydia: I might see if I can shut this door again, sorry for all the distractions! [Pauline: that’s alright!] pre-service [*Indistinguishable*] [Pauline: yes, and-]

**Excerpt 3:**

Pauline: But not all services have hymns.

Lydia: No, they don't. So what, what, yeah what's the role of them if they're not there?

*[Indistinguishable]*

Pauline: Some people would go because there aren't hymns.

*[Background talking]*

Lydia: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Janet: Yes, that's right.

Lydia: I've had –

Gary: I can't, I can't, I can't get my head round that [Pauline: oh I can!; Lydia: laughs]  
because I think music, music is emotional [Pauline: yes, exactly], it speaks to our  
emotions [Pauline: yes, yes]. *[Indistinguishable]*

Pauline: But that doesn't mean it has to be there all the time.

Gary: Yes, to not have that is like...*[Indistinguishable conversation]*

Lydia: Yeah, what do you think the role of silence, the place of silence is?

*[Pause]*

Gary: The place of sorry?

Lydia: The place of silence?

Pauline: Silence! [Lydia and Gary: silence] It's a big fat sort of gap in the very busy lives [Janet: oh yes], and loads of words [Lydia: yeah] in a service [Gary: mm, mm]. Just, it's very rare [Pauline and Lydia: mm; Janet: yes]...Silence, and in services [Lydia: mm] it's very rare [Gary: mm] [*Indistinguishable*].

Janet: You want to fill it don't you, silence [Lydia: yeah; Pauline: yes]. It's a bit like a stare, y-, you can look at someone [Pauline: yeah] but if you're looking at someone for more than four, four seconds I think it is [Pauline: yeah], it becomes a stare so, it, so I [Pauline: yeah]...I'm a shy person so I start to, I, I don't want to i...insult...I su-, I think silence is a bit like that 'cause I'm terrible for filling a silence! [Pauline: yeah; Gary: chuckles]. But, and I'm, but I'm getting stronger at it [general laughter] because, because the silence has more powerful than...[Pauline: yeah] it allows...the space.

Pauline: The silence is part of music as well [Janet: yes, yes]. You know you couldn't not have silence in music [Janet: yes, 'cause-; Lydia: mm], not sort of everything going on [Janet: you're right] at the same time [Janet: the rhythm and the] It's, it's part of it, it's [Janet: yes you're right!], it's not the opposite [Gary: yeah, yeah].

## Appendix 5e: Focus Group 5 – 31<sup>st</sup> July, 2022

### Excerpt 1:

Robert: Right, 563, ‘O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder [Heather: mm...gosh], consider all the works thy hand hath made.’ Ahhhhh! [General laughter] Ahh it’s just...this is wonderful stuff, erm...it’s the love of creation [Heather: mmhmm], and to some extent loving God for me is loving what he has done. What he’s made. Erm, what he’s given to us to be our, our temporary abode [Heather: mmhmm]. Erm...but I think this actually...? Didn’t this come from Russia? I think this was a missionary working in Russia...and he wrote this for his converts. Erm, in that growing little church that it, that he planted. And it, I mean it is a missional hymn, if, if you look at it and see how the created order of things actually reflects God’s own glory...erm...‘I scarce can take it in, that on the cross my burden gladly bearing, he bled and died to take away my sin.’ [Heather: mm] Ahh, ‘how great thou art, how great thou art.’ [Heather: indeed].

Erm, 777....Ahhh, oh yes, mm, I’m going to pause for a moment and come back to what you said about lockdown [Heather: mm]. It was just so *awful*, it, it felt so shallow now th-, th-, there was...there was an early father of the church, I think it might have been St Augustine, who wrote something like ‘he who sing prays twice.’ [Heather: yes] Erm...and...it is possible [Heather: mmhmm] to be a Christian on your own [...] but there are times when coming together with other Christians [Heather: mmhmm]...is actually a big, big thing [Heather: mmhmm]. Erm, and I can imagine the hermits in centuries gone by, and the anchorites sealed up in their cells [Heather: mmhmm], erm...maybe [Heather: what they’ve missed, what they’ve missed] maybe thinking, praying to God, you know, I am part of something bigger. This isn’t about *me* [Heather: mm]. It’s about *us*. And it’s not *my* story; it’s God’s story. And when we were in lockdown...and we couldn’t sing in church, I mean...you missed so much of coming

together with other people [Heather: mmhmm], and worshipping God as a part of the entire church of all believers in the world [Heather: yeah; Robert: mm] and...for so many congregations all round the world, to have stopped that [Heather: yeah] part of worship, I...

Heather: It's sort of the opposite of uplifting wasn't it [Robert: yes]. Opposite of uplifting [general laughter; Lydia: yeah]

Henry: [*Indistinguishable*] Being with people is, is so important I find [Elaine: mmhmm]. [...] erm, church coffee mornings [Heather: uh huh, *indistinguishable*, yeah] are the highlights of my week, you know? [Heather: yeah, uh huh]. I look forward to them so much [Heather: good, yeah, yeah]. Erm...mainly to be with other people [Lydia: mm] you know [Heather: yeah], that's not to say I don't have friends at whatever, you know [Heather: yeah, *indistinguishable*], but to be in a congregation [Heather: that's right] and to be part of that [Heather: uh huh] means a lot now [Heather: yes].

### **Excerpt 2:**

Lydia: That's fantastic [Heather: mmhmm]....Do you ever erm, find yourself deliberately or not deliberately singing these or other hymns at home? And does that feel any different? So what's different about singing them in church essentially, erm?

Heather: Oh it's very different.

Robert: Yes, it is. I think part of it is the realisation that when we come together as the body of Christ, we're part of something so much bigger [Heather: mmhmm] and that part of the Eucharistic service 'with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven', 'holy, holy, holy Lord', we're joining in with *them* [Heather: yeah, yeah]

and...we, we're time bound, they're not! [Heather: yeah, yeah, gosh, yeah] and it's, you know, we are just a part of that whole process, and *one day* [Heather: yeah] we'll do it as they do it! [Heather: timeless, we'll be timeless yeah].

Heather: But for me it sort of embodies the, the word fellowship [Lydia: mm; Robert: mm, mm].

### **Excerpt 3:**

Lydia: Well yeah it's difficult to get an organist at 8 o'clock, I think that, I think it's part of that, you, you could have hymns but most of the services don't and they're quite short. And I, and midweek services often the same. And I sometimes think, yeah, it's the singing that we drop. We, we think [Henry: yeah] that's the bit that's optional, which is why I'm then asking [Heather: yeah], you know why well why do we do it I suppose? [Henry: mm; Heather: yeah, yeah, yeah]. Erm, because it seems-

Henry: Takes the joy out of the service I think.

Heather: Well...[Lydia: yeah]

Henry: To a certain extent, without-

Heather: But it mustn't do for the people that go to it, do you know what I mean? [Lydia: yeah] But erm, but the added joy...[Lydia: yeah] of singing in church [Henry: mm, mm] is just...it's great.

Robert: I did used to go to Book of Common Prayer Services [...] I did find that had a kind of different aspect to it, it was more contemplative [Heather: yes] and that worked as

well [Heather: yes, yeah, yeah, yeah, uh huh]. It was a very different thing from a service with hymns, but I did find that it worked, but it, it was a different mindset [Lydia: mm]. And I think if somebody was asking me why do we sing hymns? T-, to my mind, it's actually something very ancient. It's something that the Greeks and Romans would have done, in their religious observances [Lydia: mm], and...I think really...singing a hymn is...uh how can I put this...it, it's a sort of special way of praising God. And we have some examples in the New Testament, the *Magnificat* is a, is an outstanding one, and the *Nunc Dimittis*, which I think were both used *as hymns* in the early church, if I understand correctly. So...one of the reasons I think if I was explaining to somebody who doesn't go to church, one of the reasons we do it is because it's actually grounded in the Scriptures. Erm [Heather: mmhmm], and worship *has* to be grounded in the Scriptures [Heather: yeah, yeah].

Erm, ma-, many years ago [...] a whole group of us got sent on a...a worship leading course [...] one of the aspects of that course was, they talked about the sort of hymns that you can choose, and what you should not choose. Erm [laughs], and believe it or not the example they, they gave of what you should not choose is [*singing*] 'I'm building a people of power' [Heather: laughs], oh they said, 'there's nowhere [*bangs table*] in the Scriptures that God says that [Heather: yes], you're putting words into the mouth of God [Heather: oh right!] you must not do that' [Heather: laughs]. So worship...hymn singing must be scripturally based [Heather: right] or it, it has no validity [Heather: yeah, right].

## Appendix 5f: Focus Group 6 – 6<sup>th</sup> August, 2022

### Excerpt 1:

Gerald: So that's my three [Lydia: fantastic] but there were others that I said [Lydia: laughs] I had to sort of, you know, so it's a bit arbitrary the choice.

Lydia: Mm, yes, I actually would find it very difficult to narrow my hymn choices, the hymns and songs down to three, which perhaps makes it a little bit unfair that I'm asking you here and now, but we'd probably be here for hours [laughs] if we discussed all the ones we wanted to! [Pause] Yes, would either of you like to...?

Jean: I'll go next [Lydia: yeah, yeah, yeah]. [Pause] When I thought about it, I mean again, I've gone for traditional [Lydia: mm]. Mainly because if I'm thinking about hymns when I'm not at church, when I...I, I, I'm a terrible, I haven't got a very good voice, terrible singing, but I really like singing. So if I'm in the house [Lydia: yeah] on my own, and, I tend to sing hymns. You know if I, if I'm just...mooching, which sounds awful, but I do it [Gerald: mm] erm but the hymns that I picked, erm...is, well my favourite's 'Thine be the glory' [Lydia: mm; Gerald: uh], because I just again for the meat [Gerald: very popular] I think it's, it's...a hymn I enjoy, all of them are, but they have a very deep meaning, that I think it, it, it sort of...they've been written by really clever people, and I, I think erm...'Thine be the glory' I love the chorus, I think it, it just really you know, you know you're just surrendering yourself. And I think it, done in a group it, it emphasises it [Lydia: mm].

**Excerpt 2:**

Mark: But I think going back to your point, I think, you know, singing is, you know, important and, you know, everybody enjoys er, congregational singing [Mark: oh absolutely] so er, you know.

Gerald: I wonder how important the actual musical instrument is, I mean traditionally it was used to always be an organ [Lydia: yep]. Then that became electronic, well some people had different ideas about the...the purity of the technology, but I'm thinking also of where areas, you know the organ has completely clapped and they've just gone onto piano, or for example in Christchurch where, moderately frequently, er we have a band [Lydia: mm], well we have a, whatever it is [Mark: yeah] with a, with a guitar. And I wonder if that has any...impact on opinions about the music and the hymns. I don't know.

Jean: Did you not find that you know, when, when erm...it's just a, you know you join in with a YouTube...one, they, th-, we always seem to be out of step [laughs] with it, it seems to be much easier if you've got someone playing an inst-, instrument [Lydia: mm], whatever the instrument [Gerald: keeps you right] than if it, if it's electronic [Gerald: yes]. I don't know why [Gerald: yes I think, *indistinguishable*] but I mean it's not just here. I mean [Gerald: yeah] [...] it's the music's just on, on the screen [Gerald: yeah] and I, I just don't think the singing's as good. I think the, the live, I think having someone actually do it [Gerald: yeah] seems, they seem to be more in sync [Lydia: mm; Gerald: yeah] than, than when you're following something on the screen [Mark: yes, yes, yes]. I don't know why [Gerald: yeah], 'cause there's nothing wrong with the music but er...[Gerald: yeah]

Lydia: Yeah that's really interesting.

Jean: But I think as well the other point is that during Covid when we couldn't sing, I mean that was....dreadful [general laughter, muted]. [*Indistinguishable*] Did you not think?

Gerald: Oh absolutely.

Jean: Dreadful [Gerald: oh absolutely]. I mean you know your, your hymns were up there and you, you sort of, you really wanted to sing [Gerald: I know, it was terrible].

Lydia: I remember we were allowed to hum for a bit [general laughter], don't tempt me! [General laughter] but...

Gerald: Bring your paper and comb [Lydia: yeah!]

Jean: Exactly yeah, just [Gerald: yeah], it just felt unnatural [Mark: yeah] not to be singing [Mark: yeah].

Mark: I mean, 'cause some churches have just the CDs, [...] and 'cause it's piano accompaniment on the CDs [Jean: mmhmm; Lydia: mm], and it was playing, and I was thinking, 'ah, when do I come in?' You know [*Indistinguishable*] start [Jean and Lydia: yeah] because it's playing away [Gerald: mm], and I think, 'oh, should I have come in a few [*Indistinguishable*]' [Lydia: yeah, yeah] because you know, because playing to a CD [Gerald: yeah]...'cause then I think quite a few other members of the congregation were also thinking, 'oh, we, you know, we're perhaps several bars behind the music' [Lydia: yeah].

### Excerpt 3:

Jean: It's, it's a way to be involved without any threat [Gerald: yeah, yeah] 'cause nobody, you're not standing out [Lydia: mm; Gerald: that's right]. You know, yes you [Gerald: yeah] you can join in but nobody's going to, you know, say 'ooh you sang a note that's wrong', you know [Lydia: yeah, yeah, yeah] you can't do anything wrong [Mark?: yeah, yeah] when you're singing, I think.

Mark: And if you don't want to sing, [Jean: that's fine] that's alright as well [Lydia: yeah, yeah, yeah], you know, you know, you know 'cause even on *Songs of Praise* I've s-, you know the congregations when the, the camera's going round [Gerald and Lydia: yeah] er you see the odd pers-, you know [Gerald: yeah], nobody, the odd person not singing at all [Lydia: yeah, yeah, yeah] whilst everybody else around...now w-, whether that's because they don't know the hymn [Lydia: yeah] or [Gerald: yeah], you know, because they don't want to be seen on camera singing! [Lydia: yeah, yeah, yeah; general laughter] You know, but er...

Gerald: I think I will say that as well, on reflection I think I'd add something else. Erm... historically... certainly when I was a kid, I think what would be expected as one entered church was silence. Er...that's given way to a lot more social interaction with people saying hello and catching up [Jean: yeah] on the week. But on top of that, I still find it really immensely relaxing a-, and getting ready for worship, when I can hear [...] the piano [...] [Jean: yeah; Lydia: mm]. And again...that, that, that, that kind of, that a-, adds to the atmosphere you know [Lydia: mm]. Except for those who don't like music! [General laughter].

Lydia: Well it doesn't sound like they're in the room so I wouldn't worry! [General laughter]

Jean: But I, I think that, that's nice because y-, you did used to come in, sit down, put your head down [Gerald: yeah] and everybody just...sat, but it's nice when you come in and there's that atmosphere [Gerald: yeah absolutely] because it's quite welcoming [Lydia: mm]...Because erm, I think it does put people off going to church, thinking, 'I'm just gonna sit there and be ignored.' [Lydia: mm; Gerald: yeah] I mean you have heard of it happening in churches but it hasn't been my experience.

## Appendix 6 – Incumbent Interview Excerpts

### Incumbent Interview – 14<sup>th</sup> September, 2022

#### Excerpt 1:

Lydia: Do you sense that the kind of pattern of worship here is fairly typical, or do you think that churches are far too individual to make-

Rachel: I would say, I would have said typical, but actually when I think about it, I think [...] I think we are atypical 'cause I think typically now, most churches operate with no organist, no problem [Lydia: yep, yep; laughs]. Let us not forget the dearth of organists [Lydia: yes] in the diocese. And I tell them this as well, you know what I mean? I say, you are in dreamland [Lydia: yep] and not just, erm, that we have organists but that we have people who are musicians [Lydia: mm] and will play. And do play.

Lydia: I was surprised in, particularly in the discussion at St Michael and All Angels at just how many organists they *name!* [Rachel: Oh yeah! Lydia: laughs] I was like, that's a lot, that's a lot of organists to be going through.

Rachel: Well there's, well there we are look [*pointing at list on wall*], there's, there's the organists we can call on.

Lydia: Yeah that's amazing.

Rachel: It's phenomenal, I could add, add th-, probably hasn't got everybody now. There's a-, there's easily another three I can think of that we've [Lydia: yeah] used since then. It's phenomenal.

Lydia: That's extraordinary [*Indistinguishable*].

**Excerpt 2:**

Lydia: Yeah, that's really helpful. So, slightly more interestingly I suppose, erm, I became interested in kind of music and worship particularly during Covid, because churches obviously did a whole load of different things but all closed. Erm...and I started having conversations with people after services, sort of on zoom, you know after like zoom services or YouTube services or whatever, and people would say, 'it's the singing I miss, miss the most.' And that, that I found really interesting. Erm, but yeah I'd be interested to know about what happened during that time, like practically – what the services were and all that kind of stuff – but also how you think people responded to online worship, particularly in relation to singing.

Rachel: Yeeeahh. That's a [Lydia: I think; laughs], that's a really good one. I had a field day [Lydia: yep!], I just, I just thought 'stuff it! You're having whatever I want to sing and just get on with it! There's nowt you can do about it apart from put mute on!' [Lydia: yeah?]

[...]

Rachel: Erm, and, like I say it was just bliss just to be able to, 'let's sing something', and not have to *teach* it to anybody [Lydia: mm] and they could just listen [Lydia: yep]. Erm, but we always had the words up so they could join in or whatever. So that was, that was really liberating [Lydia: mm], absolutely loved that.

[...]

Lydia: That's really interesting.

Rachel: But I think they, erm...it's interesting that I thought that music really mattered even though it was being delivered in a [Lydia: mm] rather odd way. Erm, because I think it is, more than anything else, the glue that holds congregations together.

Lydia: That's really interesting. And when people st-

Rachel: Do you know what I mean [Lydia: yeah, yeah], if you, if you think your, well I mean your kind of 'The Lord be with you', 'And also with you'. You've got moments of, of, of response, but I think the missing of the singing is actually-, and I've been very struck the number of people you know going to big pop concerts and all the rest of it, erm, and all of the sort of summer festivals. And, erm, it's a universal thing I think, that you sing together in harmony [Lydia: yeah], er something that you love, and that holds you together even if it's your favourite Coldplay or Ed Sheeran or whatever [Lydia: yeah, yeah, yeah]. Erm, and I think that was the thing that, that struck me, is erm I love singing loads of pop songs and all the rest of it, but there is no greater, deeper joy than singing about the love of God [Lydia: yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah]. And, and I, I think they might n-, they might not be able to articulate that, but I think that, that's it [Lydia: mm], is actually, that's where, that's, that's their one opportunity to proclaim their faith [Lydia: yep, yeah, yeah].

Lydia: That's really interesting because when I asked people in churches about covid...they talked quite a lot about, erm, coming back into church and not being able to sing [Rachel: mm]. And I think, 'cause there was that funny period wasn't there-

Rachel: It was murder; that was murder. Yeah, and so that, that really was hard [Lydia: mm] erm, pe-, I mean it was okay at Christchurch 'cause I could pick some really nice YouTube stuff [Lydia: yeah] and so you had a, I loved having the variety of styles and all the rest of it. Erm but it, it felt pretty brutal – I mean you would have experienced it as well [Lydia: yeah, absolutely, yeah, yeah, yeah] just sitting there and, particularly if it's your favourite one or something like that, erm so that was really hard. And I think it was harder...I would imagine it would've, would have had more impact in the other churches because you haven't got the visuals to sort of compensate for the lack of sing-, there's nothing to watch [Lydia: yes] so all you're aware of is what you're not able to do [Lydia: mm].

### **Excerpt 3:**

Lydia: What, what's the kind of place of those BCP Communion without, you know, where, services without music, do you think? Or indeed the midweek Communion which aren't BCP [Rachel: mm], erm. Where do you reckon, are there people who come to those and only come to those?

Rachel: Oh yes.

Lydia: And is that about the music or is that about something else entirely?

Rachel: Erm, it's, I don't know if it's because they don't like music, I think they like the BCP, rather than they don't like music [Lydia: yeah], I, I think that's kind of what they're valuing. Erm, I really struggle to connect with worshipping God without music [Lydia: mm] I guess [Lydia: yeah, yeah, yeah]. For me that's quite-, I can, I can worship God in silence [laughs; R: yep] but I don't want a whole load of words [*Indistinguishable*; Lydia: laughs] yeah.

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## Musical Citations

*Note: this list contains reference to the specific pieces of music listed in the main body of the thesis and in the appendices, except where my multiple tunes are given for the same hymn (in providing indicative scores, I recognise that the assemblage of a given hymn incorporates the many tunes to which it is sometimes set), and where it is unclear to what piece of music a participant is referring.*

### Definitive Recordings

Andersson, Benny, and Björn Ulvaeus, 'Thank You for the Music', from *ABBA: The Album* (Polar, 1977)

The Benedictine Monks of Santo Domingos De Silos, *Chant* (Angel, 1994)

Bocelli, Andrea, 'The Lord's Prayer', from *My Christmas* (Universal, 2009)

Bowie, David, 'Let's Dance', from *Let's Dance* (EMI America Records, 1983)

Brown, Brenton, 'Everlasting God (Strength Will Rise)', from *Everlasting God* (Thankyou Music, 2005)

The Divine Comedy, 'The Eye of the Needle', from *Regeneration* (Parlophone/EMI, 2001)

Ian Dury and the Blockheads, 'Don't Ask Me', from *Do It Yourself* (Stiff Records, 1979)

Meat Loaf, 'Bat Out of Hell', from *Bat Out of Hell* (Cleveland International Records, 1977)

Plaut, Julia, 'Thank You God for Snails', from *Thank You God for Snails* (Integrity Music, 2000)

Simone, Nina, 'My Way', from *Here Comes the Sun* (RCA Victor, 1971)

Sinatra, Frank, 'My Way', from *My Way* (Reprise, 1969)

Stevens, Cat, 'Morning has Broken', from *Teaser and the Firecat* (A&M Records, 1971)

The Sugarhill Gang, 'Rapper's Delight', from *Sugarhill Gang* (Sugarhill Records, 1979)

## Indicative Recordings

- Bach, Johann Sebastian, *Mass in B Minor*, The Choir of Trinity College Cambridge, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, cond. by Stephen Layton (Hyperion, 2017)
- Beethoven, Ludwig van, *Sinfonie 9*, Philharmonia Orchestra and Chorus, Aase Nordmo-Lövberg, Christa Ludwig, Waldemar Kmentt and Hans Hotter, cond. by Otto Klemperer (EMI Classics, 1957)
- , *Symphony No. 5 in C minor, Op. 67*, New York Philharmonic, cond. by Leonard Bernstein (Sony, 2017)
- Elgar, Edward, *Symphonies Nos 1 & 2*, The Hallé Orchestra, cond. by Mark Elder (Hyperion, 2023)
- Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus, and Lorenzo da Ponte, *Don Giovanni*, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Bryn Terfel, Renée Fleming, Ann Murray and Michele Pertusi, cond. by George Solti (Decca, 1997)
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- Tchaikovsky, Pyotr Illich, *Symphony No. 4, Symphony No. 5*, London Philharmonic Orchestra, cond. by Vladimir Jurowski (London Philharmonic Orchestra Ltd, 2012)
- Thomas, Richard, and Stewart Lee, *Jerry Springer – The Opera* (Pathé, 2005)
- Wagner, Richard, ‘Bridal Chorus’, from *Lohengrin*, Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, Bavarian Radio Chorus, Annelies Kupper, Helena Braun, Lorenz Fehenberger, Hans Braun, Ferdinand Frantz and Otto von Rohr, cond. by Eugen Jochum (Deutsche Grammophon, 1953)
- , *Tristan und Isolde*, Staatskapelle Dresden, Margaret Price, Brigitte Fassbaender, Eberhard Büchner, René Kollo and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, cond. by Carlos Kleiber (Deutscher Grammophon, 1982)

## Indicative Scores (Including Hymns)

*Note: there is an indicative score here corresponding to each indicative recording listed above. However, I have only included hymns here as they occur in an indicative hymn book (without a corresponding indicative recording). This is because hymns are recorded less frequently, and written more for the purpose of participatory performance than audience listening.*

Ainger, A. C., 'God is working his purpose out', arr. by Millicent Kingham, in *The New English Hymnal*, comp. by The English Hymnal Company Ltd (The Canterbury Press Norwich, 1986), pp. 1040-41

Alexander, C. F., 'All things bright and beautiful', adap. by Martin Shaw, in *New English Hymnal*, pp. 588-89

Alstyne, Frances Jane van, 'To God be the glory!', arr. by William Howard Doane, in *Anglican Hymns Old and New*, ed. by Kevin Mayhew and Graham Benzies (Kevin Mayhew Ltd, 2008), no. 777

Bach, Johann Sebastian, *Mass in B minor, BWV 232*, ed. by Friedrich Smend (Edition Peters, 2001)

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Bancroft, Charitie L., 'Before the throne', adap. and arr. by Vikki Cook (PDI Worship/Adm., 1993), in *Anglican Hymns Old and New*, no. 70

Bianco de Siena, 'Come down, O Love divine', trans. by Richard F. Littledale, arr. by Ralph Vaughan Williams, in *Anglican Hymns Old and New*, no. 120

Beethoven, Ludwig van, *Sinfonie Nr. 9 d-Moll, Op. 125* (Schott and Co., 1986)

———, *Symphony No. 5 in C minor*, ed. by Jonathan Del Mar (Bärenreiter, 1999)

Bridges, Robert, based on the German of J. Neader, 'All my hope on God is founded', arr. by Herbert Howells, in *New English Hymnal*, pp. 724-25

Briggs, G. W., 'Now is eternal life', arr. by Charles Steggall, in *New English Hymnal* p. 259

- Budry, Edmond, 'Thine be the glory', trans. by Richard Hoyle, arr. by G. F. Handel, in *New English Hymnal*, pp. 268-69
- Bunyan, John, and Percy Dearmer, 'He who would valiant be', adap. from English folk song by Ralph Vaughan Williams, in *New English Hymnal*, pp. 800-01
- Burns, Edward, 'We have a gospel to proclaim', arr. by William Gardiner, in *New English Hymnal*, pp. 1022-23
- Elgar, Edward, *Symphonies No. 1 and 2 in Full Score* (Dover Publication, 2007)
- Evans, Daniel J., 'Be still for the presence of the Lord' (Thankyou Music/Adm., 1986), in *Anglican Hymns Old and New*, no. 62
- Farjeon, Eleanor, 'Morning has broken', adap. from Old Gaelic melody by Christopher Dearnley, in *New English Hymnal*, p. 537
- Ford, Mavis, and Julie Sharp, 'You are the King of Glory (Hosanna to the Son of David)' (Authentic publishing/Adm., 1987), in *Anglican Hymns Old and New*, no. 849
- Forster, Michael, 'Onward, Christian pilgrims', arr. by Arthur Seymour Sullivan, adap. by Kevin Mayhew, in *Anglican Hymns Old and New*, no. 599
- Gillman, Bob, 'Bind us together, Lord', arr. by Andrew Moore (Thankyou Music/Adm, 1997), in *Anglican Hymns Old and New*, no. 73
- Hatch, Edwin, 'Breathe on me, breath of God', arr. by H. S. Oakley, in *New English Hymnal*, pp. 744-45
- Heber, Reginald, 'Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!', arr. by J. B. Dykes, in *New English Hymnal*, pp. 328-29
- Hine, Stuart K., 'O Lord my God! (How great thou art)', adap. from Swedish folk melody by Stuart K. Hine (Stuart K. Hine/The Stuart Hine Trust/Published by kingswaysongs.com, 1953), in *Anglican Hymns Old and New*, no. 563
- How, William Walsham, 'Summer suns are glowing', iss. by The General of the Salvation Army (The Campfield Press, 1986)

- Lyte, H. F., 'Abide with me; fast falls the eventide', arr. by W. H. Monk, in *New English Hymnal*, pp. 720-21
- McEwan, Steven, 'Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise' (Body Songs. Adm., 1985), in *Anglican Hymns Old and New*, no. 272
- Monsell, J. S. B., 'Fight the good fight with all thy might', arr. by Henry Ley, in *New English Hymnal*, pp. 778-89
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- Newton, John, 'How sweet the name of Jesus sounds', arr. by Alexander Reinagle, in *New English Hymnal*, pp. 804-05
- Randall, J., 'Iesu, Iesu, 'rywt ti'n ddiagon', in *Cân A Maul, Song and Praise: The Hymnal of the Calvinistic Methodist Church of the United States of America*, ed. by Daniel Protheroe (General Assembly, 1918), no. 101
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- Saward, Michael, 'Christ triumphant', arr. by John Barnard (Michael Saward/Jubilate Hymns and John Barnard/Jubilate Hymns), in *Anglican Hymns Old and New*, no. 103
- Schubert, Franz, *Der 23 Psalm: "Gott ist mein Hirt" for Female Choir and Piano* (Breitkopf & Härtel, 2021)
- Schutte, Dan, 'I, the Lord of sea and sky (Here I am, Lord)' (Daniel L. Schutte and New Dawn Music, 1981), in *Anglican Hymns Old and New*, no. 337
- 'The Scottish Psalter' (1650), 'The Lord's my shepherd', arr. by Brother James Leith MacBeith Bain and Colin Mawby, in *Anglican Hymns Old and New*, no. 723
- Thomas, Richard, and Steward Lee, *Jerry Springer – The Opera*, arr. by Jack Long (Wise Publications, 2003)
- Traditional, arr. by Keith Stent, 'The little light of mine' (Kevin Mayhew Ltd, 1999), in *Anglican Hymns Old and New*, no. 762

Tschaikovsky, Peter I., *Symphonie No, 4, Op, 36* (Peters, 2006)

Wagner, Richard, 'Bridal Chorus', from *Lohengrin* (Brietkopf und Härtel, 1906)

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Watts, Isaac, 'When I survey the wondrous cross', adap. by Edward Miller, in *New English Hymnal*, pp. 212-13

Wesley, Charles, 'And can it be', arr. by Thomas Campbell, in *Anglican Hymns Old and New*, no. 36

———, 'Jesu, Lover of my soul', arr. by J. B. Dykes and Joseph Parry, in *New English Hymnal*, pp. 822-23

Whittier, John, 'Dear Lord and Father of mankind', arr. by C. Hubert H. Parry, in *New English Hymnal*, pp. 764-65

Zschech, Darlene, 'My Jesus, my Saviour (Shout to the Lord)' (Darlene Zschech/Hillsong Publishing/Kingsway music, 1993), in *Anglican Hymns Old and New*, no. 519