

1 Chapter 12 1
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3 Moving Between Musical Worlds: 2
4 Worship Music, Significance and Ethics in 3
5 the Lives of Contemporary Worshippers 4
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9 Mark Porter 9
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14 The latter decades of the twentieth century saw the increasing adoption of forms 14
15 of popular music in congregational worship (known collectively as ‘contemporary 15
16 worship music’ or simply ‘worship music’), initially within the American and 16
17 British church, but increasingly on a broader international scale. Within the 17
18 discourses of contemporary worship music¹ it is often assumed that music is, in 18
19 many senses, a fundamentally neutral medium.² Differences in musical taste are 19
20 on the one hand frequently set aside as matters of personal preference of little 20
21 relevance to the spiritual task at hand during congregational worship. On the 21
22 other hand, they are engaged in a purely pragmatic manner in order to connect 22
23 with particular demographics that are assumed to be attached to a certain style.³ 23
24 Whilst these discourses have served an important function in the growth of the 24
25 contemporary worship music scene, providing a defence for the admission of 25
26 certain styles of music into worship and teaching worshippers to set aside self- 26
27 centred concerns when gathering together, they have also served to hold back 27
28 the discussion of important aspects of musical practice, meaning and experience, 28
29 relegating them to the realm of private feeling or simple preference and restraining 29
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31

32 ¹ That is, the public discourses present and employed within the context of the Church 32
33 by leadership, musicians, and congregation members where contemporary worship music 33
34 has become established practice, as well as those employed in its support where there still 34
35 remains an element of contestation. See Anna E. Nekola, ‘Between This World and the 35
36 Next: The Musical “Worship Wars” and Evangelical Ideology in the United States 1960– 36
37 2005’ (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2009). For how this collective/official 37
38 discourse often differs from that of ordinary individuals, see Martin D. Stringer, *On the 38
39 Perception of Worship: The Ethnography of Worship in Four Christian Congregations in 39
40 Manchester* (University of Birmingham Press, 1999), p. 69.

40 ² Monique M. Ingalls, ‘Awesome in This Place: Sound, Space, and Identity 40
41 in Contemporary North American Evangelical Worship’ (PhD diss., University of 41
42 Pennsylvania, 2008); Nekola, ‘Between This World and the Next’.

43 ³ Gerardo Marti, *Worship Across the Racial Divide: Religious Music and the 43
44 Multiracial Congregation* (Oxford University Press, 2012). 44

1 their contestation and entry into discourse – a move which raises important ethical 1
2 as well as political questions. 2

3 Monique Ingalls suggests that opening up the discourse to include a broader 3
4 range of concerns ‘involve[s] rejection (or at least a heavy reworking) of 4
5 contemporary Christian music’s founding ideology that style is a neutral vehicle 5
6 for the Christian message’,⁴ a position that might render doing so a somewhat 6
7 problematic exercise. The prospect of reworking the ideology, however, seems 7
8 less problematic than a complete rejection. Whilst the ideology is common within 8
9 contemporary worship music it is not one that is necessarily essential to its on- 9
10 going life. The presentation of musical style as neutral came about largely as 10
11 a reaction against those who would dismiss popular styles of music as bad or 11
12 inappropriate for Christian usage – the initial ascription of neutrality to musics 12
13 arose as a plea not to be rejected out of hand.⁵ The wider Church has since come 13
14 to a level of acceptance of a range of musics which renders such discourse less 14
15 necessary than it once was, and provides space for a move beyond the founding 15
16 ideology. Moreover, a framework which seeks to open up discussion of a range of 16
17 concerns surrounding the significance of a variety of aspects of different musics is 17
18 one in which worship music’s initial bid for acceptance could have been evaluated 18
19 in a less polemical manner. A conversation that allows each voice to the table 19
20 and surrounds and engages it with a range of others is one that has the potential 20
21 to deepen and broaden rather than undermine the purposes that gave birth to the 21
22 contemporary worship movement. 22

23 Ascriptions of neutrality have also, over the course of time, acquired other 23
24 significance. The fear of distraction from the spiritual aspect of worship is a recurring 24
25 theme within talk about worship music.⁶ Christians worry that talking about music 25
26 and potentially ascribing power to it in a setting where direct encounter with God is 26
27 expected risks ascribing power to an aspect of the experience that should not become 27
28 powerful and potentially confuses the source of encounter. Talk about music, in 28
29 other words, is talk that has the potential to detract from ‘proper spirituality’ rather 29
30 than open up important aspects of spiritual experience, mediation and negotiation. 30
31 Such concerns again seem to stem from a particular conception of what music-talk 31
32 might be expected to look like – if musical style is neutral and primarily a matter of 32
33 personal preference then talk about music will have significance only on a relatively 33
34 meaningless level and thus will inevitably be a distraction from the true purposes 34
35 of worship. I want to suggest that in examining experiences in which music already 35
36 takes on a range of meanings and significance we find that rather than distract from 36
37 the core concerns of worship we enter more deeply into them. 37
38 38

39 ⁴ Ingalls, ‘Awesome in This Place’, p. 248. 39

40 ⁵ Ingalls, ‘Awesome in This Place’, p. 110; Nekola, ‘Between This World and the 40
41 Next’, p. 261. 41

42 ⁶ Gordon Adnams, ‘The Experience of Congregational Singing: An Ethno- 42
43 Phenomenological Approach’ (PhD diss., University of Alberta, Spring 2008), p. 115; 43
44 Marti, *Worship Across the Racial Divide*, p. 88. 44

1 In my research interviews, undertaken in the early months of 2012 as part of 1
 2 my doctoral research, I asked approximately 40 members of St Aldates church in 2
 3 Oxford firstly to talk to me about their musical lives and experiences, and then to talk 3
 4 specifically about their experiences of music in worship. We then went on to discuss 4
 5 any interesting points of contact or divergence between the two narratives they 5
 6 offered. This came out of an interest in how people negotiate the movement between 6
 7 different musical worlds and the varying ways in which this negotiation can take 7
 8 place.⁷ In focusing initially on experiences of music outside of worship I deliberately 8
 9 geared the discussion in such a way as to attempt to cut through the normal patterns 9
 10 of worship-music discourse (in which music is often marginal to discussion) and to 10
 11 open up a space for taking concerns centred specifically around music seriously.⁸ The 11
 12 research serves to open up the question of the relationship between a worshipper's 12
 13 individual musical life and their experience within the worshipping community of 13
 14 the church. Through discussion of musical experience the interviews opened up 14
 15 a broad range of issues touching on themes such as community, value, meaning, 15
 16 boundaries, diversity, ethics, mission, character and divine encounter, many bound 16
 17 up closely with questions of musical style. Through the interviews it can be very 17
 18 quickly seen that questions of musical style within the church, even one in which 18
 19 a relatively stable pattern has been reached, are far from neutral, indeed they 19
 20 embody, enact and negotiate a range of key theological, ethical and ecclesiological 20
 21 questions in ways that reach beyond those typically acknowledged in the community 21
 22 discourse.⁹ Such conversations serve to reinforce the importance of taking music- 22
 23 talk seriously within the church community and within theological discussion of 23
 24 music and provide a wide range of starting points for discussion. 24

25 The range of issues that arise serves to highlight the complex negotiations 25
 26 that take place around the musical life of a worshipping community and, as such, 26
 27 they avoid pointing to any particular model of what the musical practices of the 27
 28 church should look like. They suggest, instead, the importance of opening up an 28
 29 _____ 29

30 ⁷ Timothy Rice, 'Time, Place, and Metaphor in Musical Experience and Ethnography', 30
 31 *Ethnomusicology*, 47/2 (2003): pp. 151–79; Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life* (Cambridge 31
 32 University Press, 2000); Tia DeNora, *After Adorno: Rethinking Music Sociology* 32
 33 (Cambridge University Press, 2003); Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Studying Congregations: 33*
 34 *A New Handbook* (Abingdon Press, 1998). Antoine Hennion, 'Pragmatics of Taste', in 34
 35 Mark Jacobs and Nancy Hanrahan (eds), *The Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of 35*
 36 *Culture* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2005); Harris M. Berger, *Metal, Rock, and Jazz: Perception 36*
 37 *and the Phenomenology of Musical Experience* (University Press of New England [for] 37
 38 Wesleyan University Press, 1999); Harris M. Berger, *Stance: Ideas About Emotion, Style, 38*
 39 *and Meaning for the Study of Expressive Culture* (Weslyan University Press, 2009). 39

40 ⁸ Antoine Hennion, 'Music Lovers: Taste as Performance', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 40
 18/5 (2001): p. 5.

41 ⁹ Stringer, *On the Perception of Worship*; Mathew Guest, "'Friendship, Fellowship 41
 42 and Acceptance": The Public Discourse of a Thriving Evangelical Congregation', in 42
 43 Mathew Guest, Karin Tusting and Linda Woodhead (eds), *Congregational Studies in the 43*
 44 *UK: Christianity in a Post-Christian Context* (Ashgate, 2004). 44

1 on-going conversation within the church community that allows its worshipping 1
 2 life to be enriched by the diverse range of perspectives on music present within 2
 3 it. The communal discourse of the church needs the ability to handle the range 3
 4 of experiences and perspectives of its members. Such discussion would move 4
 5 worship music away from being seen as a neutral canvas towards a performative 5
 6 space rich with meaning. In allowing dissenting voices to be heard it would bring 6
 7 them into dialogue with a range of other perspectives, into an open forum of 7
 8 negotiation and transformation.¹⁰ In realizing that musical style is not simply a 8
 9 matter of private taste a valuable space is opened up, where values and issues can 9
 10 be raised in ways that enable genuinely meaningful dialogue that breaks beyond 10
 11 the bounds of the self. 11

12 13 14 **Dialogues: Talking About Music at St Aldates Church** 14 15

16 St Aldates, the church I have attended since 2002 and the location of my fieldwork, 16
 17 is a large Anglican church in the centre of Oxford, UK. The church operates within 17
 18 the charismatic evangelical tradition and would often identify more closely with 18
 19 other churches within this stream than it would with the Anglican Church as a 19
 20 whole.¹¹ The church building seats between 500 and 600 people and, whilst its 20
 21 origins date back to Saxon times, it has been remodelled and extended over the 21
 22 years. Its most recent reordering occurred around the turn of the millennium, with 22
 23 the seating orientation being turned sideways in order to provide a state-of-the-art 23
 24 auditorium style environment rather than the more traditional east-facing interior 24
 25 that had previously been in existence. There are three regular Sunday services, 25
 26 at 10:30am, 6pm and 8:15pm, each following a similar pattern centred around 26
 27 an initial 'worship set' lasting between twenty and thirty minutes and a sermon 27
 28 lasting five to ten minutes longer. The church has a large team of musicians¹² and 28
 29 periods of sung worship are led either by one of the paid staff or another leader 29
 30 with band backing. The style of music fits well within the genre of contemporary 30
 31 worship music, which tends to adhere closely to the style of soft rock. During 31
 32 the set the congregation attempt to engage in worship through singing and are 32
 33 encouraged to enter into an experience in which they approach God through the 33
 34 musical medium of worship. 34

35 Whilst the church has a particular reputation for hosting a large student 35
 36 community, there is nevertheless a range of people at the church who are there for a 36
 37 variety of different reasons and who bring with them a variety of different musical 37
 38 lives and backgrounds. Music forms a large part of the service not only in terms 38
 39 39

40 ¹⁰ Hennion, 'Pragmatics of Taste', p. 132. 40

41 ¹¹ See James H.S. Steven, *Worship in the Spirit: Charismatic Worship in the Church* 41
 42 *of England* (Paternoster Press, 2002). 42

43 ¹² Between 30 and 40 play regularly on Sundays with many others contributing to the 43
 44 music at other events and groups which take place during the week. 44

1 of time but in terms of significance. In serving as a medium for encounter with 1
 2 God it forms what can be an intensely emotional space in which many different 2
 3 experiences, struggles and deep aspects of spirituality are brought together and 3
 4 interact. The presence of a fairly defined style of music within this significant and 4
 5 diversely inhabited space makes the relationship of the music with the rest of the 5
 6 worshippers' musical lives, identities and tastes highly significant and interesting. 6
 7 Timothy Rommen suggests that personal relationships with musical style can 7
 8 perform significant ethical functions within the life of the church. He coins the term 8
 9 'ethics of style' as a framework within which to examine the relationship between 9
 10 individual and community, discourses of value and meaning, and the significance 10
 11 of identification or dis-identification with style as a place of ethical significance. 11
 12 He highlights how an identification or dis-identification with the musical style of 12
 13 a church can change a worshipper's relationship to the church community in a 13
 14 theologically significant manner.¹³ The relationship a worshipper forms with the 14
 15 musical worship of the church carries a much broader spiritual and communal, 15
 16 and therefore ethical, weight. In a similar manner, Nanette Nielsen and Marcel 16
 17 Cobussen highlight the space between the personal and the collective as one of 17
 18 the key places in which music takes on ethical significance,¹⁴ as the process and 18
 19 interaction at the heart of music-making allow music to be 'an art form that can 19
 20 be world-disclosive, formative of subjectivity, and contributive to intersubjective 20
 21 relations'.¹⁵ The fieldwork interviews that I conducted investigate some of these 21
 22 areas within the life of St Aldates church, examining some of the ways in which 22
 23 worshippers negotiate musical style within their own lives and the life of the 23
 24 community. Many, but not all, of my interviewees are musicians, and, reflecting 24
 25 the congregational makeup, many of them are in their 20s or 30s. I selected the 25
 26 majority of interviewees because I was aware they had musical tastes that are both 26
 27 significant to them and that diverge from the kind of music used on a Sunday. 27
 28 These tend to be the people where issues of musical style and significance are 28
 29 most intense and also those who are best able to articulate their feelings about such 29
 30 things. My hope is that a framework built up from these might be applicable to 30
 31 larger portions of the worshipping community, but I don't want to assume that an 31
 32 easy generalization is possible or to suggest that my sample provides an unbiased 32
 33 representation of the congregation. 33

34 I have organized the experiences of worshippers into three broad categories 34
 35 of experience according to the different relationships formed between areas of 35
 36 their musical lives.¹⁶ The first common thread running through the interviews 36
 37

38 ¹³ Timothy Rommen, *'Mek Some Noise': Gospel Music and the Ethics of Style in* 38
 39 *Trinidad* (University of California Press, 2007). 39

40 ¹⁴ Marcel Cobussen and Nanette Nielsen, *Music and Ethics* (Ashgate, 2012), p. 90. 40

41 ¹⁵ Cobussen and Nielsen, *Music and Ethics*, p. 4. 41

42 ¹⁶ For a similar approach within a sociological study, see Rachel Kraus, 'They Danced 42
 43 in the Bible: Identity Integration Among Christian Women Who Belly Dance', *Sociology of* 43
 44 *Religion*, 71/4 (2010): pp. 457–82. 44

1 demonstrates the ways in which the malleability of different experiences allows 1
 2 commonalities to be formed between different musical worlds. Second, other 2
 3 interviews show the ways in which separate musical worlds can co-exist; third, 3
 4 others highlight situations where the transfer of values between different musical 4
 5 worlds can potentially become problematic or in which there is some need for 5
 6 worshippers to suppress particular aspects of experience in order to positively 6
 7 evaluate an activity. Each of these categories is intentionally broad so as to 7
 8 encompass a range of different experiences; within each of them ethical, spiritual, 8
 9 experiential, social and musical questions arise in a number of ways, swirling 9
 10 together in a way that illumines the significance of musical style for the way 10
 11 in which worshippers negotiate the world around them and the role of musical 11
 12 worship within it. 12

13
 14 *Bridging Worlds Through Common Modes of Being in Music* 14
 15

16 At least one of the rationales behind the emergence of contemporary worship 16
 17 music in the 1960s was the need to use musical styles that people related to in 17
 18 daily life.¹⁷ This function, however, can potentially be called into question by the 18
 19 diversity of church membership, opening up a much wider range of experiences 19
 20 and understandings of the relationship. Despite potentially very large differences 20
 21 in musical culture some interview participants found and/or formed significant 21
 22 bridges between worship music and other parts of their musical lives, allowing 22
 23 the possibility for significant inter-contextual meaning to arise through the 23
 24 interplay of significance between settings. For some this links closely to questions 24
 25 of self-conception and personal identity, but whilst this is foregrounded in some 25
 26 experiences it is more frequently a question of wider relationships and ways of 26
 27 being in the world that, whilst involving the self, do not necessarily place it as the 27
 28 central issue at stake. 28

29 An example of the bridging of musical worlds can be seen in my interview 29
 30 with Graham, who is a member of the congregation and who plays French horn in 30
 31 the worship band. He is also a member, and was chair, of the Oxford Symphony 31
 32 Orchestra. When asked about the nature of his enjoyment when initially 32
 33 encountering worship music, Graham responded: 33

34
 35 I enjoy playing and, I guess, performing as a horn player, and know I can make 35
 36 a fairly reasonable noise. But that's never been the primary purpose for me in 36
 37 terms of worship, or in terms of orchestral playing. You want to play your own 37
 38 stuff well, but you're contributing to part of an overall impact ... The same is 38
 39 true orchestrally as was true in a worship context: that you were able to bring 39
 40 different impact through the sound and the quality of what you were able to 40
 41

42
 43 ¹⁷ Ingalls, 'Awesome in This Place', p. 57; Nekola, 'Between This World and the 43
 44 Next', p. 170. 44

| | | |
|----|--|----|
| 1 | bring in. And that was then both making for a fuller, richer music, and then | 1 |
| 2 | hopefully helping people to be able to worship. ¹⁸ | 2 |
| 3 | | 3 |
| 4 | For Graham, orchestral playing and participation in worship become common | 4 |
| 5 | musical worlds through the idea of coming together to ‘create an impact’. Later | 5 |
| 6 | in the interview, Graham forms further connections between worlds through the | 6 |
| 7 | similar ways in which he evaluates the different musical experiences. He highlights | 7 |
| 8 | the importance of an orchestra being in tune with each other both literally and | 8 |
| 9 | metaphorically in order to come together as a cohesive force and create a positive | 9 |
| 10 | experience. Within the world of the Sunday service he highlights the need for | 10 |
| 11 | the musical worship to be in tune with the congregation and with God. Graham | 11 |
| 12 | expresses the two worlds in some of the same terms, with the quality of relationships | 12 |
| 13 | found within an orchestra also being part of the key to a good quality of worship | 13 |
| 14 | on a Sunday. He conceives of worship music according to some of the criteria | 14 |
| 15 | found within an orchestral setting, whilst thinking about orchestral music in terms | 15 |
| 16 | of criteria that are not necessarily distinctive purely to itself but can carry across | 16 |
| 17 | between differing musical worlds. Graham does not employ conceptual categories | 17 |
| 18 | that frequently serve to distinguish these two musical realms but instead is able to | 18 |
| 19 | evaluate both musical experiences using a common set of terms. Graham’s ability to | 19 |
| 20 | connect with the music of the church community is not reliant upon its connection | 20 |
| 21 | with personal stylistic preferences, but neither is his other musical experience laid | 21 |
| 22 | aside when entering the church building, his conception of musical good allows | 22 |
| 23 | him to form positive relationships in a largely unproblematic manner. | 23 |
| 24 | Charlotte, another member of the congregation, does not self-identify as a | 24 |
| 25 | musician; nevertheless, she participates in amateur music-making outside the | 25 |
| 26 | church. Charlotte’s chief context for engaging with music is musical theatre. For | 26 |
| 27 | her there seem to be two key elements that bridge the two worlds: the idea of having | 27 |
| 28 | a ‘good sing’, and the public expression of emotion that is enabled by the stage: | 28 |
| 29 | | 29 |
| 30 | Although it’s not a style of music that I really listen to in any other bit of my life, | 30 |
| 31 | I do still enjoy the music at Aldates. And I think one of the things for music that | 31 |
| 32 | I’m participating in – be that in church, or singing in G&S [Gilbert and Sullivan] | 32 |
| 33 | or something, it is nice for there to be something that lets you have a <i>good sing</i> . | 33 |
| 34 | Particularly, I always think it’s quite interesting about worship music that on | 34 |
| 35 | stage you have lots of people pouring out their emotions and sort of singing love | 35 |
| 36 | songs or ‘O woe is me’ type songs [features typical of much musical theatre]. | 36 |
| 37 | And because that’s happening in a stagey context it’s inevitably going to be | 37 |
| 38 | slightly artificial, and it seems to me that worship music is one of the few points | 38 |
| 39 | I can think of where people in the course of their everyday life will use music as | 39 |
| 40 | a way of expressing their own emotions and their own feelings. ¹⁹ | 40 |
| 41 | | 41 |
| 42 | | 42 |
| 43 | ¹⁸ Interview with the author, 11 February 2012. | 43 |
| 44 | ¹⁹ Interview with the author, 25 February 2012. | 44 |

1 For Charlotte there is a common set of values that bridges the two worlds 1
 2 and helps her to move between them. There is more than this, however, because 2
 3 Charlotte isn't simply finding qualities within the music which allow her to say 3
 4 'this is what I appreciate about it': rather, she frames her experience of the music 4
 5 according to these categories and thus, to a certain degree, reconceives the Sunday 5
 6 worship in terms of qualities experienced primarily within musical theatre, 6
 7 transforming it into something different as she experiences it in those terms. 7

8 Some of the elements that come to the foreground of her experience are 8
 9 already present within the public discourse of the church – emotion, singing and 9
 10 the enabling role of the worship team are all regular topics of discourse. Their 10
 11 emphasis in Charlotte's experience, however, is very different. The stage element 11
 12 is one that is not generally emphasized in the church for fear that the worship might 12
 13 be thought of in terms of a performance;²⁰ the visibility of musicians on the stage 13
 14 will certainly be discussed, but it is generally not thought of as a separate kind of 14
 15 space in the way that it seems to be for Charlotte. The visibility of musicians is 15
 16 thought of as enabling congregational worship as they lead and set an example. 16
 17 In contrast, Charlotte's experience draws attention to the artificial nature of the 17
 18 stage context as she highlights the way in which it enables a different mode of 18
 19 experience from everyday life. This theatrical conception of the stage moves away 19
 20 from ideas of authenticity inherent within rock and worship music.²¹ Likewise 20
 21 the element of emotional singing is one that is important within the life of the 21
 22 charismatic church, however it would generally be an element that is thought of 22
 23 on a secondary level as something that has to take place in response to the work 23
 24 of God rather than something that can be a primary transformative element within 24
 25 a service.²² Worship would not generally be thought of either in terms of joining 25
 26 in with a 'good hearty sing' – the importance of singing passionately from the 26
 27 heart is certainly a key element of discourse, but to emphasize hearty singing in 27
 28 such a way that its secondary role to the activity of worship is not made clear is 28
 29 something which strikes against the regular patterns of discourse.²³ 29

30 For worshippers who routinely find spiritual meaning in other areas of musical 30
 31 activity the interrelation between musical worlds is one that can be rooted in much 31
 32 broader views of God's work and presence in the world and which will therefore 32
 33 carry with it immediate theological weight. St Aldates member and artist Tim's 33
 34 experience of music is illustrative of the way in which this can occur, rooting itself 34
 35 in a way of being in the world which connects to his artistic sensibility and informs 35
 36 36

37 ²⁰ Ingalls, 'Awesome in This Place'. 37

38 ²¹ Elizabeth L. Wollman, 'Much Too Loud and Not Loud Enough: Issues Involving 38
 39 the Reception of Staged Rock Musicals', in C. Washburne and M. Derno (eds), *Bad* 39
 40 *Music: The Music We Love to Hate* (Routledge, 2004); Jay R. Howard and John M. Streck, 40
 41 *Apostles of Rock: The Splintered World of Contemporary Christian Music* (University Press 41
 42 of Kentucky, 1999), p. 173. 42

43 ²² Ingalls, 'Awesome in This Place', p. 90. 43

44 ²³ Adnams, 'The Experience of Congregational Singing'. 44

1 his conception of worship on a Sunday so as to place it in close relation to his on- 1
 2 going experience of God in the world: 2
 3 3
 4 Intimacy I think is key, really ... I listen to all music for that purpose of bringing 4
 5 me back to something – ultimately God – because listening to music bring[s] me 5
 6 back to myself and what I know and what I’m about ... it’s soul stuff. I love 6
 7 listening to music which connects to my soul, but that’s what music does, isn’t it?²⁴ 7
 8 8
 9 For Tim, the spirituality of worship music ceases to be its defining characteristic 9
 10 over and against other forms of music, the different musics instead becoming 10
 11 part of a continuum of spiritual experience. He may have particular expectations 11
 12 of spiritual experience within Christian worship services, however they are not 12
 13 completely unique expectations. This connection means that worship music is not 13
 14 the sole provider of spiritual meaning in music but must instead share this role 14
 15 with the other musics and art-forms of daily life. 15
 16 Anna Nekola draws attention to the tension between the authority of the church 16
 17 to define what constitutes worship and the autonomy of the individual to do so that 17
 18 has been present in much of the history of protestant worship²⁵ whilst Timothy Rice 18
 19 highlights the way in which musical meaning is often impossible to control due 19
 20 to the diverse range of ways in which music can take on a variety of meanings.²⁶ 20
 21 The life of a large congregation in which regular members are often able to inhabit 21
 22 a space at arm’s-length from authority can allow these tensions to exist without 22
 23 becoming particularly problematic, indeed, they can lead to productive and 23
 24 positive ways of inhabiting the space of worship. However, in becoming a feature 24
 25 of community structures, they nevertheless impact the nature of relationships 25
 26 between individuals, community and leadership, the manner in which they build a 26
 27 shared congregational life together and the nature of their identification with each 27
 28 other. They thus carry a great deal of ethical significance within the dynamics of 28
 29 the church community. 29
 30 30
 31 *Communal and Private, Spiritual and Secular* 31
 32 32
 33 One rationale for the use of popular music in church is the desire to break down 33
 34 the distinction between the sacred and the secular that an elevated or distinctive 34
 35 church style can serve to reinforce.²⁷ In contrast to the previous section, this section 35
 36 shows how certain dynamics at work in the lives of congregation members can 36
 37 nevertheless allow this musical world to be a distinct realm within their musical 37
 38 lives. 38
 39 39
 40 ²⁴ Interview with the author, 9 March 2012. 40
 41 ²⁵ Nekola, ‘Between This World and the Next’, p. 225. 41
 42 ²⁶ Timothy Rice, ‘Reflections on Music and Meaning: Metaphor, Signification and 42
 43 Control in the Bulgarian Case’, *British Journal of Ethnomusicology*, 10/1 (2001): p. 34. 43
 44 ²⁷ Ingalls, ‘Awesome in This Place’. 44

1 Tom, an English graduate and former intern at the church, tends to listen to 1
 2 music that he describes as ‘indie’, ‘literate’, ‘witty’, ‘alternative’, ‘melancholy’ and 2
 3 fairly introspective. He specifically contrasts this with the atmosphere at a stadium 3
 4 gig: giant musical collectives are something he would generally avoid. However, 4
 5 expressive charismatic worship in a Sunday service seems to be unproblematic for 5
 6 him. When I commented on the similarities between the Sunday setting and some 6
 7 of the qualities he avoids in the larger stadium atmosphere, Tom responded: 7

8
 9 I’m quite an introvert, and I tend to process things quite inwardly. [But] I love 8
 10 the joy of being able to come together in a stadium setting – [correcting himself] 10
 11 well, I say in a stadium, in a *church* setting – and declare [shared purposes] with 11
 12 others, knowing that this is something I’ve thought through deeply in my own 12
 13 time [...] I think the music I listen to personally helps me process and helps 13
 14 me work out what I’m actually thinking, or shapes my thoughts. And then the 14
 15 music I respond to in church, I appreciate that, because it’s got a congregational 15
 16 dynamic. It is a response; it is designed to be with a range of different people all 16
 17 coming together to affirm one common faith.²⁸ 17

18
 19 For Tom, there are two counterbalancing poles to this musical life. On one pole 19
 20 is the introspective way in which he processes things and deals with life, not just 20
 21 musically but intellectually and emotionally. On the other pole is the confident 21
 22 expression of faith within community. For Tom, neither the reflective music he 22
 23 listens to in private nor the expressive worship music in church is completely 23
 24 adequate on its own; instead, he finds that they each fulfil a role in relation to 24
 25 the other, together completing the pattern which helps him to navigate life as a 25
 26 believer. 26

27 Nemi, a singer on the worship team, outlines a similar divergence between the 27
 28 public and private aspects of her musical life. For Nemi, music is something that 28
 29 takes on a large degree of emotional significance in relation to different people, 29
 30 events and situations. Her own tastes in music take her a little away from the 30
 31 church style to music that is often more ‘messy’ and ‘unpredictable’; however, the 31
 32 church music is still able to become important to her due to its potential emotional 32
 33 significance and attachments. For Nemi, the music doesn’t migrate out of this 33
 34 worship setting, either in terms of listening or of significance; in fact, she even 34
 35 goes so far as to say that listening to some of this music elsewhere would be weird. 35

36
 37 Maybe it’s not my style of music, and other than the church and what God is 37
 38 doing in Aldates it doesn’t have any other significance to me personally. With 38
 39 [traditional] hymns on the other hand, I’ve been singing hymns with my family 39
 40 since I was younger, so it, I can travel, I can remember things but with the church 40
 41 and Aldates it’s just Aldates.²⁹ 41

42
 43 ²⁸ Interview with the author, 15 February 2012. 43

44 ²⁹ Interview with the author, 12 March 2012. 44

1 This musical boundary carries a parallel in the personal realm; Nemi forms and 1
 2 enjoys significant friendships, even with members of the congregation, outside 2
 3 of the services rather than finding a place for them in the church. For both 3
 4 Nemi and Tom, the divergence in musical style is something laden with deeper 4
 5 significance for the way in which they negotiate the world and conceive of the 5
 6 church community. The corporate spiritual life of the church is something distinct 6
 7 from the experiences of daily life in specific and meaningful ways. Whilst their 7
 8 experiences within the church services may conform quite closely to church 8
 9 expectations, musical features and style carry with them additional significance in 9
 10 relationship to other parts of their lives. This relationship is something of particular 10
 11 ethical and spiritual significance in a context where the living out of faith is a 11
 12 primary concern³⁰ – there is a deep connection between questions of musical style 12
 13 and significance and personal, social and theological relationships and attitudes. 13

14
 15 *At the Edges: Value Transfer, Judgements, Discontent* 15
 16 16

17 The third category that I trace through the interviews encompasses a broad range 17
 18 of experiences in which musical value judgements formed outside of church either 18
 19 become problematic for worshippers or need to be consciously suppressed in order 19
 20 to maintain a positive experience of Sunday worship. Liz, a dancer and clubber 20
 21 with particular interests in heavier rock, has a broadly positive experience of the 21
 22 worship music of the church but, nevertheless, in certain contexts is able to express 22
 23 negative value judgements of the music: 23

24
 25 [My] first year at university I gave up non-Christian music for Lent [...] it nearly 25
 26 killed me [...] because I love music and I had almost no music. And actually I 26
 27 don't like worship CDs [...] it's often a bit ... wet round the edges. There's not 27
 28 much punch or bite to it ... To me it feels quite generic and quite samey and 28
 29 often quite predictable, and it's not the sort of ... There are bands who are like 29
 30 that in the secular world, and I don't listen to them ... because I don't like that, 30
 31 because it just feels boring.³¹ 31

32
 33 The experience of Stephen, a rapper and medic, illustrates the kind of inner 33
 34 struggle that can occur when the balance shifts so that the negative experience of 34
 35 the music is foregrounded to a much greater degree whilst the worshipper is still 35
 36 seeking to engage with the other purposes that the music is aiming to facilitate. 36
 37 37

38 I don't enjoy it [worship music] at all; I find it very cheesy. The jazz part of me 38
 39 finds the chords incredibly boring and the melodies incredibly boring. The hip 39
 40 hop part of me finds the lyrics dreadful and generally empty [...] I feel that God 40
 41 has helped me to get past a lot of my own silly judgments in these ways and 41
 42 42

43 ³⁰ Ingalls, 'Awesome in This Place'. 43

44 ³¹ Interview with the author, 3 February 2012. 44

| | | |
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| 1 | actually to say, well, these [worship songs] are still truth, and this is still ... and | 1 |
| 2 | you know, singing truth is a wonderful thing. I love the church and I love joining | 2 |
| 3 | in with my brothers and sisters to praise God, and so I've kind of found joy in | 3 |
| 4 | that, but in the music itself, it's a battle. ³² | 4 |
| 5 | | 5 |
| 6 | These two quotations illustrate a much wider range of feelings and judgements | 6 |
| 7 | that worshippers bring to the worship music within the church. On occasion this | 7 |
| 8 | can lead to a deep struggle with the musical aspect of congregational activity, | 8 |
| 9 | but often it sits on a much more ambiguous level where value-judgements only | 9 |
| 10 | occasionally raise their heads because worshippers put them to the back of their | 10 |
| 11 | mind in favour of other purposes. The judgements will sometimes be framed as | 11 |
| 12 | purely musical in nature but often they connect to broader modes of being in the | 12 |
| 13 | world. Stephen later discussed how the judgements about lyrics that come from | 13 |
| 14 | his hip hop background connect with attitudes towards the way in which good | 14 |
| 15 | theology should be expressed alongside music that does justice to the darker sides | 15 |
| 16 | of human existence. Liz went on to highlight how even positive value judgements | 16 |
| 17 | are something that can be problematic, as they can lead to a distraction from what | 17 |
| 18 | she sees as the principal purpose of worship. | 18 |
| 19 | One further quotation from Ben, a musician who feels stylistically constrained | 19 |
| 20 | by the imposition of a uniform pop-rock style, serves to highlight the close | 20 |
| 21 | connection between musical value judgements and deeper questions of spirituality: | 21 |
| 22 | | 22 |
| 23 | When I play music properly in any setting, it's about the connection between | 23 |
| 24 | your soul and the other band and whoever's there, and just expressing yourself | 24 |
| 25 | truly honestly [...] I totally let go when I'm playing, and that could be in a church | 25 |
| 26 | setting or a contemporary music pub scene. The difference is that I actually felt | 26 |
| 27 | for a long time that the church was a better connection, [that it] was a more true | 27 |
| 28 | and honest connection to worship, whereas now I'm finding at the moment it | 28 |
| 29 | isn't necessarily, but that's more of the style and the system. ³³ | 29 |
| 30 | | 30 |
| 31 | The close relationship which Ben feels between musical experience and the | 31 |
| 32 | soul leads him to feel the imposition of stylistic constraint that emerges from a | 32 |
| 33 | system of authority within the church (alluded to towards the end of quotation) | 33 |
| 34 | as a constraint of the soul, with music-making in a pub setting becoming a more | 34 |
| 35 | authentic location of worship than the church itself. | 35 |
| 36 | | 36 |
| 37 | | 37 |
| 38 | Discussion/Analysis | 38 |
| 39 | | 39 |
| 40 | As these last few interviews have demonstrated, within the framework of the | 40 |
| 41 | church, church members sometimes suspend (although often only partially) their | 41 |
| 42 | | 42 |
| 43 | ³² Interview with the author, 10 April 2012. | 43 |
| 44 | ³³ Interview with the author, 6 March 2012. | 44 |

1 musical value judgements because they understand music to serve other purposes 1
 2 within the worshipping life of the church. The question of what to do with value 2
 3 judgements in a context in which they're not a regular part of public discourse 3
 4 is something that can create tension for those who find them to be part of their 4
 5 experience and is the area in which ethical dilemmas are most-readily present 5
 6 both for worshippers and for the leaders shaping the church's musical life and 6
 7 values. Worship team leaders emphasized in interview how they would encourage 7
 8 worshippers to set aside problems encountered in relation to musical style in favour 8
 9 of a direct engagement with God that can happen regardless of musical context. 9
 10 Beliefs about the nature of music shift discourse away from musical valuations 10
 11 and instead frame music simply as a tool for worship. If worshippers regularly 11
 12 experience tension between the music they value and the music the church sings, 12
 13 they may learn to regularly suppress key aspects of their experience (or they may 13
 14 eventually move to a different church as a way of escaping these tensions). This 14
 15 habituation is likely to have consequences for the way in which these worshippers 15
 16 learn to relate church and world, spiritual and material. Some of these consequences 16
 17 may be positive, fostering self-discipline, selflessness in community, a move away 17
 18 from consumerist attitudes to music and the development of attitudes that allow 18
 19 them to relate to the divine in a broad range of situations. Other consequences 19
 20 are likely to be negative, where they are forced to hold back key elements of 20
 21 their experience and activity from dialogue with the church community; they are 21
 22 restrained from valuing important aspects of experience and Sunday worship is 22
 23 prevented from being a place of fully open and honest coming before God as 23
 24 community. 24

25 A parallel in public life serves to highlight the importance and potential of 25
 26 opening up space for dialogue. Rowan Williams in his reflections on secularist 26
 27 attitudes to the role of religion in the public square uses language that connects 27
 28 this manner of neutralizing aesthetic judgements and negotiation of religious 28
 29 difference. Williams suggests that 'by defining ideological and religious difference 29
 30 as if they were simply issues about individual preference, almost of private "style", 30
 31 [secularist] discourse effectively denies the seriousness of difference itself'.³⁴ He 31
 32 maintains that such a situation is undesirable in society and that instead, in order 32
 33 to create a healthy liberal democracy, there is the need for public negotiation 33
 34 of difference in an environment where different voices can be heard and taken 34
 35 seriously without the assumption that in doing so the product would be inevitable 35
 36 animosity, conflict or disloyalty to the larger community. Indeed, he argues that the 36
 37 situation operates almost the opposite way around and that in providing a space for 37
 38 these differences to be taken seriously there is the potential for a more powerful 38
 39 level of social identification to take place. The history of the worship wars has 39
 40 served to embed similar anxieties within the consciousness of those involved in 40
 41 the contemporary worship music scene, a memory of community divisions rooted 41
 42 in musical loyalties being close at hand whenever issues of musical difference 42

43 _____ 43
 44 ³⁴ Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square* (Bloomsbury Continuum, 2012), p. 25. 44

1 are raised. The constraint of meaningful discussion surrounding music, however, 1
 2 can serve to impoverish aspects of the life of the worshipping community just as 2
 3 it can serve to weaken societal bonds. The problems the church is quick to see 3
 4 in the privatization of religious meaning can serve as a spur to self-examination 4
 5 and reflection around the areas of its common life where it might be complicit in 5
 6 similar problems. 6

7 Lutheran scholar and musician Lorraine Smith Brugh proposes a framework 7
 8 that she entitles ‘responsive contextualization’ as a basis for examining and shaping 8
 9 the liturgy of worship. As worshippers bring their own horizons of experience to 9
 10 the truths of worship ‘Every dramatic action, every piece of music, every preached 10
 11 word is received in a local context, where it completes its meaning. [...] the truth 11
 12 of art must intersect with the particularity of each new context in order to have 12
 13 meaning.’³⁵ She emphasizes the importance of identifying and bringing into 13
 14 conscious awareness meaning as it is expressed in the community due to the way 14
 15 in which worship expresses the values of a community and those things that it 15
 16 finds meaningful and valuable in all of life. In examining the range of experiences 16
 17 present at St Aldates we have seen how such processes of meaning-making are 17
 18 already at work within the church community in a range of ways both productive 18
 19 and problematic. Brugh observes that existing liturgical meaning often goes 19
 20 unnoticed or unrecognized in the community, and she argues that churches need a 20
 21 process that ‘reflects to the community who it believes itself to be under God and 21
 22 with God’.³⁶ This seems to be particularly true in the case of contemporary worship 22
 23 music where key elements of discourse serve not just to deflect attention away 23
 24 from such meaning but to deny its relevance or very presence. In some situations 24
 25 such a process of examination may well lead to a reconfiguration of worship 25
 26 practices; in others it may instead lead to an enrichment of existing practices as 26
 27 church members develop a clearer understanding of the rich variety of meanings 27
 28 and experiences which they currently encounter in a largely one-sided fashion. 28
 29 In acknowledging and engaging with a broad range of experience, meaning and 29
 30 significance relating to music, participatory energy can be unleashed and a road to 30
 31 deeper individual and communal flourishing opened up; and in opening up space 31
 32 for mutual dialogue about music-making, churches can reduce the potential for 32
 33 reinforcing and cementing fixed positions and resulting experiences of alienation.³⁷ 33

34 34
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40 ³⁵ Lorraine Smith Brugh, ‘Responsive Contextualization: A Liturgical Theology for 40
 41 Multicultural Congregational Worship’ (PhD diss., Northwestern University, June 1998), 41
 42 p. 39. 42

43 ³⁶ Smith Brugh, ‘Responsive Contextualization’, p. 161. 43

44 ³⁷ Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, p. 102. 44

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