

# The Developing Field of Christian Congregational Music Studies

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## Abstract

Whilst Christian congregational music has long been an object of reflection and study it has often been pushed towards the margins of the various disciplines that it inhabits. In this article I survey some of the challenges such study has faced before suggesting that recent disciplinary developments have served to prepare the ground for increased study of Christian congregational music. I suggest that ethnomusicology, in particular, has played an important role in motivating recent enquiry across a range of disciplines although not without facing a number of further challenges itself. I suggest that a field of Christian congregational music studies is beginning to emerge and finish by outlining recent contributions to scholarship from a range of perspectives.

## Keywords

congregation – music – church – Christian – musicology – theology – ethnomusicology

Over the course of recent years the study of Christian congregational music has begun to flourish in new and exciting ways, with congregational music increasingly emerging as both an object and a field of study. What I initially suspected to be a somewhat sparse area of enquiry when first embarking on my own congregational research project a few years ago is attracting increasing numbers of scholars intrigued by the variety of questions it raises. In this article I will survey the recent emergence of this developing area of scholarship;<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of this choice of term see Monique Ingalls, Carolyn Landau, and Thomas Wagner (eds), *Christian Congregational Music: Performance, Identity, and Experience* (Surrey:

I will trace the challenges that such study has faced and the developments that have led to its increasing viability before describing recent work in the field. In providing a narrative of the development of Christian congregational music scholarship I hope to provide some grounding for increasing dialogue with and within the field and for the development of a more self-aware field of study.

### Fragmented and at the Margins

Christian congregational music is by no means a novel object of reflection. There are long traditions of thought and reflection on its purpose, nature, development, texts and musical characteristics going back as far as the church fathers.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, study of congregational music has, for various reasons, often been pushed towards the margins of the various disciplines that it inhabits. Whilst there have been a great number of historical volumes published on church music within musicology, for example, in reading them one can often be struck by the absence of the congregation in favour of the more traditional musicological focus on composers, works and, sometimes, musicians. This is, perhaps, unsurprising; Dan Michael Randel, for example, describes the way in which the discipline of musicology has often privileged more-complex forms of art music traditions, noting the undervaluation of ‘repertoires that “don’t look like much on the page,” [and] that rely for their effectiveness on the particular circumstances of place, audience and performance’.<sup>3</sup> Such a situation has led to much musical scholarship focussing on elite establishments in which a focus can be maintained on the professional services of choirs and composers.<sup>4</sup> Clive Burgess and Andrew Wathey can thus

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Ashgate, 2013), p. 3. Ingalls, Landau and Wagner choose the label primarily for its inclusive potential and to avoid the restrictive connotations of designations applied more frequently to specialised genres and areas within church music. Whilst ‘congregational’ as a term has equal potential to exclude particular musical practices associated with the church it helpfully focuses attention back on neglected aspects of church music whilst, as yet, having fewer restrictive connotations than other designations and, as such, being open to broader definition.

- 2 James W McKinnon, *Music in Early Christian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).
- 3 Dan Michael Randel, ‘The Canons in the Musicology Toolbox’, in *Disciplining Music: Musicology and Its Canons*, ed. Katherine Bergeron, and Philip Vilas Bohlman (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 16.
- 4 Studies of hymnody perhaps provide an exception to this pattern but nevertheless have often maintained a focus on the production of repertoire.

observe that ‘smaller institutions (parishes and hospitals) and monasteries... still fare poorly in musicological narratives by comparison with cathedrals and... collegiate foundations’<sup>5</sup> and that ‘institutions have been framed too much in terms of their prescribed complement of clergy, singers and other staff—irrespective of the realities of day-to-day attendance.’<sup>6</sup> The interest provided by elaborate musics has meant that everyday realities have often been neglected and congregational music pushed to the sidelines.

Jeremy Begbie, writing from congregational music’s other natural home in the discipline of theology, laments that ‘in modern theology, music is conspicuous by its absence’, a tendency which he puts down largely to music’s resistance to linguistic capture in the face of a theological discipline that is firmly committed to the truth-bearing ability of words.<sup>7</sup> Following earlier periods in which music occupied a prominent role in theological reflection the concerns of more recent theologians have allotted it a lesser significance, meaning that it has been marginalised in favour of other questions. As congregational music has struggled to find an entirely suitable place of rest either within musicology or theology, church historians and social researchers Peter Webster and Ian Jones therefore suggest that ‘the study of church music... has fallen between several disciplinary stools. Musicologists and music historians have... assessed [recent compositions] primarily according to musical quality, rather than by whether they seem “good” or “appropriate” for worship. Historians and sociologists of Christianity have approached church music largely as a source for understanding quite different questions: for example, to trace patronage of the arts or to trace theological and social attitudes in the words...in preference to considering why people valued music as part of worship at all, or what they thought “good” church music was. Theologians, likewise...who have engaged in theological reflection on art or the arts...have tended to allot comparatively little space to music.’<sup>8</sup> The study of congregational music has an uneasy relationship with traditional disciplinary boundaries and, as a result, has been engaged in a somewhat selective manner within the academy.

Recent interdisciplinary efforts to bring theology and music together often reflect similar challenges for the study of congregational music. Thus, for

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5 Clive Burgess and Andrew Wathey, ‘Mapping the soundscape: church music in English towns, 1450–1550’, *Early Music History* 19 (2000), pp. 1–46 at p. 9.

6 Burgess and Wathey, ‘Mapping the soundscape’, p. 10.

7 Jeremy Begbie, ‘Theology and Music’, in *The Modern Theologians: an Introduction to Christian Theology Since 1918*, ed. David F. Ford and Rachel Muers (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).

8 Ian Jones and Peter Webster, ‘The Theological Problem of Popular Music for Worship in Contemporary Christianity’, *Crucible* (July–September 2006), pp. 9–16 at p. 10.

example, whilst the various programmes pioneered by Begbie in order to explore Theology Through the Arts have been incredibly influential in opening up important new areas of conversation, they have also tended to privilege the existence of music as an art form rather than as congregational practice. Whilst this is a deliberate decision on Begbie's part in order to explore particular areas of broader conversation, in opening up some areas others are inevitably sidelined. The Durham-based Music Theology network reflects what seems to be a similar initial prioritisation, with Bennett Zon suggesting, for example, that 'music theology aims to recover the seemingly lost unity at root between musical and theological meaning in modern and historical areas of composition, performance and listening', a taxonomy very much rooted in the same tradition of Western Art Music.<sup>9</sup> Such developments are very much to be welcomed, however they are not, by themselves, enough for the study of musical formations characterised by their location within the worshipping life of Christian communities.<sup>10</sup> Work that brings together a grounded examination of the music of the church with theological examination operating on a similar human scale is an area which has yet to be fully explored.

Aside from studies within the academy, congregational music is an area that often attracts, on some level, the reflections of practitioners and lay-people. Musical leaders in particular are often driven to reflect on and write about the many questions raised by developments and challenges within the musical practices of the communities within which they are a part. Such practitioners can often find themselves relatively alone in church settings where musical practice receives much greater emphasis than reflection and thought around music. A variety of organisations exist in order to resource church music, however often these will provide largely practical resources or will exist firmly within particular traditions, thereby providing relatively little space for critical reflection on those traditions and practices.<sup>11</sup> This situation has received at

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9 Bennett Zon, 'Bedazzled By Breakthrough: Music Theology and the Problem of Composing Music in Words', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 136/2 (2011), pp. 429–35 at p. 430.

10 Sven-Erik Brodd makes a similar analysis of the situation, placing taxonomies and definitions of church music alongside the kind of work already mentioned: 'Many theologians have written about what church music might be from a theological perspective and many have also discussed the theology of music in general...Church music has, however, rarely been explored from the perspective of explicit ecclesiological questions' (Sven-Erik Brodd, 'Ecclesiology and Church Music: Towards a Possible Relationship', *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 6/2 (2006), pp. 126–43 at p. 128.)

11 The most prominent in the UK is the Royal School of Church Music (RSCM) which in recent years has provided increasing space for critical reflection but nevertheless remains

least as much comment as that within musicology or theology. Mark Evans, for example, writing from the perspective of contemporary music studies, expresses a desire to ‘move beyond more manuals and “how tos”, suggesting that church music education and practice needs instead ‘critical examination, historical relevance, analysis, provocation’ since it has ‘lagged sadly behind in the world of critical enquiry.’<sup>12</sup> And Jones and Webster write that ‘whilst there is a large body of church-based literature devoted specifically to church music, much of it concerns the practicalities (choir training, for example) and largely skirts around theological questions... “How-to” manuals on popular worship for music have tended to focus particularly on the state of mind and heart of the worship leader, rather than engage in theological reflection on particular styles of music themselves.’<sup>13</sup>

The scattered nature of research amongst a range of settings and disciplines means that congregational music scholarship has historically often been shaped by the constraints and priorities of these settings rather than being opened up to the varying dimensions and attributes of the object of study<sup>14</sup> and a number of commentators have stepped back and diagnosed this as the underlying problem. Ethnomusicologist Philip Bohlman observes the segmentation that has existed within studies of music in American religious experience which he finds to be divided between i) philological studies of denominational liturgy and hymnody ii) musical studies of music divorced from religious experience and iii) the ‘democratic’ voices of practitioners.<sup>15</sup> Bohlman clearly finds inadequacies within such a division, focussed as

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largely, at least in many of its local forms, tied to the English choral tradition. Worship Central, based at Holy Trinity, Brompton, has recently become increasingly influential within charismatic traditions, providing a counterpart focussed around Contemporary Worship Music.

- 12 Mark Evans, *Open Up the Doors: Music in the Modern Church* (London: Equinox, 2006), p. 4.
- 13 Jones and Webster, ‘The Theological Problem’, p. 10.
- 14 Franz Praßl and Anthony Ruff make a similar point, suggesting that ‘The academic institutionalization of church music studies needs to be developed further, so that research is not subject only to chance factors of individual interests but provided with continuity’ (Franz Karl Praßl and Anthony William Ruff, ‘Church Music Scholarship’, in *Religion Past and Present*, ed. Hans Dieter Betz, Don S Browning, Bernd Janowski and Eberhard Jüngel (Brill, 2011)).
- 15 Philip Bohlman, Edith Blumhofer and Maria Chow (eds), *Music in American Religious Experience* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 10–11. See, for example Avery T Sharp and James Michael Floyd, *Church and Worship Music: An Annotated Bibliography of Contemporary Scholarship* (New York: Routledge, 2005) for a catalogue of literature on American church music.

it is on particular sets of interests which exclude as much ground as they open up. Ingalls, Landau and Wagner, in a similar manner, suggest what is missing from scholarship on Christian congregational music is 'a multi-voiced dialogue between methodological approaches, disciplinary perspectives and the positioning of scholars in relationship to the communities they represent'<sup>16</sup> and John Witvliet believes such a need is important not just in the academy but for the training of church musicians, suggesting the need for 'interdisciplinary courses that do not relegate the complex issues of our time to footnotes; scholarship that looks for conversation partners among cultural anthropologists, philosophers of aesthetics, and systematic and biblical theologians; pedagogy that challenges students to become perceptive participants in actual liturgical events; and mentors who are practitioner-scholars'.<sup>17</sup> Whilst this may seem to suggest a somewhat gloomy portrait of congregational music studies, cries such as these do not simply echo unheeded; they come alongside a number of developments and evolutions that have begun to turn such conversations into a fuller reality and, as such, run with, rather than struggling against, the grain of much recent research.

### (Inter-)Disciplinary Evolution

Fields such as congregational studies,<sup>18</sup> practical theology,<sup>19</sup> ritual studies and liturgical studies<sup>20</sup> have recently begun to prepare the ground for increased interdisciplinary study of congregational music and worship practices. And, as readers of this journal are no-doubt aware, recent turns to ethnography in theology and ethics<sup>21</sup> have combined with developments in the social

16 Ingalls, Landau, and Wagner, *Christian Congregational Music*, p. 10.

17 John Witvliet, 'Training Church Musicians as Pastoral Liturgists', in *Musicians for the Churches: Reflections on Vocation and Formation*, ed. Margot Esbeth Fassler (New Haven: Institute of Sacred Music at Yale University, 2001), p. 21.

18 Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Studying Congregations: a New Handbook* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998). Mathew Guest, Karin Tusting, and Linda Woodhead (eds), *Congregational Studies in the UK: Christianity in a Post-Christian Context* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).

19 Bonnie J Miller-McLemore (ed), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

20 Catherine M Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). Hans Schilderman (ed), *Discourse in Ritual Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

21 Elizabeth Phillips, 'Charting the "Ethnographic Turn": Theologians and the Study of Christian Congregations', in *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. Pete Ward (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2012). 'The Ethnographic

sciences<sup>22</sup> to make study of and reflection around congregations an increasingly feasible and popular exercise.<sup>23</sup> Despite such changes, music still often comes as something of an outsider, set apart as its own field of study and finding itself largely absent from the developments of these interdisciplinary fields. In 2004 Mary McGann, in her study of African American Catholic music, is still able to write that ‘ethnography is just emerging as a source of insight into contemporary worship and theology’<sup>24</sup> and, more recently, Martyn Percy comments that ‘the field of theology and religious studies has been thoroughly exposed to conversations with social sciences such as anthropology and sociology; and more recently, with psychology and cosmology. But conversations about faith and theology with musicology are still relatively new, and to some extent nascent.’<sup>25</sup> Such a situation is, perhaps, unsurprising; music can often be a little late to the conversation. Marcia Citron, for example, notes musicology’s relatively late engagement with feminist scholarship,<sup>26</sup> whilst David Beard and Kenneth Gloag make similar observations about its engagement with post-structuralism and postmodernism.<sup>27</sup> Traditions of musical training and scholarship, moreover, can intimidate non-specialists, putting them off from studying a domain which has its own peculiar sets of codes, rules and rituals. Michelle Bigenho discusses how this can often put anthropologists off from musical commentary, explaining that music is often seen as a privileged field, leaving non-specialists wary of studying an area which they assume to require special knowledge and skills over and above other areas of inquiry.<sup>28</sup> Music,

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Turn in Theology and Ethics’, in *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics*, ed. Christian Bataalden Scharen, and Aana Marie Vigen (London; New York: Continuum, 2011).

22 Phillips, ‘Charting the Ethnographic Turn’, pp. 100–101.

23 Although see Joel Robbins, ‘What is a Christian? Notes Toward an Anthropology of Christianity’, *Religion* 33/3 (2003), pp. 191–199. and Joel Robbins, ‘Continuity Thinking and the Problem of Christian Culture’, *Current Anthropology* 48/1 (2007), pp. 5–38. for a discussion of continuing obstacles in the related discipline of anthropology.

24 Mary E McGann, *A Precious Fountain: Music in the Worship of an African American Catholic Community* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2005). p. xix.

25 Martyn Percy, ‘Afterword’ in Ingalls, Landau and Wagner *Christian Congregational Music* pp. 217–222 at p. 217.

26 Marcia J Citron, ‘Feminist Approaches to Musicology’, in *Cecilia Reclaimed: Feminist Perspectives on Gender and Music*, ed. Susan C Cook, and Judy S Tsou (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994) p. 15.

27 David Beard, and Kenneth. Gloag, *Musicology: the Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2005) p. xii.

28 Michelle Bigenho, ‘Why I’m Not an Ethnomusicologist: a View from Anthropology’, in *The New (Ethno)musicologies*, ed. Henry Stobart (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2008). p. 29. Kay Kaufman Shelemay made a similar point in a 2012 address to the American Academy

then, serves as a specific kind of ecclesial practice that may need an extra degree of care and attentiveness in order to find its place within renewed patterns of conversation.

Whilst interdisciplinary fields of congregational study have been developing, studies of music have not stood still, and the development of the field of ethnomusicology<sup>29</sup> over the course of the twentieth century<sup>30</sup> has provided much of the ground necessary for increased interdisciplinary study of congregational music, broadening study of music beyond the Western Art Music canon and at the same time bringing with it a new range of disciplinary tools necessitated by such study. Developments in ethnomusicology have been a large motivating force behind a recent interest in the field of congregational music studies, a field which, due to ethnomusicology's focus on the practices, understandings and experiences of musicians and communities, has the potential to be a remarkably fruitful area of ethnomusicological inquiry. Ethnomusicology, whilst being far from the only discipline to make important contributions, has served to highlight the potential of congregational music as a field of study in its own right and in doing so—and in confronting its own limitations—has begun to spur further conversations across disciplinary boundaries. The possibility of such an alliance has, nevertheless, taken time to emerge. Ethnomusicology's prioritisation, early in its history, of the collection and comparison of exotic 'musical systems'<sup>31</sup> was not one that brought Christian musics to the foreground. Such familiar musical systems, from this

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of Religion: 'I would like to combat a condition that I will ironically term "scholarly melophobia"—the scholarly fear of music. I use this phrase both to get your attention and to underscore my efforts to combat a situation of musical exclusion that extends well beyond the community of religion scholars to colleagues in most fields outside of music.'

29 The Society for Ethnomusicology suggests that 'Ethnomusicology is the study of music in its cultural context. Ethnomusicologists approach music as a social process in order to understand not only *what* music is but *why* it is: what music means to its practitioners and audiences, and how those meanings are conveyed.' They suggest that ethnomusicologists share three main foundations '1) Taking a global approach to music (regardless of area of origin, style, or genre). 2) Understanding music as social practice (viewing music as a human activity that is shaped by its cultural context). 3) Engaging in ethnographic fieldwork (participating in and observing the music being studied, frequently gaining facility in another music tradition as a performer or theorist), and historical research.' (<http://www.ethnomusicology.org/?page=WhatIsEthnomusicol>).

30 Alan P Merriam, *The Anthropology of Music* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1964). Henry Stobart, *The New (Ethno)musicologies*.

31 Samuel Araujo, 'Ethnomusicologists Researching Towns They Live in: Theoretical and Methodological Queries for a Renewed Discipline', *Музикологија* 9 (2009), pp. 33–50 at p. 35.



perspective, needed no special attention in order to be understood. Amy Stillman, in 1993, criticised such neglect, suggesting that the scholarly drawing of a strong dividing line between ‘indigenous’ and ‘introduced’ musics in missioned areas had led to areas of scholarly blindness through the neglecting of the latter.<sup>32</sup> Likewise Jeffers Engelhardt as late as 2009, could still refer to the ‘ethnomusicology of Christianity’, alongside its anthropological counterpart, as an emergent project.<sup>33</sup> Ethnomusicology has, however, adapted considerably since its earlier periods, giving increasing attention to music’s role as and in culture<sup>34</sup> and turning its ethnographic attention to the wide variety of processes, social relationships, ideas, objects and events that surround musical practices and groups.

Following similar trends in anthropology,<sup>35</sup> a more-recent turn within the discipline to a greater focus on ‘research at home’ alongside the more-traditional focus on exotic musical cultures has allowed researchers to study the church without feeling they need confine themselves to distant examples in order to engage in productive research.<sup>36</sup> Such a turn has not only focussed ethnomusicological attention on musical cultures at a closer geographical or cultural proximity to many Euro-American researchers, but has served to help create a discipline better able to deal with a variety of interests and standpoints. Samuel Araujo suggests that the turn to fieldwork at home has itself brought into question traditional ideals of objectivity and neutrality, forcing the commitment of the researcher to their object of study into closer awareness, bringing about collaborative work between researchers and practitioners, and establishing the need for intensified interdisciplinary approaches.<sup>37</sup>

32 Amy Stillman, ‘Prelude to a Comparative Investigation of Protestant Hymnody in Polynesia’, *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 25 (1993), pp. 89–99.

33 Jeffers Engelhardt, ‘Right Singing in Estonian Orthodox Christianity: A Study of Music, Theology, and Religious Ideology’, *Ethnomusicology* 53/1 (2009), pp. 32–57 at p. 33. Engelhardt provides a helpful catalogue of recent pieces of scholarship in the ethnomusicology of Christianity, situating it in close relation to late 20<sup>th</sup> century developments in anthropology.

34 Bruno Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-one Issues and Concepts*, 2nd ed. (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2005), p. 217.

35 Cf. Anthony Jackson *Anthropology at Home* (London; New York: Tavistock Publications, 1987). Mariza Peiraon ‘When Anthropology is at Home: The Different Contexts of a Single Discipline’, *Annual Review of Anthropology* 27 (1998), pp. 105–128.

36 For one early example of this see Mellonee Burnim ‘Culture Bearer and Tradition Bearer: An Ethnomusicologist’s Research on Gospel Music’, *Ethnomusicology* 29/3 (1985), pp. 432–447.

37 Araujo, ‘Ethnomusicologists Researching Towns’. p. 39.

The second edition of Barz and Cooley's book 'Shadows in the Field' in 2008 documents similar trends, charting the move towards a more self-aware ethnomusicology able to reflect on its own priorities and interests. Such moves are critical for interdisciplinary study of congregational music, allowing for the varying positions, disciplinary and institutional allegiances and relationships of those close to the field of study to be examined as they are brought into the conversation rather than positioned, somewhat awkwardly, to one side.<sup>38</sup> This is particularly important if such musical study is to enter into a conversation with theology—a discipline that makes strong claims over and above the realm of objective detachment—but is also important for secular scholars who, in examining Christian musics, are faced with the challenge of finding an appropriate subject position whilst studying a culture that is relatively close to home and has the potential to carry with it the load of numerous existing societal anxieties.

Even given such developments there remain tensions to work out—the different disciplines and institutions that studies of congregational music bring into conversation often embed competing priorities and discourses. The close connection of much research with faith and practice means that fundamental normative questions are often raised in areas that ethnomusicology can still find it uncomfortable to tread and in which it has much to learn from other disciplines. Within a missionary context, the recent rise of 'ethnodoxology' represents one attempt to use the inspiration of ethnomusicology to fulfill a particular set of goals for fostering the development of particular kinds of locally-responsive Christian musics. The slightly uncomfortable fit between this movement and portions of the academy was demonstrated in a published exchange between John Vallier and Brian Schrag and Neil Coulter in 2003. An assertion by Vallier that ethnodoxologists are unethical social engineers doing work that doesn't fit well with the 'larger secular-based ethnomusicology community'<sup>39</sup> was met by a counter response from Schrag and Coulter that their work sits relatively comfortably within broader and more-nuanced conversations about applied research and might better be understood as an 'imperfect act of love'.<sup>40</sup> The polemical nature of the conversation as well as a more-recent reiteration of

38 Gregory Frederick Barz, and Timothy J. Cooley, *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

39 John Vallier, 'Ethnomusicology as Tool for the Christian Missionary', *European Meetings in Ethnomusicology* 10 (2003), pp. 85–97. John Vallier, 'Reply to Schrag-Coulter's Response', *European Meetings in Ethnomusicology* 10 (2003), pp. 109–116.

40 Brian Schrag and Neil Coulter, 'Response to "Ethnomusicology as tool for the Christian Missionary"', *European Meetings in Ethnomusicology* 10 (2003), pp. 98–108.

similar issues on the Society for Ethnomusicology's email discussion list in April 2013 highlights the care that needs to be taken when bringing different fields of discourse together, particularly when they are bound up with strong practical agendas. It suggests the need for a sensitive and nuanced interaction that is able to reflectively examine such questions as applied research<sup>41</sup> and normativity both on the part of the academy and on the part of practitioners.

### Recent Work

The challenges of researching and writing at these intersections have been taken up by a number of recent scholars, and it is partly their work in beginning to do so that laid the foundations for Martyn Percy, Carolyn Landau, Tom Wagner, Monique Ingalls and me to convene the first 'Christian Congregational Music: Local and Global Perspectives' conference just outside Oxford at Ripon College, Cuddesdon in 2011. In convening the first conference our desire was to begin to consolidate some of this work and to lay the foundations for a more developed field of study. Although four out of the five of us are ethnomusicologists, our desire in convening the first conference was to bring together some of the diverse range of scholars and practitioners scattered through different departments and institutions in order to begin to draw together a fragmented field of scholarship, practice and reflection into a common conversation, a project I continue with this article. Thus Ingalls, Landau and Wagner suggest that the way forward for congregational music studies involves 'collaboration across methods, disciplines and backgrounds', modeled on congregational music itself which 'takes a plurality of voices to perform knowledge, shape understanding and bring identity into being'.<sup>42</sup> Within the two conferences we have convened thus far (the second being in 2013), papers have been presented from disciplines such as theology, musicology, popular music studies, religious studies, inter-cultural studies, sociology and liturgical studies, among others. No doubt owing to the organisers' networks and professional connections, the first conference was skewed heavily in favour of ethnomusicology, with around half the papers hailing from scholars working within this discipline. The second, however, showed a growing interest in congregational music studies from a variety of other fields, two thirds of the presentations coming from disciplines outside ethnomusicology. Whilst some individuals came with a strong

41 See, for example Klisala Harrison, 'Epistemologies of Applied Ethnomusicology', *Ethnomusicology* 56/3 (2012) pp. 505–529.

42 Ingalls, Landau and Wagner, *Christian Congregational Music*, p. 11.

existing involvement as practitioners many have also come from a primarily academic standpoint. Clearly there are a large number and wide range of scholars and practitioners interested in becoming part of this conversation.

The papers presented at the conferences<sup>43</sup> have been a reflection of a growing field of literature, and recent description and analysis of congregational practices takes a wide range of forms; phenomenological,<sup>44</sup> ethnographic,<sup>45</sup> sociological<sup>46</sup> and historical,<sup>47</sup> some of which focus on individual (well-known or relatively anonymous) congregations or individuals within them, and some of which focus on broader movements, disputes and trends both within the church and in the surrounding cultural landscape. Theological and ideological concerns often arise within these studies as a result of a focus on congregational practices, either as they are articulated within congregations or as they are implicit within their practices and discourse, and these concerns serve as important avenues along which different disciplinary perspectives are able to converge. Thus, for example, some of Ingalls' own work<sup>48</sup> focusses on the eschatology implicit within different forms of conference worship, contrasting

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- 43 In which many, but by no means all, of the authors listed below have taken part.
- 44 Gordon Adnams, 'The Experience of Congregational Singing: an Ethno-Phenomenological Approach' (PhD diss., University of Alberta: 2008).
- 45 McGann, *A Precious Fountain*. Jonathan Dueck, 'An Ethnographic Study of the Musical Practices of Three Edmonton Mennonite Churches', (PhD diss., University of Alberta: 2003). Imani Sanga, 'Composition Processes in Popular Church Music in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania', *Ethnomusicology Forum* 15/2 (2006) pp. 247–271. Mark Jennings, "'Won't You Break Free?" an Ethnography of Music and the Divine-Human Encounter at an Australian Pentecostal Church', *Culture and Religion* 9/2 (2008) pp. 161–74. See also the list by Jeffers Engelhardt mentioned above.
- 46 Gerardo Marti, *Worship Across the Racial Divide: Religious Music and the Multiracial Congregation* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
- 47 Within my own subfield of contemporary worship music these include Jay R Howard, and John M Streck, *Apostles of Rock: the Splintered World of Contemporary Christian Music* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999). Pete Ward, *Selling Worship: How What We Sing Has Changed the Church* (Bletchley: Paternoster Press, 2005). Anna Nekola, 'Between This World and the Next: the Musical "Worship Wars" and Evangelical Ideology in the United States 1960–2005', (PhD diss. University of Wisconsin-Madison: 2009). Ian Jones and Peter Webster 'New Music and the "Evangelical Style" in the Church of England, c. 1958–1991' in *British Evangelical Identities Past and Present*, ed. Mark Smith (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008). Sharp and Floyd's bibliography, mentioned above, contains a great number of historical studies.
- 48 Monique Ingalls, 'Singing Heaven Down to Earth: Spiritual Journeys, Eschatological Sounds, and Community Formation in Evangelical Conference Worship', *Ethnomusicology* 55/2 (Spring/Summer 2011) pp. 255–79.

the differing eschatological and social imaginations associated with the musical practices of the American Urbana and Passion student conferences. Anna Nekola<sup>49</sup> pursues similar issues, examining broader theological and political patterns and tensions within evangelicalism over individual and ecclesiastical authority, the relationship between church and world and between rationalistic and felt religion, the balance between evangelism and praise and the nature and construction of meaning. Perry Glanzer, taking a slightly different approach,<sup>50</sup> begins with an explicit theological task, evaluating the success of different frameworks for the relationship between Christ and culture proposed by Richard Niehbuhr, George Marsden and John Yoder in relation to Christian heavy metal culture and Jeffers Engelhardt investigates the theological and ethical ideals that shape ideas of 'right' music, an idea that binds together 'beliefs about the efficacy of sound and style' with 'beliefs about religious truth, confessional differences, and a right way of being in the world'.<sup>51</sup>

A number of authors, following a stronger practical agenda, have made suggestions as to appropriate normative practice. Gordon Adnams, for example, in focussing closely on individuals' experiences of congregational singing critiques common understandings of authenticity within congregational music, following Charles Taylor in advocating the need for a greater focus beyond the self in approaching the music of the church. Gerardo Marti, by contrast, begins on an institutional level, focussing on the relationship between church music and ethnic diversity, suggesting that common understandings of the importance of stylistic diversity in nurturing multiethnic communities are misplaced and that churches would do better to focus on processes of social incorporation. Martyn Percy<sup>52</sup> meanwhile offers a theological and ideological critique of denominational practices, arguing that early Vineyard repertoire offers a distorted picture of divine and human power whilst Martin Stringer draws a close connection between contemporary spaces of worship and the 'safe' spaces of shopping malls and hotel lobbies. Stringer observes the evacuation of value and signification from such spaces and their insulation from the challenges and problems of the real world and argues for the recovery in church of an aesthetic of dangerous transcendence<sup>53</sup> which he believes many of our musical practices to have

49 Nekola, 'Between This World'.

50 Perry Glanzer, 'Christ and the Heavy Metal Subculture', *Journal of Religion and Society* 5 (2003) pp. 1–16.

51 Jeffers Engelhardt, 'Right Singing' at p. 36.

52 Martyn Percy, *Words, Wonders and Power: Understanding Contemporary Christian Fundamentalism and Revivalism* (London: SPCK, 1996).

53 Martin D Stringer 'Worship, Transcendence and Danger: Reflections on Siegfried Kracauer's 'The Hotel Lobby' in Ingalls, Landau and Wagner *Christian Congregational Music* pp. 169–184.

lost. Such proposals, whilst connecting closely to congregational practices, draw on broader traditions of theological and philosophical reflection in order to provide a source of guidance and instruction. The balance between such descriptive, theological and normative angles is constantly in a state of flux.

Ethnomusicological studies of Pentecostalism and Evangelicalism in particular have served an important role in opening up and developing this field of study and the history of scholarship in this area is traced by Melvin Butler. Butler begins with pioneering work undertaken in the 1970s<sup>54</sup> and follows the trail through the influential work of Melonee Burnim in the 1980s<sup>55</sup> all the way through to more recent works that continue this tradition of enquiry into the current century.<sup>56</sup> Studies of Pentecostalism have served as a key precedent for more recent work, particularly in the United States where congregational studies is, perhaps, more developed than elsewhere.<sup>57</sup> Timothy Rommen's work on gospel music and the ethics of style in Trinidad, has become increasingly referenced in recent dissertations and articles on congregational music. Rommen examines the contestation of musical style in churches on the island through the lens of ethical discourse, examining the ways in which different styles become ethically charged and the way in which this affects their deployment and negotiation both on an individual and on a congregational level. In bringing together ethnographic study of music with questions of identity, ethics, ideology and theology and in situating congregational musics firmly within broader cultural landscapes Rommen has helpfully begun to lay the ground for further connections to be made between a vast range of issues, placing congregational song at the heart of a network of concerns and negotiations and placing normative questions closely alongside analysis and description of practices.<sup>58</sup> Likewise, Butler's own work on Pentecostal congregations in Jamaica, Haiti and Brooklyn<sup>59</sup>

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54 Horace Clarence Boyer, 'An Analysis of Black Church Music with Examples Drawn from Services in Rochester, New York' (PhD diss., University of Rochester: 1973) is his earliest example.

55 E.g. Melonee Burnim, 'The Black Gospel Music Tradition: Symbol of Ethnicity' (PhD diss., Indiana University: 1980).

56 Glenn Douglas Hinson, 'Fire in My Bones: Transcendence and the Holy Spirit in African American Gospel' (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania: 2000).

57 See Mathew Guest, Karin Tusting and Linda Woodhead, *Congregational Studies in the UK: Christianity in a Post-Christian Context* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004) for a comparison of congregational studies in the USA with its British counterparts.

58 Timothy Rommen, *Mek Some Noise: Gospel Music and the Ethics of Style in Trinidad* (Berkeley, Calif.; London: University of California Press, 2007).

59 Melvin L Butler, 'Musical Style and Experience in a Brooklyn Pentecostal Church: an 'Insider's' Perspective', *Current Musicology* 70 (2000) pp. 33–50. Melvin L Butler, "Nou Kwe

has delved into the relationship between belief, spiritual experience, research and practice in a range of congregational contexts, providing a methodological challenge to broader ethnomusicological scholarship to move away from strategies of disbelief towards the spiritual and to place a greater value on the descriptions of 'insiders'. Butler takes a strong lead in integrating his ethnographic work with his own Pentecostal allegiance and beliefs, letting them affect his theoretical descriptions as well as his relationship with those he is researching. Moreover, as a musical practitioner within his area of study, Butler begins to bring questions of practice and understanding much closer together. Butler therefore finds himself at an intersection between the discourses of Pentecostalism and those of academia in a way that requires the treading of new ground.<sup>60</sup> Others have struck out in the opposite direction, and Barbara Rose Lange, in her ethnography of Hungarian Pentecostal Music takes issue with ethnographers—in particular drawing attention to the earlier work of Jeff Todd Titon<sup>61</sup>—who suggest that Christian conversion is often necessary in order to fully understand the Pentecostal point of view due to Pentecostals' broad attribution of divine agency to a variety of processes and events within the world.<sup>62</sup> Lange suggests, instead, that her work follows the 'wish expressed by ordinary church members for the secular world to understand them better', at the same time also grappling with the possibilities of polarization and suspicion arising when carrying out fieldwork from an explicitly nonreligious stance.

Whilst many studies avoid the traditional ethnographic desire for exoticism and focus on 'western' congregations, the study of more distant cultures has been re-opened largely through a focus on the legacies of missionary work and associated processes of indiginisation.<sup>63</sup> Within such studies more than simply

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Nan Sentespri" (We Believe in the Holy Spirit): Music, Ecstasy, and Identity in Haitian Pentecostal Worship', *Black Music Research Journal* 22 (2002) pp. 85–125. Melvin L Butler, 'Songs of Pentecost: Experiencing Music, Transcendence, and Identity in Jamaica and Haiti' (PhD diss., New York University: May 2005).

60 Butler, 'Musical Style and Experience'. pp. 35–38.

61 Jeff Todd Titon, 'Stance, Role, and Identity in Fieldwork among Folk Baptists and Pentecostals in the United States.' *American Music* 3 (1985) pp. 16–24. Titon's own ethnographic work is also worth noting: Jeff Todd Titon, *Powerhouse for God: Speech, Chant, and Song in an Appalachian Baptist Church* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988).

62 Barbara Rose Lange, *Holy Brotherhood: Romani Music in a Hungarian Pentecostal Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) p. 13.

63 Gregory Frederick Barz, *Performing Religion: Negotiating Past and Present in Kwaya Music of Tanzania* (New York: Rodopi, 2003). Zoe C Sherinian, 'Musical Style and the Changing Social Identity of Tamil Christians', *Ethnomusicology* 51/2 (2007) pp. 238–80. Michael

musical practices are at stake as congregational musical practices often come loaded with questions of musical understanding, political relationships, identity, theology and social and cultural values, all of which become subject to contestation and negotiation as part of the missionary encounter, often carrying with them a great deal of ambiguity. Barz, in particular, seeks to set aside traditional ideas of syncretism as the lens through which post-encounter musics are described<sup>64</sup> in order to attribute a greater deal of agency to local people and to rebalance traditional assumptions of the power balance within missionary relationships in a more interactive manner.<sup>65</sup> Stillman, meanwhile, highlights the complex and shifting nature of these relationships, suggesting that in Polynesia Christian hymnody has itself become thought of as indigenous and part of local traditions, with boundaries between indigenous and introduced musical domains therefore being far from fixed.<sup>66</sup>

A focus on such local and trans-national relationships within post-colonial settings complements, in the literature, an increasing awareness of the broader presence of trans-national processes of musical circulation,<sup>67</sup> breaking down

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- Webb, 'Palang Conformity and Fulset Freedom: Encountering Pentecostalism's "Sensational" Liturgical Forms in the Postmissionary Church in Lae, Papua New Guinea,' *Ethnomusicology* 55/3 (Fall 2011) pp. 445–72. Muriel E Swijghuisen Reigersberg. "Research Ethics, Positive and Negative Impact, and Working in an Indigenous Australian Context.," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 20/2 (2011) pp. 255–262. Muriel E Swijghuisen Reigersberg, "We Are Lutherans From Germany": Music, Language, Social History and Change in Hopevale,' *Aboriginal History* 36 (2012) pp. 99–117. Stillman, 'Prelude to a Comparative Investigation'. Jan Hellberg, 'To Worship God in Our Way: Disaffection and Localisation in the Music Culture of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia', *Journal of Musical Arts in Africa* 7/1 (2010) pp. 17–50.
- 64 Gregory Frederick Barz, 'The Performance of Religious and Social Identity: An Ethnography of Post-Mission Kwaya Music in Tanzania (East Africa)' (PhD diss., Brown University: 1997). pp. 5–10.
- 65 See, for example, Olof E Axelsson, 'Historical Notes on Neo-African Church Music.' *Zambezia* 3/2 (1974) pp. 89–102 for an earlier critique that pits imperial impositions against the possibilities of indiginisation.
- 66 Stillman, 'Prelude to a Comparative Investigation'.
- 67 Rommen, *Mek Some Noise*. Butler, 'Musical Style and Experience'. Robert Beckford, *Jesus Dub: Theology, Music, and Social Change* (London: Routledge, 2006). Monique Ingalls, 'Transnational Connections, Musical Meaning, and the 1990s "British Invasion" of North American Evangelical Worship Music', in *The Oxford Handbook of Music and World Christianities* ed. Suzel Reily, and Jonathan Dueck (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.). Ingalls. 'Singing Heaven Down'. Tanya Riches, and Tom Wagner, 'The Evolution of Hillsong Music: From Australian Pentecostal Congregation Into Global Brand', *Australian Journal of Communication* 39/1 (2012) pp. 17–36.



any simple binaries that might be drawn between different kinds of study and raising similar kinds of questions within a range of locations. Rommen, for example, describes the ‘negotiation of proximity’ on Trinidad and the way in which more ‘distant’ American musical styles can be used as a way of escaping the complex world of association built up around more local musics and instead become used as gateways to the transcendent.<sup>68</sup> Ingalls surveys similar processes at work in the American elevation of British worship music, thought by its American enthusiasts to be free of the commercialisation endemic in the American worship industry and thus representative of a more authentic and sincere expression of worship<sup>69</sup> whilst Tanya Riches and Tom Wagner examine the transformation of Hillsong music and branding from something with heavy local and Australian connotations to its current existence as a global brand, tracing changing musical style and focus as an integral part of this process of development.<sup>70</sup> The realities of transnational musical circulation are increasingly being met by a complementary focus within the study of this music.

### Conclusion

Emerging congregational music scholarship represents a wide range of interests and approaches and, as can hopefully be seen from this brief, and selective, survey, the interest in this field of study is developing quickly from a number of different angles. The twin poles of this journal, ethnography and ecclesiology serve as important symbolic markers as to the range of interests and perspectives that studies of Christian congregational music bring into conversation, representing both practically focussed and theoretical work; both that which foregrounds normative issues and interests and that which allows them to remain a background presence. It is, at least partly, this intersection of perspectives which marks out the field as one with a great deal of latent potential and it remains an important driver of both interest and innovation.

Whilst recent trends in scholarship of Christian congregational music have been encouraging, it still has further to go before emerging as a mature field of enquiry. The diversity of scholarship means that many scholars and practitioners are as yet often largely unaware of the varying traditions of thought being engaged by their colleagues, critical interdisciplinary engagement being, as

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68 Rommen, *Mek Some Noise*.

69 Ingalls, ‘Transnational Connections’.

70 Riches and Wagner ‘The Evolution of Hillsong Music’.

yet, far from pervasive. Moreover, there are still important holes in the conversation which begin to become apparent as a fuller picture of current scholarship and disciplinary allegiances emerges. Research is relatively unevenly geographically distributed, and large volumes of faith-centred work emerging in the USA, for example, could be helpfully balanced by a greater number of contributions from elsewhere. Likewise many historical, analytical, critical and theoretical perspectives have yet to become fully incorporated into the conversation, a strong recent focus on the congregation sometimes leading to a field which, despite its diversity, can from time to time become introspective rather than developing a strong engagement with frameworks that have been developed within other fields of study. Many meta-level questions too have yet to be fully interrogated, with relatively little contestation having occurred up to this point over issues such as methodology. As the volume of work on which to reflect grows such questions will naturally become more prominent as earlier scholarship becomes open to the possibility of critique and dialogue. It is my hope that we will see this dialogue grow and flourish over the near future, and that rich conversation around congregational music will become, more and more, a normal aspect of thought and practice.