

The intersectional ecologies of civic musical spaces

As I tune into a Facebook Live broadcast in early 2020, a group of Christian Climate Action activists are gathered on the pavement outside the Anglican headquarters, Church House, in London. Banners displaying the group logo and the slogan “Children need us to act now” make clear both the identity of the group and the focus of the protest, whilst miniature models of coffins and flowers represent the deaths of children which have taken place around the world as a consequence of climate change. As cyclists, motor vehicles, and members of the public pass the group, Helen Burnett leads the gathered individuals in a liturgy of healing and protest. Three musical performances are interspersed between prayers, liturgy, and the reading of stories from children affected by climate change. The first, the well-known hymn “The Day Thou Gavest” is sung by the group led by Samantha on vocals; the second, a call for God’s mercy in the face of humanity’s wounding of the planet is accompanied by a ritual action in which those present are invited to place snowdrops around the model coffins; and the third, a “Canticle of Turning,” celebrates the potential that “the dawn draws near and the world is about to turn.” It brings with it grounds for hope and the possibility of a new future just around the corner.¹

A climatic encounter

Civic spaces such as the public space of protest described above have many uses; indeed, the multiple ways in which they can be used serve as one of their defining characteristics. They are locations in which different groups can assemble and express or enjoy themselves, and where they can do so in a place where encounter with a wider spectrum of others is not only likely but

¹ Footage from the protest has subsequently been uploaded to Vimeo (Empathy Media, “Vigil for Action for the Victims of Climate Catastrophe,” last accessed April 7, 2022, <https://vimeo.com/391218058>.)

is expected.² As such, they serve an important role in shaping both societal subgroups and societies themselves, whilst at the same time constituting spaces that are full of ambiguities, intersections, and uncertainties as the encounters which they enable are subject to continual contestation and negotiation. Such public spaces rarely stabilize into completely fixed formations; indeed, they resist precisely this stabilisation as spaces are continually re-purposed, re-used, and re-occupied by a variety of different assemblies, publics, and interest-groups. My brief vignette offers one illustration of the many ways in which both Christianity and musical activity are often present within civic space, either through explicit Christian appropriation of these spaces and Christian presence within them, or through more-implicit processes and encounters which require a little more explicit examination in order to fully draw out.

The nature of these spaces can be experienced in a variety of different ways, but they are spaces which are brimming with possibilities. Reflecting with Samantha in interview upon the event described above, we repeatedly touched on her fluid movement between a variety of different musical spaces and, describing her use of one of her own compositions at the protest event, Samantha framed this relationship as follows:

it's not a Christian song, but . . . I don't like to draw too many distinctions . . . it's a worship song, but it's deeply rooted in justice, and that question—could the world be about to turn? It's almost like speaking it prophetically . . . it just felt so integrated, so powerful, and . . . it felt you know honest in the way of giving space for lament and recognising the death, the damage, the reality of what is happening now, and then also that, that embodying that prophetic calling of the church to speak . . . it felt really like explosive actually like, it felt like a . . . radical and true use of liturgy, ritual, music . . . I think my faith and my activism spills into my music . . . but my music is really based on testimony and experience and story and

² See, for example, Douglass, Ho, and Ling's description of civic spaces as "those spaces in which people of different origins and walks of life can come together without overt control by the government, or by commercial or other private interests, or the de facto dominance of one group over another." (Mike Douglass, K C Ho, and Ooi Goik Ling, "Civic Spaces, Globalization and Pacific Asia Cities," *International Development Planning Review* 24, no. 4 (2002): 346–7).

guerrilla worship I would say, in a secular context like a gig, because it's not, I don't label myself as a Christian artist at all . . . it's about bringing . . . this tuning fork outside of the church building and allowing people to resonate with that as well, because if people are searching, but they won't necessarily look in church, those traditional structures, for whatever reason. (Samantha, Interview with the Author, 3 March 2020).

Civic space, as Samantha describes it, is a realm that has unique possibilities for faithful action and true musical performance. Indeed, the possibilities which it offers, as described here, might even be considered more faithful and more true than spaces more explicitly dedicated to the performance of worship. It becomes true, I suggest, through its disruptive ability to voice stories and realities outside of the conventional limits of liturgical propriety, to bring Christian ritual into more immediate contact with the structural and personal realities of the world around, and to integrate a life of faith with a life lived out away from church buildings and the space for prayer and worship which they provide. It is not necessarily that such things are impossible in a church service, but rather that the conventions, structures, and priorities which set such a space up as distinct and separate are precisely those things which order the world so as to put the challenges, connections, and experiences of daily lived reality in a subordinate role.

Questions of spatial order

In many senses, Samantha's experience is not at all unusual—in the interviews which I carry out with different individuals about music and their life of faith on a semi-regular basis, I have become very familiar with similar kinds of fluidity. There are almost always interesting patterns of interplay that can be observed in the lives of individuals between their experience of music in explicitly sacred contexts and their experiences within a range of other musical spaces.

Samantha's mode of navigation between these environments is not easily generalisable to all who make these movements, and speaks perhaps to her artistic temperament, to her explicit adoption of Christian faith later in her life, and to her broad and varied experiences.

Nevertheless, it is clearly something which transcends the merely personal as it takes place at an

interface for action and engagement, opening up to rather than shutting away from the surrounding world.

There are a vast range of possible configurations via which music, Christianity, and civic space can come into contact with one-another. The performance of explicitly Christian music either by Christians or by those with no strong Christian affiliation within civic space, for example, sits alongside performance of music which has no such Christian connection, and which may contain varying degrees of explicitly spiritual content. These cannot all simply be collapsed into one-another as if they are one-and-the-same thing. We cannot claim that the spiritual or the religious is always immediately present, however we can, perhaps, recognize that there are diverse avenues through which it can appear, sometimes unexpectedly: through the interpretations and experiences of individuals as much as through the intentions of performers; through the contents of what is being performed or the different groups or spaces involved; through connection with particular calendar events; or through a wide range of other considerations which emerge within the broader performance ecology which constitutes a particular act of musicking.

A number of recent theologians have been eager to draw connections between Christian theology and musical spaces such as the concert hall which are set apart from traditional Christian religious institutions. Indeed, this has become an increasingly common tasks in recent theology. David Brown, for example, in his work on music and sacramentality, focuses on the potential to experience God or a divine ordering within a concert hall space. He describes the sacramental potential of Mozart, Haydn, and Springsteen, among others, in his imagination of a sacramentally-infused world. He finds that it is important to “reclaim for religious experience great areas of human encounter with the divine that have been either marginalized in contemporary Christianity or almost wholly ignored”³ and the investigation of a broader range of musical spaces and formats is thus part of an attempt to recognize the divine-infused nature

³ David Brown, *God and Grace of Body: Sacrament in Ordinary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 6.

of the world around. Christian Scharen, in a similar manner, wishes to approach concert spaces through a sacramental lens, suggesting that:

those who inhabit contemporary communities of faith, who are the conservators of the practices of traditional faith, ought to take seriously that [the spiritual elements aroused by concert spaces] may be the means through which the concertgoer could find means to sustain and deepen the “wow” they experience in the live music performance. Because the church is the body of Christ, formed into the very character of God who listens to the cries of human life from sorrow to joy that emerge in popular music, and whose very gift of communion it is that festival goers experience there, Christians of all people ought to see the connections between “secular music” and “sacramental theology and practice” as crucial.⁴

The appeal of sacramental categories is a clear one. The idea of sacrament forms a ready-made bridge between the creator and the material realm, one that has a long lineage in Christian theology, and which has rich patterns of thought upon which to draw in considering the broader God-music relationship. It is not, however, the only paradigm available. Jonathan Arnold, moving slightly away from sacrament as the key guiding category, in his work on *Sacred Music in Secular Society*, discusses the liberation of sacred music from organized religion, but rejects definitions of sacred music which focus on intentions, devotion or context, and suggests instead that sacred music be defined as “that which appeals to those needs, desires and doubts that are experienced by all thinking and truly human individuals.”⁵ Maeve Heaney, meanwhile, in her exploration of the rock concert, suggests that:

In the complex world we live in, in which rock concerts can look and sound like major worship sessions and seem to feed the experience of “spirituality” of those who attend, [this space constitutes a] frontier which is not only (or even) external, but that runs right

⁴ Christian Scharen, “Secular Music and Sacramental Theology,” in *Secular Music and Sacred Theology*, ed. Tom Beaudoin (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2013), 104.

⁵ Jonathan Arnold, *Sacred Music in Secular Society* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 147.

*through anyone who has faith and, therefore, knows doubt; who inhabits the world as a Christian, and is, therefore, “in this world, but not of this world” (John 17:16); who discovers in contemporary, secular (rock, pop, or indie) music a space or a place in which their Christian existence breathes, moves, dances and even thrives, precisely because it is “in between,” on the boundary and frontier of the various dimensions of their lives.*⁶

The task is a similar one, although the framing is different—the discovery of the Spirit of God in places beyond those which often form the focus of traditional literature and expectation. A re-realisation that this was part of the human experience all along, and a fresh attempt to recognize that within theological discourse. All of these different authors point in a similar direction—they begin to erode clear distinctions between Christian and non-Christian spaces. It is, perhaps, an obvious move, but it is one that theologians feel the need to make largely because of a suspicious feeling that perhaps someone once tried to draw a stronger distinction between these different environments.⁷

Sacramentality and beyond

Whether such a re-framing of the role of religion or sacred music is cause for anxiety, excitement, or a feeling of loss can vary according to the situations under consideration and the beliefs and attitudes of the individual. Anxiety can, for example, be provoked by the removal of ritual or explicitly faith-based frameworks which may once have surrounded a particular sacred

⁶ Maeve Heaney, “Musical Space: Living ‘In Between’ the Christian and the Artistic Callings,” in *Secular Music and Sacred Theology*, ed. Tom Beaudoin (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2013), 17.

⁷ In doing so, they stand alongside a number of other practices and trends which move in a similar direction. The use of Contemporary Worship Music (i.e. Christian rock) in worship spaces, for example, employs popular music styles in order to form a connection between the experience of worship and the everyday. Likewise, churches are often used as arts or performance venues aside from the music which is performed during worship. Some are more at peace with these practices than others, and it is interesting to read a 1987 publication in the newspaper of the Holy See seeking to regulate the distinction between spaces incredibly closely: “It is not legitimate to provide for the execution in the church of music which is not of religious inspiration and which was composed with a view to performance in a certain precise secular context, irrespective of whether the music would be judged classical or contemporary, of high quality or of a popular nature. On the one hand, such performances would not respect the sacred character of the church, and on the other, would result in the music being performed in an unfitting context” (Paul Augustine Mayer and Virgilio Noè, “Concerts in Churches,” *L’Osservatore Romano* 50 (1987): 6.

musical composition through its performance in a concert venue. A feeling that a work may become de-sacralised, that the composer's intentions (whatever those may once have been) might be violated, that its religious quality will give way to an experience of the work which neglects to showcase its deeper spiritual meaning.⁸ Such anxieties are, perhaps, not as strong as they may once have been, however they are still made visible in articles which emphasize the additional significance which can be gained from performing liturgical works within a liturgical framework.⁹ Likewise, they can be made visible in programme notes and in rehearsals which seek to instil in listeners and in performers a sense of what the work might ideally be intended to mean, and what that might mean for their participation in the performance event. However, the intersection of a life of faith with dynamic musical expression, and with areas off-limits inside ritual worship can, for some, provide a greater cause for excitement than the musical expressions found within traditional ritual boundaries. As Tamisha Tyler writes "My spiritual connection to God was not limited by genre, and I often resonated more with the deep, complex stories of the women at the top of the Billboard charts, than songs at the beginning of church

⁸ James Macmillan's comments in interview with Jonathan Arnold are illustrative of some of the ambiguities "I think, in many ways, it's fine to do liturgical music in concert. If it directs attention to that repertoire, if it broadens the awareness of that music, if it wins people over to it, to that style of musical utterance and if people perceive in it something of its inner character, who knows what they're going to make of it? You can't say it's wrong to pay 'X' amount of money to go to the concert hall to hear that when you should really be going to church. You might get nothing from it in church and a lot from it in the concert hall, or vice versa, and you can't legislate for that. I am quite clear when one would get the most out of a Victoria Mass, for example . . . If you came to Westminster Cathedral to hear the choir singing in a Latin liturgy, with Gregorian chant Propers and so forth, I think you'd find that you would inevitably experience the musical elements of that Victoria in a completely different, complex [way] and with far greater and more proximate associations than from an excellent performance of it in, say, a concert hall given by an expert group such as The Tallis Scholars or The Sixteen. You have to decide how you want to experience these things." (Jonathan Arnold, *Sacred Music in Secular Society* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 51–2.)

⁹ Choral director Mark Duley, for example, builds upon Albert Blackwell's quotation of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, which states that "sacred music defined by its liturgical purpose increases in holiness to the degree that it is intimately linked with liturgical action" (Mark Duley, "Performing Sacred Music Today: Context and Culture," *REA: A Journal of Religion, Education and the Arts*, no. 10 (2016): 2.) in order to suggest that "To fully appreciate the carefully balanced expressivity woven into the counterpoint [of a Byrd Mass], one needs to be aware not just of its liturgical origins, but of the emotional intensity of its genesis . . . In the way one programmes and introduces it, it is possible to create a 'backstory' to the mass that provides information and increases the audience's appreciation" (*Ibid.*, 6).

services.”¹⁰ Such a story is not at all uncommon and, rather, represents a feeling that many individuals encounter at some point in their life of music and faith.

It is well worth commenting on what it means for theologians to theologize the space of the concert in sacramental or related terms. It is an interpretational move which performs a number of tasks. Firstly, it is a self-conscious attempt to build up a more open picture of Christianity, one which is not confined by traditional institutions, styles, or art-forms but which is open to the experiences which many (including the theologians themselves) find significant in their day-to-day experience. Secondly, it extends the interpretational reach of Christian paradigms, claiming the concert space as one which can, appropriately, fall under the interpretational categories of Christian faith and thereby be incorporated within a Christian worldview.¹¹ This second move is, perhaps, one that deserves a greater degree of caution, as such a claim to interpretational authority may well be contested by many who enjoy these experiences but don’t believe the church has the authority to interpret them in such a way. Theories of musical meaning are many and diverse¹² and, particularly in the case of religion, can form part of broader contestations over power and authority.¹³ These debates remain live and active as much within Christian communities as beyond them, and thus theologians’ interventions into them, as much as those

¹⁰ Tamisha Tyler, “Beyoncé Mass and the Flourishing of Black Women,” in *Ethics and Christian Musicking*, ed. Nathan Myrick and Mark Porter (London; New York: Routledge, 2021), 240.

¹¹ Lauren Michelle Levesque suggests something similar in relation to Robin Sylvan’s work on religion “Sylvan, at least, has been criticized for overextending the category of ‘religion’ in his work on popular music. The danger of this over-extension lies in the imposition of particular religious significance onto cultural practices that have complex and multi-layered meanings for musical participants” (Lauren Michelle Levesque, “Can a Song Save the World? The Dynamics of Protest Music, Spirituality, and Violence in the Context of the ‘War on Terror’” (PhD diss., Saint Paul University, 2012), 146). Likewise, Andrew Mall’s recent work on beer and hymns events draws attention to a real-world desire to avoid “imposing the sacred onto the secular [in order to make] events as welcoming as possible [whilst recognizing] that faith identities are multivalent and problematic”. Mall also draws attention to the fact that, despite attempts towards inclusion, even de-spiritualized hymn singing can put individuals off, and that individuals “might have a negative or critical perspective of Christianity and take offense at religious songs invading secular spaces” (Andrew Mall, “Beer & Hymns’ and Community: Religious Identity and Participatory Sing-alongs,” *Yale Journal of Music & Religion* 6, no. 2 (2021): 48).

¹² See Ian Cross and Elizabeth Tolbert, “Music and Meaning,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Music Psychology*, ed. Susan Hallam, Ian Cross, and Michael Thaut (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 33–46.

¹³ 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), 2–3.

of musicologists, participants, and listeners, form part of an ongoing and active dynamic of contestation. Thirdly, the frequent recourse to the category of sacrament is one that buys into longer traditions of art-music interpretation, interpretations which focus on the work as a (beautiful) product, potentially capable of triggering transcendent experiences, as mediated through the composer and as ultimately inspired by God.¹⁴

These descriptions often centre on the potential of experiencing God through the concert hall over and above other ways in which faith and civic space may find themselves brought into contact. And, whilst this is an ordering of experience which may easily find favour with Christian theologians, it is, perhaps, one that is less likely to be the primary refuge-point of the ethnographer or sociologist. Faith and civic space encounter one-another in a much broader range of ways than simply divine encounter and, for disciplines not quite so concerned as theology with always keeping God front and centre in thought and reflection, that wider range of engagements between belief, individual, society, and group identity, among others, will often serve to place sacramental categories as one of a number of ways in which faith becomes meaningful within civic musical performances.

Sacramental categories are, perhaps, restrictive in another way, too. When looking for the sacramental, writers tend, often, to go to the works which they themselves have found particularly spiritually significant, and they thus form not a general picture but a specialized one that self-selects a canon of works which are particularly spiritually appealing in a particular way as those which are available for interpretation. Such selection comes with a further nagging doubt that, if sacrament is the primary evaluative category for understanding experiences

¹⁴ It is important to note that I am speaking here of broad tendencies. Sacramental theology has diversified a great deal in recent years, and the way in which, for example, Contemporary Worship Music is often understood to be sacramental (Lester Ruth and Swee-Hong Lim, *Lovin' on Jesus: A Concise History of Contemporary Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2017)) can entail far more back-and-forth interactions, and be less dependent on the characteristics or mediation of a musical composition, than a traditional understanding of musical transcendence (Mark Porter, *Ecologies of Resonance in Christian Musicking* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 71–92). Nevertheless, a focus on the sacramental potential of musical experience often tends to push in a particular direction.

outside of religious worship, then perhaps, despite assurances of expanding the net beyond the realm of worship, it is still that worship which forms the primary location and paradigm for understanding the significant elements of faith-music encounter. To return to Samantha's example from the start, it is not so much the potential for divine encounter which gave a particular space spiritual power, but rather the intersection of faith, ritual, justice, and a broader public in resonant relationship. Whilst grasping the fundamental importance of making connections between faith and non-religious musical spaces, I suggest that there are weaknesses to this kind of approach which become easily visible from an ethnomusicological perspective, and that a key part of what might be needed is to pay attention to the multidirectional flows of meaning and interpretation which are capable of going on.¹⁵

Intersectionality and play

A basic starting premise, therefore, needs to be the recognition that the potential intersections between Christianity, music, and civic space are many and diverse. In civic spaces, we find Christians drawn to a variety of different musical expressions, each of which afford their own range of experiences shared to a greater or lesser degree with those of worship. Likewise, we find musical expressions from which at least some Christians might wish to distance themselves, suspicious that they may not be entirely compatible with a devoted life of faith. We find churches and other groups seeking to establish and contend their own musical presence in a broader (literal or figurative) marketplace of possibilities and ideas. We also find a range of musical expressions which seem to have religious or spiritual overtones that resonate in some way with a life of faith, despite their distance from institutional religious devotion. And that's just for starters. We need to begin with the complexity of possible negotiations, and just as the distinction between public and private is far from clear-cut, so the distinction between religious

¹⁵ For further analysis of the relationship between ethnomusicological and theological perspectives see Mark Porter, "How (Ethno)musicological is God? Ethnomusicology, Theology, and the Dynamics of Interdisciplinary Dialogues," in *Religion—Musik—Macht* ed. Wolfgang Müller and Franc Wagner (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2020), 117–40.

and civic spaces is a complex and multi-layered one. In her edited collection on *Music, Sound and Space*, Georgina Born asks:

*how is it that music and sound, catalysed by their social and technological mediation, engender such a profusion of modes of publicness and privacy? Sometimes constructing strongly bounded zones of experience, sometimes also recursive and nested assemblages—a range of forms of private-within-public, virtual public-within-private, public-within-public, private-within-public-within-private and so on?*¹⁶

We might ask similar questions of religion and civic space. We might think of the ways in which elements of faith and publicness can be nested within one-another in multiple ways and according to multiple logics. Within a stadium context we can, perhaps, consider the difference between a concert staged by a worship leader, the embedding of religious music within the 2012 Olympic ceremony, and elements of spirituality within the One-Love concert in Manchester in 2017 (which I will return to later) or a performance by Beyoncé.

Following theologian Mirella Klomp, I want to suggest that music within civic space, from a perspective of Christian theology is fundamentally a space of negotiation which, in its more-positive expressions, can sometimes resemble play. Klomp, in her work on televised passion performances in the Netherlands, describes contemporary performances of the passion narrative in public city-spaces, in which celebrity performers take on the roles of characters in the story and weave in popular music performances as they find space within the narrative.¹⁷

Klomp writes that:

Ludic practices such as The Passion may be recognised as events where the antithesis between the religious and the secular grows weak or even disappears. Offering a playground or an interface, these events trigger (or even induce) people's hermeneutical faculties for the

¹⁶ Georgina Born, "Introduction—Music, Sound and Space: Transformations of Public and Private Experience." in *Music, Sound and Space* ed. Georgina Born (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 26.

¹⁷ Short excerpts from performances can be viewed on the event's YouTube channel <https://www.youtube.com/c/thepassionnl/videos> (last accessed April 7, 2022).

*sacred in a way which is very similar to Ammerman's 'sacred consciousness' and Bauman's 'trying on identities' ... 'Play' makes the religious-secular dichotomy irrelevant: institutionalised religion in late modern Dutch society is undeniably in decline but, at the same time, religion, and engagement with the sacred, are ludic practices that are very much alive.*¹⁸

*The appropriation and appreciation of pop songs as part of the performance of The Passion depends, at least partly, on the successful integration of diverse mental spaces into a single blend. If participants in the audience or on stage, either individually or as a group, cannot or will not accept the pop-songs as a way of telling the story of Jesus' last days in a new, contemporary format, a conflict may arise: the use of pop songs in the context of a biblical narrative will make The Passion 'contested ground' in several ways, as we will see.*¹⁹

This is not simply a description of the relationship between religion, music, and civic space as it has always existed and will always exist. Klomp's description, rather, highlights an intersection that has taken on a particular role within contemporary socio-religious dynamics in which the power of religious institutions has given way to a new search for God and for spirituality. This relationship, then, is one that is constantly open to re-negotiation as power-relationships shift, as the locus of interpretational authority moves, and this, in part, is why an ecological perspective is important. Within civic space, Christian narratives and meanings have little claim to providing a dominant interpretative paradigm, and faith must therefore make its way into music in other ways, without the guiding frameworks of an organized ritual act. Indeed, as Klomp points out, the musical choices of the Netherlands passion performances themselves represent acts of transformation and negotiation deeply bound up with a sense of place.²⁰ The use of popular music within the passion performances serves to situate them in a broader secular landscape of experience, whilst the use of specifically Dutch repertoire serves to position

¹⁸ Mirella Klomp, *Playing on: Re-staging the Passion After the Death of God* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 134–5.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 105.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 30–1.

them within a shared national frame of meaning. The production's practice of covering the songs using artists other than the original performer serves to transform them in relation to the histories and connotations of particular individuals, whilst their deployment in relation to the passion narrative resituates their narrative context in relation to different actors and situations. The balance between institution, individual, and a range of other players and sources of meaning is a very particular to this space and this setting.

Contestation and conflict

These negotiations can take a number of different forms, and the individual quests which Klomp describes are far from the only way in which they can occur. Monique Ingalls' description of musical performances at Christian parades in Toronto has a slightly more earnest dimension to it, as groups contest public space with the aim of reclaiming it, but Ingalls' account too, nevertheless brings in a key element of negotiation.

The Jesus in the City parade is a public religious event that illustrates what ethnomusicologist Rasmussen has called 'the festivalization of religion', characterised by 'busy intersections of dogma and information, ritual and performance, piety and politics'. Bramadat notes that such cultural spectacles serve as important sites in which communities are created, contested and represented; thus, they provide a significant basis for studying the complex interrelationship of ethnic, national and religious affiliations in contemporary Canada.²¹

Ingalls' account does not so much describe an engagement in a spiritual quest as a process of public negotiation between groups and communities as they seek to assert their presence in the public realm of the city.²² Nevertheless, the fact that none can simply claim the space as their

²¹ Monique M Ingalls, "Singing Praise in the Streets: Performing Canadian Christianity Through Public Worship in Toronto's Jesus in the City Parade," *Culture and Religion* 13, no. 3 (2012): 337–9.

²² Such events are well worth comparing with the kind of historical counterparts described in Mark Roosien's chapter. Public worship has often been tied to the appropriation of space and the contestation of authority, and music is one of the means through which this has often taken place. Whilst contemporary events can often have a more-informal character to them than some of the liturgies that Roosien describes, there is substantial continuity to be found in the encounter between religion, public space, and a public audience who may or may not be sympathetic to the particular traditions being performed.

own and, rather, have to bring their voice to bear amidst the voices of others is one that foregrounds multiplicity and complexity, all within the playful space of a public parade which is enabled by music, the festivalization which it brings, and its power to move and to exert a force within the space of the city.²³

Such public musical contestations can also take on a far more fraught character as recent events within the United States serve more than adequately to demonstrate. In his chapter on the city, Mark Roosien describes worship protests held by Sean Feucht in Washington DC towards the end of 2020 in the course of the CoViD-19 pandemic.²⁴ As liturgical-studies scholar Adam Perez has highlighted,²⁵ these musical protests are not necessarily to be understood so much as intersectional encounters but as more direct claims to power in which music serves as a vehicle for the enthronement of God within the public sphere, and through which the groups assert themselves as those who have the legitimacy and authorisation that comes with this enthronement. In this case, the others which these groups encounter are not necessarily expected to be sympathetic or drawn in, but rather exist as bystanders in a power-contest in which God, global events, music, and political power are drawn together in a narrative which attempts to assert its primacy over and above other narratives. This is not, in Klomp's sense a playful space. Individuals are not trying on different possibilities and exploring the intersections of different experiences and identities but are either celebrated, to the extent which they

²³ As Chantal Saint Blancat and Adriano Cancellieri have highlighted in their description of Filipino Santacruzian processions in Padua, this assertion of presence and visibility can sometimes be a more cautious one, self-conscious of the gate-keeping role of other (faith-based) groups, their anxieties, and the performance of difference. Not all groups have easy or equal access to the use of public space and it is a space as full of difficulties as it is idealized (Chantal Saint-Blancat and Adriano Cancellieri, "From Invisibility to Visibility? The Appropriation of Public Space Through a Religious Ritual: The Filipino Procession of Santacruzian in Padua, Italy," *Social & Cultural Geography* 15, no. 5 (2014): 645–63).

²⁴ Government restrictions, particularly on religious worship, formed the primary focus for the protests, however, as this issue quickly became bound up with broader culture wars over the course of the pandemic, protests also drew in a wider range of issues concerning race, gender, abortion, and political power. Worship and music thus became a symbol and focus for a much wider range of issues.

²⁵ Adam Perez, "There's a Theology Driving Sean Feucht's Worship Music Protests—and it's a Popular One," *Religion News Service*, October 23, 2020. <https://religionnews.com/2020/10/23/theres-a-theology-driving-sean-feuchts-worship-music-protests-and-its-a-popular-one/>.

conform to the group's guiding principles or denounced insofar as they stand in the way of the reality which is being proclaimed in and through the music:

*Feucht's gatherings gain a double-valence concerning who the spiritual enemies are: both governmental leaders who would place restrictions on church gatherings and those protesting racism and police brutality. For Feucht and his ilk, praise and worship is the weapon for defeating those spiritual/political enemies just as it was for ancient Israel.*²⁶

The dynamics of the Feucht gatherings bring us to an important qualification to what might otherwise become an easy celebration of the potential which the interface of music, faith, and civic space has to generate exciting new forms of experimentation. The potential for music to be used inhospitably in public space has been well-documented in relation, for example, to the weaponization of classical music in order to deter gatherings of young people.²⁷ We cannot automatically assume specific interplays of music, faith, and civic space to be harmless, universally appealing, or unproblematic, rather the Feucht gatherings highlight the potential controversy and polarisation which can build up around this intersection, serving to divide up common space rather than provide a hospitable and welcoming environment for each and every person who might be come to encounter a particular gathering.²⁸ As Junxi Qian helpfully summarizes “in a time of neoliberal governmentality and, more recently, post-truth politics, the assembly of people in a public forum is by no means straightforwardly progressive. Instead, it can be divisive and reactionary, haunted by hate speeches, symbolic violence and reinforced barriers of engagement pivoting around race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, etc.”²⁹ Neither

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Lily Hirsch, “Weaponizing Classical Music: Crime Prevention and Symbolic Power in the Age of Repetition,” *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 19, no. 4 (2007): 342–58.

²⁸ It is nevertheless worth noting the power which these events are able to acquire—the intersection of religion, music and public space takes on power through its combination of ritual, aesthetics, and public or political engagement. Together, these form a combination which is highly meaningful for individuals and groups and which has potential implications far beyond the boundaries of a particular ritual gathering but which mobilizes musical/ritual forms in building up a compelling religious and aesthetic experience.

²⁹ Junxi Qian, “Geographies of Public Space: Variegated Publicness, Variegated Epistemologies,” *Progress in Human Geography* 44, no. 1 (2020): 78.

music nor Christian music have any kind of automatic exemption from these broader societal trends.

Multiple configurations

There are, then, multiple different configurations to be considered here. The different examples described thus far cannot all simply be collapsed into one-another as if they are one-and-the-same thing. One further example, I want to suggest, helps to bring the manner of possible intersections into focus. In May 2017, twenty-three people died following the detonation of a homemade bomb after a concert by singer Ariana Grande at the Manchester Arena, UK. Two weeks later, the One Love Manchester concert, in common with a number of movements and symbols of solidarity that have been deployed in the wake of different terror events around the world, sought to provide healing and catharsis through a set of musical performances emphasising light, hope, togetherness, and love in the face of traumatic attacks which left many horrified.

Replaying the concert via YouTube, there is a sense of an event that crosses multiple domains—history, civic identity and cohesion, personal emotion, love, and spirituality among others. These domains do not arise as separate from one-another so as to move from the personal intimacy of love songs to solidarity with a traumatized city to an invocation of a God through religious categories. Rather, everything is layered together and interwoven so that civic solidarity, romantic love, and the love of God instead become hard to distinguish one from another in terms of where one ends and another begins. Indeed, there is a sense that each can, to an extent, be mapped onto the others. The clearest invocations of God come from the lips of Justin Bieber:

I'm not going to let go of hope. I'm not going to let go of love. I'm not going to let go of God. Put your hand up if you're not going to let go. God is good in the midst of the darkness. God is

*good in the midst of the evil. God is in the midst, no matter what's happening in the world, God is in the midst and he loves you and he's here for you.*³⁰

Bieber's invocation is followed by a call to the crowd to repeat different affirmations, declaring their love and honour for the different individuals and families affected by the trauma which led to the event. This is not received by the crowd as a statement of a faith foreign to the overall experience of the event, but rather as a natural continuation of the love, solidarity, and therapeutic space/catharsis that has built up through a range of music and interaction over the course of the different performances. Indeed, undertones of faith have made themselves felt throughout the concert, through exhortations that love drives out fear, that God and destruction have nothing to do with one another, and through the Black Eyed Peas' invocation of divine help and guidance in their song *Where is the Love*, sung jointly with Ariana Grande. Pete Ward describes the presence of faith over the course of the concert as follows:

*religious elements drawn largely from a shared Christian heritage, were brought into the space created by this event. They served as a resource for hope and resilience in the face of the collective trauma that had been shared by the people of Manchester. These religious elements can be divided into three groups. The first are those aspects of the concert that are explicitly religious in their message of origins. The second are aspects of the performance that take on a religious or spiritual meaning in the context of the event, and the third relates to the response of the crowd.*³¹

Whilst Ward, as a Christian theologian, along with a range of Christian media outlets and commentators who found significance in Bieber's relatively explicit expression of faith, has found it easy to observe and foreground the specifically Christian features of this event, and thereby draw it into the orbit of Christian theological interpretation, it is worth remembering that for many experiencing and interpreting the event these did not form the major categories

³⁰ Quoted in Pete Ward, *Celebrity Worship* (London; New York: Routledge, 2020), 103.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 102.

through which to understand its significance. And this is why, whilst acknowledging the presence at the table of such categories and ways of seeing, I suggest that it is better not to see them as controlling categories, but as part of a larger set of interplays and frictions.

We can go further than this, however—I suggest it is not simply the religiosity of elements which is the key element to be taken into consideration here. Rather, it is the intersection that occurs between trauma, civic identity, affective expression, spirituality, and celebrity—amongst other things—in which multiple elements come together to create an expression many times more potent than any on their own.³² Through coming together in this manner, each aspect is expanded to take on further significance in relation to the others, no longer limited and confined to its own specific sphere of relevance, but able to become integrated into a broader complex which is simultaneously both holistic and fragmented. The affective power of musical community is able to draw them all together largely because of music's ecological nature as interaction³³ and as a relational phenomenon which crosses over between individuals, spaces, and groups across multiple dimensions of physicality, sociality, and spirituality, amongst others. As Junxi Qian argues, “Public space brings together the social, the political, the symbolic, the material and the bodily, and oscillates between assembly and disassembly, between relative stability and tendencies of becoming. Ad hoc intersections of these different spheres of everyday life create novel ways of constructing and inhabiting publicness, and the ‘social centrality’ of public space . . . emerges out of highly decentred rubrics of power and agency.”³⁴

The overall construction of the One Love event is one in which relationships and interactions are key to its power. The range of singers and musicians coming together serves to

³² My argument here bears comparison with David Garbin's analysis of Kimbanguist marches in the UK. Garbin suggests that “parades and processions are . . . deeply polysemous . . . they are also intersectional as they mobilise or contest different categories of identities—ethnicity, gender, religious or cultural belongings” (David Garbin, “Marching for God in the Global City: Public Space, Religion and Diasporic Identities in a Transnational African Church,” *Culture and Religion* 13, no. 4 (2012): 43).

³³ Mark Porter, *Ecologies of Resonance in Christian Musicking* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

³⁴ Junxi Qian, “Geographies of Public Space: Variegated Publicness, Variegated Epistemologies,” *Progress in Human Geography* 44, no. 1 (2020): 80.

offer a broad-spectrum coalition able to represent a city, a broader music industry, and a response to what is felt as a national and international tragedy.³⁵ It nevertheless establishes a set of interactions caught up in friction and ambiguity. How will particular encounters be interpreted? Which will prove to be generative? Which interpretative paradigms will attain prominence? Whilst Christian artists often have a specific idea as to what they are trying to accomplish in these intersections, events such as this one bring with them a much more distributed pattern of meaning-making in which structures of authority and belief are much weaker, and in which the ability to relate in various different ways to a common musical activity is the centre through which individuals come together into a momentary coalition.

This can, perhaps, be considered a typically postmodern spiritual-but-not-religious approach to the world in which institutional hierarchies are set aside in favour of the power of individual meaning-making. However, as an onlooker, the power of this event comes precisely through its refusal to separate the domain of individual religious faith from broader human and communal expressions and needs. It is one that recognizes the communal dimension of grief and trauma, the role of music in processing that, and the overtones of institutional religion which can also form important reference points for this negotiation, referring meaning-making beyond the individual to transcendent, communal, and narrative realms of experience, however complex or problematic relationships to such institutions may now have become in the lives of those present. This particular space is one of greater civic significance than a typical concert, serving to respond to a collective experience of trauma which extended well beyond the bounds of the event itself. Indeed, it is partly the collective, distributed agency of this event which tends to resist traditional interpretations of the sacramental. As it becomes clearly visible that the meaningfulness of the occasion comes from multiple directions, and from the juxtaposition of

³⁵ The Manchester bombing itself, of course, represents another, very different kind of intervention at the intersection of religion and civic space. For insightful analysis of social media discourse surrounding the association or lack of association between Muslims and terror in the wake of this bombing see, for example Joseph Downing, Sarah Gerwens and Richard Dron, "Tweeting Terrorism: Vernacular Conceptions of Muslims and Terror in the Wake of the Manchester Bombing on Twitter," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 15, no.2 (2022): 239–66.

multiple participative agents, so the sources and kinds of meaning proliferate and so the power of the event begins to lie in interaction more than it does in gift.

As with the climate protest described at the start, the intersection of faith, music, and civic space is, here, mediated by a third issue which all spheres have, to some extent, in common—in this case, that of grief and trauma. In reflecting on the role of *Religion in the Public Sphere*, Jürgen Habermas proposes the need for religious actors to translate their concerns into a commonly understandable or appreciable form in order for secular actors to take these concerns seriously, to understand their importance, and to be able to participate in a process of mutual position-taking in which differing individuals move through a process of mutual understanding and consensus,³⁶ and this seems, at least in part, to be part of the process at work in these events. Christian concerns are able to take on meaning and power within civic spaces precisely as they touch on the issues which are already meaningful to a broad coalition of different individuals and interest-groups within the population. More than this, however, through this process of encounter, they take on a new significance and a new relationship both to those who originated them and to the others which they encounter. Whilst Habermas understands this process of encounter as a pre-requisite for public rationality, it clear in the examples discussed that rationality is far from the best category for understanding music. Perhaps instead of public rationality, we might talk here about public affectivity. Rather than rational statements being translated into a publicly-understandable language, we have a situation focussed around publicly-appreciable affective performance and communication. Music then becomes a means of encounter and of mixing-up, of translation, of negotiation, and Christianity can have a presence in this process of encounter to the extent which it is able to take on meaning in relation to those concerns with which individuals are wrestling and where it can reach out to realms of public significance.

³⁶ Jürgen Habermas, “Religion in the Public Sphere,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (2006): 1–25.

To pick one more example from the concert, Stevie Wonder's performance at the Manchester event might be considered somewhat trite on a purely textual level, painting an idealized picture in which love can heal the world and invocations of God which lead to destruction are all ultimately illegitimate distortion of a love-based religious message.³⁷ Spoken and sung over gentle picking on a (virtual) guitar, the soothing and hopeful affect of the music addresses itself to the shared trauma of the gathering, offering an intimate feeling and message of solidarity and addressing both personal and communal needs for catharsis. Stylistic and theological groundings in the singer's Christian faith and experience may well undergird the message, but their explicit articulation is built up to rather than foregrounded front and centre. Any agreement or feeling that the atmosphere of love mediated through the music might indeed also be the true nature of God or of institutional religion (and there are likely a variety of reactions within such a crowd) comes from the broader buy-in that has been established to the catharsis which the offering of this music brings with it. Indeed, the different elements of this short interlude are so tightly bound up together that it is hard to separate one from the other—Wonder's appeal to God is one that is able to become meaningful because it is so tightly bound up together with the appeal to love and the offering, both verbal and musical, of communal peace on the lips of a celebrity musician whose achievements and prominence across a broad range of audiences, recordings, and performances have tied him into the shared fabric of the gathered community and have brought with them the capital to be able to voice such a sentiment in a legitimate manner. The concerns and feelings of Christian or other religious faith are embodied in a musical and spoken language which is publicly accessible and feelable primarily as it addresses and emerges within other themes and feelings which the gathered

³⁷ "Ariana, this is Stevie, and I just wanted to let you know that I am with all of you in Manchester. We all know that love is truly the key. I don't care what ethnicity you are, what religion you are, that love really is the way, so anyone that tries to make anyone think that things of destruction has anything to do with God or Allah, they're a lie. Yes, I stand with you Manchester, I just want you to know—[singing] *Love's in need of love today, don't delay, send yours in right away. Hate's goin' 'round, breakin' many hearts. Stop it please, before it's gone too far*—I stand with you Manchester, I'm with you Ariana forever, God bless you" (Scooter Braun Projects, "One Love Manchester (June 4th, 2017)," last accessed July 13, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fXgIRvoOtS4>).

concertgoers are processing, and it is through this process of layering, ambiguity, commonality, and play that a meaningful interaction begins to take place.

Conclusion

Whilst I end on a hopeful note, civic musical spaces should no more be idealized than should particular Christian musical expressions. Each space offers particular affordances, some of which will be positive in nature, and some of which will misfire, exclude, or even traumatize. They are part of a mixed ecology, in which different musical formats and styles address themselves to spiritual and theological aspect of life in different ways and, as such, they are not, I suggest, simply an optional addition to theologies of Christian musicality which centre on the worship of the church. Rather, as Samantha's example at the start clearly shows, they serve a key role in negotiating the intersection of faith with a range of activities, individuals, groups, and concerns which are often not so immediately present within the spaces of Christian worship. The power of faith is reliant on its ability to address the issues which are of significance within personal and communal attempts to make sense of life in the world, and to this extent, musical encounters beyond the realm of worship can provide equal, if not greater potential for meaningful interaction between faith and world than encounters within spaces traditionally designated for worship.

The examples which I have discussed are very much examples rather than a comprehensive description of all the possibilities which civic space affords. Precisely because civic space is open to such a broad range of possible intersections, I can only gesture to some of its dynamics rather than attempting a comprehensive taxonomy of all the possibilities available. We can think, for example, of remembrance day services which take place in outdoor spaces across the UK, of hymns that have made their way into sporting traditions,³⁸ of a range of traditional processions

³⁸ See, for example Barry Richards' discussion of the singing of *Abide with me* at FA cup finals, in which he concludes that performance of the hymn "reaches to what the sociologist Edward Shils called the 'sacred centre' of society . . . it is an affirmation (potentially all-inclusive) of a human community, based on a collectivised mourning for

and pilgrimages³⁹ that make their way through streets and squares across European cities and beyond, or of the concert hall performances that I gestured to early on but haven't gone on to further analyse. There are buskers who perform hymns or gospel music, commuters who tune in to Christian playlists,⁴⁰ devout believers who experience the flow of the spirit playing music at their local pub.⁴¹ Each of these settings has its own particularities and its own set of intersections between faith, music, and a range of concerns and dynamics specific to the actors, spaces, institutions, and traditions which it serves to bring together. Some of these will be more playful in nature, some will display an easier reconciliation between multiple concerns, and others will tend towards a greater degree of tension. The list is not for me to bound and finalize, rather the ecology of music and Christianity is one which is expansive, creative, and highly fluid, and this is increasingly recognized by individuals who connect the dots in spaces not traditionally marked out for such connection.

Whilst clear-cut distinctions between civic and religious space are brought into question by the perpetual crossing-over that regularly occurs between the two, civicness and religiousness remain useful ideas. An impulse towards the civic is an impulse towards engagement with and

ubiquitous loss and death." Barry Richards, "Abide with Me': Mediatized Football and Collectivised Mourning," in *Media and the Inner World: Psycho-Cultural Approaches to Emotion Media and Popular Culture*, ed. Caroline Bainbridge and Candida Yates (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 30.

³⁹ Philip Bohlman describes the interweaving of secular/public and sacred space in the course of European pilgrimages: "The occasions on which the pilgrim-musicians performed were similarly varied, with some groups contributing primarily to events that might seem secular to outside observers (e.g. dances in Mariazell hotels), other groups performing only during unequivocally sacred moments, and still others performing in both types of events, accordingly blurring any sharp distinctions between them." (Philip Bohlman, "Pilgrimage, Politics, and the Musical Remapping of the New Europe," *Ethnomusicology* 40, no. 3 (1996): 379).

⁴⁰ See, e.g. 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), 371 or, more-generally, Michael Bull, *Sound Moves: iPod Culture and Urban Experience* (London: Routledge, 2007).

⁴¹ See, for example, my earlier discussion elsewhere of the experience of Ben, who suggests that: "When I play music properly in any setting, it's about the connection between your soul and the other band and whoever's there, and just expressing yourself truly honestly . . . I totally let go when I'm playing, and that could be in a church setting or a contemporary music pub scene. The difference is that I actually felt for a long time that the church was a better connection, [that it] was a more true and honest connection to worship, whereas now I'm finding at the moment it isn't necessarily." (Mark Porter, *Contemporary Worship Music and Everyday Musical Lives* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 73).

openness towards a range of public concerns, interests, and institutions, and is a crucial part of navigating the world in which we live. Music is able to contribute to this through its wide-ranging and often ambiguous ability to set up multiplicities of relationships, to afford possibilities for meaning, to enlist bodies, and to fill spaces so as to exploit and offer points of entry which cross over between multiple realms. When music is performed in civic space it can bring with it an attempt at sacralisation or it can open a space for religious meaning to enter, however as musical sound interacts with a broader public in an ambiguous and multiple public venue, such religious meanings will always struggle to be exclusive, rather the music will touch on a broader range of concerns, belongings, and interests equally present in that public space, layered alongside other sounds and co-present with other histories, vibrating in bodies that are present to the sound and to each-other in a multiplicity of different ways. It is a medium which is never disconnected from the others by which it is surrounded, rather it both reaches out to and is affected by the broader ecology to which it contributes.

Musical spaces never stand in isolation from one-another and, as individuals move from one to another, and as music does the same, interplays of meaning and significance are set up which extend well beyond the limits of any particular venue or performance. At the same time, the relationships between different musical spaces are continuously playing off each other and evolving as we have seen, for example, in the way that the kinds of spaces described in this chapter were affected by the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic led to a flattening of spatial relationships, whereby concert halls and churches alike became funnelled into the virtual formats of YouTube and Zoom. A great deal of recent academic interest in the theology and spirituality of these spaces is driven by changes in the ways that we imagine the role of faith and spirituality in society. This changing relationship will continue to drive further work and research in this area, just as it continues to drive performers, artists, and communities to explore the possibilities open to them.

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