

How music is used to  
convey religious  
feelings and ideas



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The beginnings of religious music have a long standing history ever since the inception of the religious fundamentals into the human society. Religious music is perhaps the longest existing genre of music, which has significantly undergone significant changes over a long period of time. The history of music in the music tradition can be traced to the early Christian community who began the practice with the view that it formed a critical spiritual component of music. According to Cunningham and Reich (2009), “ The tradition of singing (or rather, chanting) sacred texts at religious services was an ancient Jewish custom that appears to go back to Mesopotamian sources...The Lyre used by Jews was a common Mesopotamian instrument, whereas the harp for which King David was famous came to the Jews from Assyria by way of Egypt” (p. 145). The distinct utilization of music to convey religious feelings and ideas involves due consideration being given to difference dimensions of religious music, resultant factors from religious music practice, elements leading to successful integration of religious music, different modes in the practice of conveying feelings and ideas, emerging perspectives regarding the danger of music in religion practice, and finally the appropriateness of music in the contemporary religion setting.

### Dimensions of Religious Music

In the contemporary Christian society there exist diverse forms of religious music dimensions. This primarily arises from the involvement of the existence of distinct cultural backgrounds in regard to the experiences of religious music in a certain society setting. There is also an association of migration factors in the development of dimensions of religious music.

According to Bohlman, Blumhofer, and Chow (2006), “ The temporal

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dimensions of America religious music constantly allow for new beginnings. New migrants bring new musics that are themselves – more than not in American music historiography” (p. 4). This implies that in the advancement of religious music as a genre of contemporary music, different cultural and contextual setting influence the emerging perspectives regarding religious music.

### Factors Making Music Religious

Various factors contribute towards making music religious as seen in occurring forms of music. The music itself plays a key role in the manifestation of religious music fundamentals. This elementally depends on the aspect, genre, and cultural ties associated with the music being sung in a particular religious occasion. Moreover, the content of the music also plays a key role in terms of meanings derived from the music being played in a certain setting. The words essentially serv to convey the intended message and contribute to developing a theme for the music. Previous research views have also acknowledged the fact that the religious component of music is also partly influenced by the setting or locations at which the music is being played (Morris, 2004). There is also a fundamental effect played by harmony in the creation of distinct tunes that are capable of appealing to the human ear and other senses. Furthermore, the creation of harmony also entails the matching of sound aspects like voice differentiation, tonal variation, and accompanying instruments.

### Aspects the Contribute to Religious Music Success

The fact that religious music seems to work as witnessed in key religious settings suggests that there are indeed several aspects associated with the development of success. According to Blackwell (2000), “ In music such as Mozart’s, however, these natural structures and forces are little more confining than the rainbow arch signifies then. Intuiting the inmost secrets of acoustics and harmony, Mozart becomes a covenant partner with creation, begetting music that echoes and celebrates divine creativity” (p. 119). This serves to portray the fact that in the contemporary practice of religious there are key ingredients that essentially contribute to the achievement of the desired milestones going by the religious undertakings.

### Modes of Conveying Feelings and ideas

The aspect of conveying the desired message in a religious music composition entails the inclusion of creativity, physical, vocal, and psychological elements in different formats. In terms of creativity For instance, the Gregorian chant entails the use of key sound formulations in successfully accomplishing the proposed objectives of the music and its content. Physical aspects of music essentially involve instrumental accompaniments and body movements. Vocal aspects involve the incorporation of tonal variations as seen medieval Roman Catholic sermons (Morris, 2004). Psychological elements involve the occurrence of mental images with regard to the contextual aspect of the music in focus, for instance, the creation of an illusion of heaven.

### Dangers of using Music in Church Worship

#### Augustine’s Confessions

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Augustine's confession elementally exposes the mannerisms through which music brings in a feeling of uncertainty as it primarily entails control of one's consciousness in order to attain the desired response. According to Burton (2007), " Excessive delight in music for its own sake, he says, 'happens to me'; it is the music that is the subject of action (moveat), rather than Augustine himself" (p. 149). He further expresses worry regarding the manner in which repetitive confessions may potentially result in the distortion of the intended meaning as it alienates the person and takes to a different form of himself.

### Confessions from Ulrich Zwingli

Ulrich Zwingli was an early leader in Switzerland's reformation church beginning from 1484 to 1531 (McGonigle & Quigley, 1996). He was an ordained catholic priest who expressed his views regarding contemporary practices in the church in those times. He essentially rejected teaching of the roman church and supported teachings according to the bible – this was his key motivator towards the opposition of certain elements including music in the church setting. Through the manifestations of his confessions an ordinance was passed by the council of Zurich banning all non scriptural practices in the church. According to McGonigle and Quigley (1996), " This resulted in the removal of images from the churches, the suppression of monasteries and convents, the abolition of the mass and even the prohibition of organ music in the simple communion service that was now the centre of worship" (p. 9).

### Appropriateness of Music as a Vehicle for worship

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The appropriateness of music as a vehicle depends upon the setting, nature of sound, and variations in terms of performers in essence. According to Joncas (1997), “ Music’s sacramental power is rooted in the nature of sound, the raw material for music. Sound itself is our starting point for understanding music and its capacity to serve as a vehicle for God’s self revelation” (p. 44). This therefore suggests that music is indeed a vehicle in the achievement of religious and worship fundamentals.

Moreover going by Joncas (1997), “ Sound events like music or speech are impermanent events which exist for the listener only in doing of them-only for the duration of the performance” (p. 44). This therefore serves to expose the fundamental aspects of sound with regard to the accomplishing the desired sentiments of music as a tool in itself. As Joncas (1997) puts it, “... one note or syllable or lapping wave in sequence after another...”(p. 44). consider the incorporation of the aforementioned elements in the Handel’s ‘ Hallelujah chorus’ or alternatively Mozart’s ‘ requiem’, the inclusion of the said components would serve to elementally achieve the desired religious milestone focusing on the congregation.