

Praise and Worship:

How to Validate Creative Endeavors and Glorify God

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MUS 470

Senior Thesis

Professor Mark S. Dorn

Colorado Christian University

April 8, 2016

This thesis is presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Bachelor of Arts--Music

Introduction

Music is the combination of rhythm, melody and harmony. These elements are tools created by God and left in the hands of humans to steward and enjoy, in many ways no different than the Garden of Eden being left to Adam and Eve to steward and enjoy. Music is one of the few ways in which man can break through the veil of everyday monotony and experience something that is both visceral and immaterial. Music can be experienced by all people, not just those who are religious or find religion in music; however, the experience will not always be the same for every person nor will it assume the same meaning. This can be wonderful for a consumer because they can infer their own meanings from a piece of music, but to an artist this can be frustrating if the piece carries his or her own emotions and feelings that are different from the consumer's. The dilemma gets even more confusing when religion is added to the mix.

Gerardus Van der Leeuw explains the confusion this way:

The relationship between religion on one hand and art, moral philosophy, and science on the other, raises great difficulties for human thought and comprehension. Pious men of strict observance can hardly see in art an obedient maidservant. Artists of *l'art pour l'art* look down on religion with distrust and often contempt. Independent moral philosophy demands freedom from religious restrictions. Imperial religion condemns "works" and glorifies faith.¹

This conflict is particularly present in the relationship between contemporary Christianity and contemporary art. For instance, as a Christian who uses music solely for the purpose of bring praise to God, how does one listen objectively to music that is made for other purposes without finding it to be profane if their only filter for music is the elevation of the Holy? Conversely, how does a Christian who uses music as a method of expressing their own creativity and skill in non-sacred settings find a way to use music for that act of elevating the Holy instead of

¹Leeuw, G. Van Der. *Sacred and Profane Beauty; the Holy in Art*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963.

criticizing the skill or the methods of the other worshipers? The relationship between religion and music is the source of a great conflict in the current Christian climate that is opening the door to many dangers within the church and communities of musicians. The purpose of this paper is to identify some of the dangers caused by the conflict from a Christian worldview and to offer this solution. A Christian Musician can have two different postures towards music, Praise and Worship. A Christian Musician who understands the difference between these two postures can have a strong relationship with God, while finding validation in their own creative endeavors.

The first step in unraveling any kind of solution to this conflict, or “rivalry”, as Leeuw calls it, is to define what it means to be a Christian Musician in the twenty-first century. An understanding of whom this solution is relevant to is important because members of other religions or art forms may have unique dilemmas or conflicts that this paper could do little to resolve. The next step is to explain the difference between “Praise” and “Worship” as discussed in this paper and how they should be defined in order to make the most of this solution. The final step is to understand how these postures can positively affect a Christian Musician. This re-definition of postures may seem trivial or ridiculous; however, it can offer some freedom and validation to the musical pursuits of Christian Musicians, and quell some of the unnecessary conflict between the camps of Religion and Art.

Excellence

For the sake of clarity any music presented in this paper, either hypothetical or specific, should for the sake of argument be considered excellent. Dr. Allen Schantz in his book *Music, Arts, and the Bible* says that in Genesis 1 God instructs Adam and Eve to subdue and rule over

all things on earth; this is called the ‘cultural mandate’. Music, being one of the many features of the earth, must be included in this mandate; God calls man to rule over music. Man should make music excellent, instead of music making men a fool. Schantz defines aesthetic excellence as something that engages the heart, soul, mind, and strength, as Jesus commands his followers in Mark 12. The pieces of music discussed in this paper serve different purposes, but the one thing they have in common is that they have achieved a certain standard of excellence. Dr. Schantz argues that this standard of excellence is something that God demands:

Whatever the worldview of someone who composes aesthetically excellent absolute music, such works glorify God. On the other hand, anyone who composes aesthetically mediocre works dishonors God.²

Aesthetic excellence and an aesthetic are not the same. An aesthetic is “a set of principles underlying and guiding the work of a particular artist or artistic movement.”(dictionary footnote) The aesthetic excellence of the piece is the quality with which that style or method is carried out. Music should never be judged or rejected on the sole premise that it is not aesthetically pleasing. Music should be judged based on its quality within the genre of which it is produced. The standard of aesthetic excellence that Dr. Schantz is referring to will vary with each piece of music depending on the purpose for which it was created. With that in mind, excellence for the sake of this argument can be defined as: *achieving the purpose of the music in the most effective way*. It must be assumed going forward that all of these examples of Praise and Worship bring glory to God because they are excellent in their own aesthetics and achieve the purposes for which they were created to serve.

The Christian

² Schantz, Allen Paul. Music, the Arts, and the Bible. Lakewood, CO: Aesthetic Arts Press, 2015.

What does it mean to be a Christian? A Christian is an individual who believes that Jesus Christ was divine, came to earth to be killed as atonement for the sins of man, and was resurrected in order to show his power over all things including death. If an individual believes these statements to be true and allows them to change the manner in which they carry out their life in positive way, then they will be gladly accepted into the Kingdom of God.

One of the most compelling testimonies of Christ's divinity is in the first chapter of the gospel of John. John the Baptizer is baptizing Jews in the Jordan River and Christ comes to him in order to be baptized. As Jesus approaches John, John is given a vision from God the father revealing the divinity of Christ.

³²...I saw the Spirit descend from heaven in the form of a dove and remain on him. ³³I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'the man on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, He is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' ³⁴I have seen and testify that this is the Son of God. (John 1:32-34 NASB)

This testimony of John the Baptizer is important because it gives Christ an authority he would not have had otherwise. Although he performed many miracles and testified of his own divinity, without this second-party testimony from a man who had no prior knowledge of the Messiah's identity, Jesus could have been viewed as a lunatic or one who performs miracles by means that are not holy. This encounter validates Christ's claim to divinity.

In John Chapter 3, Nicodemus, a member of the ruling counsel of Israel, questions Christ about his teaching that a man must be born again in order to enter the Kingdom of God, Jesus answers, saying that a man must be spiritually reborn rather than physically. He compares himself to the golden snake in the Old Testament story of Moses raising a golden snake on a staff in the wilderness for the people of Israel to look upon and be healed of an illness caused by their

sin and unfaithfulness. “So too should the Son of God be lifted up.” (John 3:14b) This is the first time that Christ alludes to his own death and its purpose. He would have to die and suffer the wrath of all sin that ever had or ever would be committed so that God could once again enjoy peace with his children. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)

There are many tenets of Christian doctrine that have not been addressed in this paper that profoundly affect the nature of the Christian life. These tenets, though profound and important, cannot be the deciding factors of an individual’s salvation; because the stances that Christians take on them are so varied it is impossible to reach an absolute verdict. A quote originally written in 1672 by Rupertus Meldenius suggests that all believers should understand and be unified in the same basic doctrine. Therefore when considering the state of a person’s eternal soul, the focus or the deciding factor is on the most basic and unifying doctrines. “In the Essentials, unity; in doubtful matters, Liberty; and in all things, charity.”³ The Divinity of Christ, the death and resurrection, and the Atonement for sin; these are the “essentials”, and all other doctrines determine how the Christian lives, not whether or not they are saved. If an individual believes these things then they are in fact a Christian.

The Musician

In an article called “Changing Tunes: Musical experience and self-perception in school and University students”, Stephanie Pitts offers this definition of a musician: “What makes a musician, a musician is not that he knows how to play one instrument or another, or that he

³ Perisho, Steve. "A Common Quotation from "Augustine"?" Georgetown.edu. Accessed April 8, 2016. <http://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/augustine/quote.html>.

knows how to read music: it is that he is able to grasp musical structure in a manner appropriate for musical production.”⁴ A musician is someone who produces music. In contemporary music, especially Christian music, there are two different types of musician, one who creates and the other who re-creates. The one who creates is occupied with the production of new and original material. Often these musicians will re-create a performance but the material is their own therefore it remains original. The re-creator serves a different purpose for music. They are preoccupied with the re-creation of other musicians’ material for the entertainment of others or themselves. Often church musicians fall into this category because they re-create songs in order to lead the congregation in praise to God. These re-creators would not necessarily qualify according to Pitt’s definition, because they do not participate in production but rather reproduction. However because the argument laid out in this paper is for both the creator, and the re-creator, the Merriam-Webster Dictionary definition will serve this idea better. “*Musician: noun, A Composer, Conductor, or Performer of music; especially as a profession.*”⁵ A musician is an individual who creates or performs music, no matter the purpose.

Based on the definitions given above of a Christian and a Musician, the definition of the term Christian Musician for the purpose of this paper is this: *An individual who creates or performs music, and believes in the all the essentials of Christianity, Divinity of Christ, the death and resurrection, and the Atonement for sin.* These two things can affect each other beautifully, however one does not need to be present in order to make the other excellent. A musician who loves God can experience him through their music, and God can be glorified by the excellence of the music. The music can be excellent without serving the express purpose of glorifying God,

⁴ Pitts, Stephanie E. "Changing Tunes: Musical Experience and Self-Perception Amongst School and University Music Students." *Musicae Scientiae* 6, no. 1 (2002): (pgs.73-92)

⁵ Merriam-Webster.com. Accessed April 8, 2016. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Musician>.

just as the quality of the music does not determine the faithfulness of the Christian or the quality of their relationship with God. This is important to keep in mind because it is often easy to equate the quality of one's faith with one's music or vice versa. In church for example, the skill of the individual who is leading the musical worship and the quality of the music is not a direct reflection of the individual's faith. In the same way a non-sacred performance of a musician and the quality of it is not a direct reflection of the musician's faith or lack thereof. Both of these individuals are musicians even though they serve different purposes, and both are Christians if they confess the essentials of the faith even though they serve different functions.

The Division of Praise and Worship

In regards to music, Worship and Praise are two different postures; both have the potential to bring glory to God. A musician who has chosen to follow the teachings of Christ is commanded to participate in Praise religiously and to participate in acts of worship in life. Praise is much easier to define because it serves a very specific purpose, the celebration of God. Worship is much harder to define, the music that falls under definition serves many different purposes, some of which are morally relative or indifferent. Most Christian musicians are called to participate in one of these postures more specifically than the other and God finds honor in both, though not for the same reasons. This can cause believers to reject either Praise or Worship out of an honest desire to glorify God in a way that is most sincere and an honest reflection of themselves and their experiences.

For the sake of this paper, Praise music is for the specific purpose of directly communicating to God the gratitude or recognition due him. It is a personal communication from man to God; this includes sacred music, church music, and any music that acknowledges any

specific characteristic of God and celebrates him for it. God is honored by the content of these communications and the excellence with which they are carried out. One of the results of the fall is stylistic pluralism. If there are so many different styles of music, then what music is acceptable for what purpose? Hasty and narrow minded answers to this question often cause Christian musicians to condemn perfectly acceptable and justified artistic styles because they are not stylistically pleasing. The church has consistently struggled with what music is acceptable for sacred use. *The Sacred in Music* by Albert L. Blackwell, has a chapter that outlines this struggle. He begins a section called ‘Christian Ambivalence Toward Music’ with this quote:

First, let us think of music as instantiating our fallen condition. Perhaps Steiner is correct: “There was, presumably, no need for books or art in Eden.” He is certainly accurate when he adds that after Eden, art “has communicated the urgency of a great hurt.” Part of this great hurt in relation to music is manifested in Christianity’s continual struggle with questions of music’s spiritual value.⁶

Blackwell goes on to quote St. Augustine and John Calvin and their thoughts on what sort of music is “appropriate for sacred worship” or Praise, the contradiction he says only adds more confusion to this struggle.

Worship is any act musical or otherwise performed by one or several human beings that is considered excellent. God is honored by the occurrence of these actions themselves, not specifically what they are or what they say. In *Music through the Eyes of Faith* Best makes this profoundly bold claim about the neutral nature of art and specifically music:

I take the position that, with certain exceptions, art and especially music are morally relative and inherently incapable of articulating, for want of a better term, truth speech. They are essentially neutral in their ability to express belief, creed, moral and ethical exactitudes, or even worldview. I also assume that, no matter how passionately artists may believe what they believe or try to show these beliefs in what they imagine or craft, their art remains purposefully “dumb.”...Finally, I will assume that Christians are

⁶ Blackwell, Albert L. *The Sacred in Music*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999.

biblically justified in fully celebrating artistic activity of the most diverse sort, including that which may have been created in downright unbelief.⁷

These acts of worship themselves are not responsible for their meaning as they have none, they are morally neutral, and God does not look negatively on Christians who celebrate artistic diversity. Types of music that fall under the posture of Worship include pieces addressed from one person to another person or one person to a group of persons, pieces of self-reflection for the refining of the individual's soul or the admonishment of other person or persons, and pieces that are exercises in poetry, and stylistic experimentation. The church's rejection of stylistic pluralism which is manifested in narrow minded Christian thinking is not the only problem. Artists often reject sacred music, especially contemporary sacred music, for its inability to accommodate their stylistic preferences. This is so dangerous for Christian musicians; it can cause them to reject not only sacred music, but the sacred itself. If a Christian musician is not communing with God and other believers in the way that sacred music allows, they are missing out on an irreplaceable tool that God has created to nurture the Christians' faith.

Both of these camps of Christian musicians are equally damaging to themselves. By rejecting one posture for the other instead of embracing both, Christian musicians are short changing themselves. Christians should have a healthy respect for praise and worship since they both bring glory to God. Best makes another profound suggestion in *Music Through the Eyes of Faith*:

There is but one God, One author of all creation. The astonishing variety in the creation, the juxtapositions of delicacy and roughness, fragility and resilience, grotesque and grace, plainness and ornamentation, issued out of a singularly consistent mind, given over to making things well and, in their peculiar way, beautiful.⁸

⁷ Best, Harold M. *Music through the Eyes of Faith*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993.

⁸ Best, Harold M. *Music through the Eyes of Faith*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993.

If all varieties of musical style stemmed from the same ‘singularly consistent mind’, then logically one style or posture cannot please God more than the other.

Praise

Praise music is music for the purpose of acknowledging or praising God for the things he has done or characteristics that he has. This type of music is typically played in churches or large collections of believers and is often accompanied by a teaching from scripture. It serves a function in congregational worship and in a Christian life. Praise is a very different spiritual experience from teaching or praying, it is a form of connection to God that is physical, emotional, and spiritual. In a study of African-American Baptist churches in the south, Therese Smith makes this observation:

Music is vital in the services of African American Baptist churches. There are few moments in the service when music—either congregational or choral singing, or instrumental music of some sort—is not being performed; when music is sustained in this way as an auditory or imagined presence, it functions as almost a timbral membrane for the presence of the Holy Spirit throughout the service.⁹

These southern Baptist churches are using music as a way to focus themselves on to the presence of the Holy Spirit. The music is allowing the Spirit to break through barriers such as distraction in order to fully captivate the attention of the congregation. Not all traditions of Christianity are as concerned with the spiritual elements of Praise as these southern Baptist churches, however the purpose of music in the lives of believers remains the same. Music was created by God as a small method in which men can break through a “timbral membrane” and offer God some small recognition for his glory.

⁹ Smith, T. (2015). "There is a higher height in the lord": Music, worship, and communication with god. *Religions*, 6(2), 543-565. doi:<http://ezproxy.ccu.edu:2097/10.3390/rel6020543>

There is a demand by God to praise him with song that can be found throughout scripture. In Psalm 105, David is glorifying God for the works he had done on behalf of Israel and he says “Sing to Him, sing praises to Him; Speak of all his wonders.” (Psalm 105:2) In his letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul instructs them to be imitators of God, and even commands them to “Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord.”(Eph. 5:19) If the church is the communal body of Christ, then the lessons Paul teaches to the church of Ephesus can be applied to the current church. Even God himself requires nature to sing out. In Job 38 when he is rebuking Job for doubting his wisdom, he recounts creating the world and how the stars sang out together.

What kind of music can be considered praise? The answer can be found in Ephesians 5:19, where Paul says “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.” This broad definition can and should include a variety of styles from various time periods. For instance ‘Singet dem Herr nein neues Lied’ by Johann Pachelbel,¹⁰ a Baroque period choral piece that is set to the text of Psalm 98:138:

¹O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done wonderful things, His right hand and His holy arm have gained the victory for Him. ²The Lord has made known His salvation; He has revealed His righteousness in the sight of the nations. ³He has remembered his lovingkindness and His faithfulness to the house of Israel; ⁸Let the rivers clap their hands, Let the mountains sing together for joy.

This joyous piece may obviously be praise because the text is a psalm glorifying God for his righteousness. A contemporary example of music that takes a Praise posture is the folk rock anthem ‘How He Loves Us’ by John Mark McMillian:

¹⁰ Pachelbel, Johann. Singet dem Herr nein neues Lied. Edited by David Kates, 2015

His is jealous for me, loves like a hurricane, I am a tree bending beneath the weight of his wind and mercy. When all of a sudden I am unaware of these afflictions eclipsed by glory, I realize just how beautiful you are and how great your affections are for me.¹¹

This poetic text is meant to be a reminder of how intensely God loves those who believe in him. These two songs have vastly different styles however they serve the same purpose, to praise God for who he is and what he has done. For a song or piece to be praise it does not need to fit a certain style, it only needs to be a communication from man to God.

Worship

The meaning of Worship in this paper is not the traditional definition. In the bible the practice of worship would fall under the definition of Praise as it has been laid out in this paper. Worship in this paper is a posture toward non-sacred music that allows Christian musicians to fully embrace this music because of certain qualities that each song possess. Music that falls under Worship includes pieces addressed from one person to another person such as love songs, pieces of self-reflection for the refining of the individual's soul or the admonishment of other persons, and pieces that are exercises in poetry, and stylistic excellence or experimentation. Most of the music created by human beings falls into this category. Any music that is not for the explicit purpose of communicating with God, and is excellent in the genre it was created in is Worship. It exists as a display of the Creator's infinite creativity, the by-product of his creations, creating. Human beings have created music for as long as there is recorded history, yet there appears to be no end to the intricately unique varieties in which humans express themselves.

¹¹ McMillan, John Mark. "JOHN MARK MCMILLAN LYRICS - How He Loves." Azlyrics.com. Accessed April 4, 2016. <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/davidcrowderband/howheloves.html>.

These are a few examples of that endless variety that accomplish the purpose for which they were created.

The first type of worship is any song addressed from one person to another. No type of song is a better example of this than the love song, a testament of one person's romantic affection for another person. The purpose of the love song is to communicate the emotions of one person to another through the lyrics or the music depending on the style, so an excellent love song is a song that communicates those feelings effectively. There are innumerable love songs that have been written over the centuries of humans making music, so an example of an effective love song is difficult to narrow. However certain songs stand out to certain generations. 'My Heart Will Go On' by Canadian singer Celine Dion is one such song. Originally recorded for the soundtrack to the 1997 movie 'Titanic' it won An Academy Award in 1997 for 'Best Original Song' and at the 1998 Grammy Awards won for 'Record of the Year', 'Song of the Year', 'Best Female Pop Vocal Performance' and 'Best Song Written Specifically for Motion Picture or Television'¹². Awards and accolades given by fallen people to music made by fallen people should not always be the standard of excellence, but in this case with such an overwhelmingly positive response to the song it is difficult to ignore the exceptional qualities of the piece. From the beautiful vocal performance by Dion, the well written arrangement that modulates into three different keys, and the soaring lead lines played by a solo flute to the lyrics that tell of an eternal and undying love that knows no boundaries even space and time; this song stirs the listener's

¹² "Past Winners Search." TheGRAMMYS.org. Accessed April 8, 2016.

http://www.grammy.com/nominees/search?artist=&field_nominee_work_value=My Heart Will Go On&year=1998&genre=All.

heart to feelings of heroic romance. This song is an example of music that Christians can embrace under the posture of Worship because it addresses relationships between people.

The next type of piece that is considered Worship are pieces of self-reflection for the refining of an individual's soul. An example of excellent self-reflection is almost harder to choose than an example of a love song. Human beings often deal with spiritual and emotional issues through introspection, and for musicians this manifests itself in their music. David, King of Israel, often turned to song in order to "work out" his angst with God or other men. The book of Psalms is full of such songs. Unfortunately none of the music that accompanies the Psalms has been preserved and therefore would not serve this argument very well. Fortunately there are many other selections from the centuries of musical expression to choose from. The song 'Jesus Christ' by New York rock band Brand New is something of a contemporary Psalm. The music is well played and reflects the angst of the lyrics. That combination makes this an effective song of self-reflection for the refining of the individual's soul. Songwriter and singer Jesse Lacey deals with three issues in this song. He is questioning Jesus for a solution to his heartbreak:

Well, Jesus Christ, I'm alone again
So what did you do those three days you were dead?
'cause this problem's gonna last more than the weekend¹³

He is afraid that he is not strong enough to choose Christ over all the other influences in his life:

Do you believe you're missin' out
That everything good is happening somewhere else?

¹³ Lacey, Jesse. "BRAND NEW LYRICS - Jesus Christ." Azlyrics.com. Accessed April 4, 2016. <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/brandnew/jesusjesuschrist.html>.

‘Cause with nobody in your bed
 The night’s hard to get through¹⁴

Finally he is afraid that his doubt makes him ineligible or incapable to receive the gift that Jesus gave on the cross:

Do I divide and fall apart?
 ‘cause my bride is too slight to hold back all my dark
 and the ship went down in sight of land
 at the gates, does Thomas ask to see my hands

 I know you’re coming in the night like a thief
 But I’ve had some time alone, to hone my lying technique
 I know you think that I’m someone you can trust
 But I’m scared, I’ll get scared, and try to nail you back up¹⁵

These issues and misunderstandings are emotions that many people, not just professing Christians, deal with when struggling with the love of God. The fact that Lacey puts his issues with God into words and music is a reflection of his attempts to make sense of his relationship with God. Self-aware and honest songs like ‘Jesus Christ’ can put into words what people are feeling and help them better understand their own struggles with God.

Another type of music that is very important for Christian musicians to embrace are songs for admonishment of other people. From time to time it is necessary to call to other people’s attention, mistakes that they have made or are making in order to help them to become better people, and songs are one way of doing so. The song ‘Slacktivist’ by protest punk band Desaparecidos is an example of one such song. Much like the previous example the music in this

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¹⁵ Lacey, Jesse. "BRAND NEW LYRICS - Jesus Christ." Azlyrics.com. Accessed April 4, 2016. <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/brandnew/jesusjesuschrist.html>.

song reflects the internal struggle that the songwriter has about the issue. The lyrics call out the millennial generation for how ineffective and shallow their social justice initiatives can be.

Just “like” this and the problem is solved
I want to start to kick back and get involved
Everyone is selfless it’s so much fun
Donate a dollar with my coffee and save someone
Calling all friends I loosely know
We’re a tight knit clique in the virtual
Our purses are fat these kids are gaunt
Every little bit helps a lot¹⁶

They make reference to social media justice campaigns or ‘raising awareness’ initiatives which usually achieve nothing for the victims of injustice. They just allow people to feel like they have helped without actually having to give up anything or go out of their way. The effectiveness of this type of song really depends on how it is received by the listener; however this song presents a real and important issue that needs to be addressed in contemporary culture. Songs that address important cultural issues are a very necessary component to a Christian musician’s musical palate. Christians should be engaging the world and the issues it struggles with, understanding other people’s opinions on these issues is one way of doing that.

Finally this list of types of music that are considered worship must include some examples of music that are excellent for their own sake not necessarily for the sake of individuals. These next few artists and pieces are examples of musicians and music that serve the purpose of exercises in stylistic experimentation. This is music that God finds glory in because of

¹⁶ Obrest, Connor. "Slacktivist - Desaparecidos." Genius.com. Accessed April 4, 2016.
<http://genius.com/Desaparecidos-slacktivist-lyrics>.

how it achieves high levels of experimentalism or aesthetic excellence. This is art in its most neutral form. It does not attempt to achieve any moral statement as the music presented in the previous paragraphs. As a musician, Christian or otherwise, the opportunity to experience music that has no moral connotations and can be enjoyed for the pleasure is an indispensable gift that should be relished with great joy. That is why these examples are relevant to this argument.

The first type of exercise in excellence is the use of poetry in music in order to make the music more excellent than it would be on its own. The dictionary definition of poetry is “literary work in which special intensity is given to the expression of feelings and ideas by the use of distinctive style and rhythm.”¹⁷ Poetry is a very experimental art form and offers a good deal of freedom in its uses. The pairing of poetry and music is as old as the art forms themselves. It allows the composer of the piece to steer the listener’s emotions in a certain direction or to tell stories. The use of poetry for the sake of itself is different from the other uses of poetry in music. It still steers the listener’s emotions in a purposeful direction but it does not offer insight, lessons or morals. There are very few artists that create this kind of experimental poetry music, and none is as creative and original as the music produced by the Icelandic band Sigur Ros.

Sigur Ros has a very unique sound and is by technical definitions post-rock, with slow constantly refraining instrumental motives that swell to levels of intense sound and emotion. The harmonic structure of their music is very thick despite their minimal instrumentation. Played mostly on electric guitar and keyboards, large and ethereal chords are created by many doubled tones and clustered tones. The tones in these chords are all diatonic to the song’s key but the chords follow no obvious progression. This harmonic structure makes their chords sound more

¹⁷ Merriam-Webster.com. Accessed April 8, 2016. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/poetry>.

like large occurrences of sound rather than traditional chord progressions. The lead singer and guitarist Jonsi is known for playing his electric guitar with a cello bow which accounts for this sound in their compositions. While their sound and the execution of their instruments is unique, it is their lyrics that make them an example of the use of poetry in music for the sake of itself. In many of their songs Jonsi sings in an original language that he created called ‘Vonlenska’ which is Icelandic for ‘Hopelandic’.¹⁸ The language has no official translation and rarely repeats syllables in the same order. In 2012 Douglas Wolk wrote an article for MTV.com about Sigur Ros and the history behind Hopelandic. He describes the language as “an invented pseudo-language that uses Icelandic phonemes but doesn’t quite coalesce into words with particular meanings.”¹⁹ The band is very mysterious about their public image and very rarely gives much explanation for their creative choices. So the only official explanation of the lyrics comes from the FAQ page on the band’s website. “it’s of course not an actual language by definition (no vocabulary, grammar, etc.), it’s rather a form of gibberish vocals that fits to the music and acts as another instrument.”²⁰ The use of nonsense syllables is not completely original; the jazz vocal technique ‘scatting’ is similar to this style of vocalization. The difference is scatting is often improvised and used as an embellishment to lyrics that express emotion through ideas. Consequently scat, though emotional and nonsensical, is just an accentuation of the idea that is presented in the lyrics. Jonsi, on the other hand, writes and recreates sequences of phonetic sounds to express unadulterated emotion, allowing the listener to interpret a meaning for

¹⁸ "Sigur Rós - Frequently Asked Questions." Sigur Rós - Frequently Asked Questions. Accessed April 07, 2016. <http://sigur-ros.co.uk/band/faq.php#07>.

¹⁹ Wolk, Douglas. "SIGUR RÓS, MAGMA, LILLY ALLEN AND OTHERS WHO SPEAK IN TONGUES." MTV News, May 30, 2012. <http://www.mtv.com/news/2696230/sigur-ros-magma-simlish/>.

²⁰"Sigur Rós - Frequently Asked Questions." Sigur Rós - Frequently Asked Questions. Accessed April 07, 2016. <http://sigur-ros.co.uk/band/faq.php#07>.

themselves. The band has been known to leave a blank section in the album leaf of their CD packages, where lyrics would typically go, for listeners to draw or write their own lyrics.²¹

While the linguistic implications of Vonlenska could take up an entire essay, this is just a brief overview of the unique music of Sigur Ros. Their music is breathtakingly beautiful and they only use poetry to express emotion in a way that is unique to the human voice. The music is accessible and easy to listen to. It offers the listener a chance to experience visceral human emotion without any distractions. This is truly a unique musical experience.

In order to begin a discussion on experimentalism for its own sake, a definition should be given in order to avoid any confusion. Merriam-Webster dictionary defines experimental as “using a new way of doing or thinking about something.”²² With this definition it can be said that all music that is known in the present musical age came from an individual looking at the previous practice in a new way and then creating from that lens. In that case there are innumerable artists, scientist, instrument makers and all assortments of craftsmen that should be considered excellent in their experimentation. In an attempt to keep this argument as applicable to contemporary musicians as possible a more recent selection is necessary. Very few artists have been as musically and sonically experimental while still receiving high critical marks as Tom Waits.

Tom Waits started his career in 1972 as an eccentric blues singer/songwriter. Around the year 1983 respectively with the release of his album ‘Swordfishtrombones’ he made one of the

²¹Carpenter, Lorraine. "Beyond Words: Icelandic Quartet Sigur Rós Draw a Blank." Montreal Mirror, July 1, 2012.
<http://web.archive.org/web/20120701003207/http://www.montrealmirror.com/ARCHIVES/2002/103102/music3.html>.

²² Merriam-Webster.com. Accessed April 8, 2016. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/experimental>.

most startling career turns of the decade. After becoming dissatisfied with the sounds of his earlier music he cut ties with his record label and producers and reinvented himself as the screaming and wailing ‘tin-pan alley’ style, experimental, pre-rock artist that his is now known as. The new music he began releasing was eaten up by critics for the sounds that he was using in his recordings and his new vocal style. According to an account from his longtime producer Bones Howe in the documentary ‘Under Review: Tom Waits 1983-2006’, Waits had become intensely interested in “junkyard percussion and kick the bumper sounds”. He would often stop on the side of the road to pick up and hit old hubcaps and other garbage to hear what sounds they made.²³ He wanted to make music with these kinds of rough and strange sounds. He achieved this on ‘Swordfishtrombones’ and all his consequent records. His sound became an often dissonant and strange mix of very rhythmic centric jazz and blues that was never played on conventional instruments. One of the most fascinating examples of his junk yard style sounds is on the first track of his second album ‘Rain Dogs’. He has insisted in numerous interviews that the percussion on that track was someone destroying a dresser with a 2x4.²⁴ As if Waits’ new sound was not experiential enough, he began to sing in a painfully raspy growling voice and write lyrics that portrayed very strange and grimy characters. He assumed just as much a different character in each album as he did a different sound.

The music of Tom Waits is not easy to listen to. However he accomplished a new level of experimentalism that challenges not only the listener but also other artists to attempt new and interesting sounds and themes. He found a new way of thinking about traditional blues and jazz

²³ Under Review: Tom Waits 1983-2006. Produced by Andy Cleveland. Performed by Tom Waits, Bones Howe. SnagFilms. Accessed April 4, 2016. http://www.snagfilms.com/films/title/tom_waits_under_review_1983_2006.

²⁴ lib

and made them into something that was unlike anything else of its time, therefore achieving the purpose of experimentation for its own sake.

A good deal of this paper has been dedicated to examples of Worship. It is not without good reason. Each of these examples has achieved a high level of excellence in their own genres. This excellence brings glory to God, he takes pride in his creations doing excellent things with the faculties that he gave them. In the same way that a loving father takes pride in and is pleased with his child when they accomplish a great feat, so is God proud of his children when they exceed in excellence. For example if a young child excels past his peers in the field of athletics and scores any measure of points, a loving and supportive father finds pride in the being that was created with a part of himself. God views his children in the same fashion, when one of the beings that bears his image excels to new heights of excellence he takes pride in that child and finds value in that child. This principle many not carry over into other aspects of the human experience but in the aspect of the arts it is compelling. God gave the cultural mandate for humans to take control of the earth and master it. Achieving excellence in the music not only fulfills that mandate but more importantly it glorifies God himself.

Why does any of this matter?

Why does this division between Praise and Worship matter? Why was it necessary to spend twenty pages on redefining these terms? This division could save a Christian musician from a good deal of distraction and inhibition in their music making experience. It can be difficult for a musician in a church setting to allow themselves to worship God if the music is not

up to their standards or preferences. On the other hand it can be easy for a Christian musician to reject the pursuit of certain aesthetics because the church has rejected the idea of stylistic pluralism and they fear rejection from the church. Both of these issues are unfortunate injustices to musicians. There is no reason why both of the postures of Praise and Worship cannot occupy the life and practice of the Christian musician without any conflict.

In the church music, will vary in style and quality, this can cause an issue for a musician whether they are leading or in the congregation. If a virtuoso piano performer is in the congregation at a particular church service and the keys player in the worship band is not of the same skill level or style that the virtuoso is familiar with, the keys become a distraction from the real purpose of the music. This is an injustice to both musicians. The virtuoso in the congregation is missing out on not only the purpose of the music but also on the opportunity to participate in congregational praise. While the keys player whose skill is most likely not an issue to a majority of the congregation has become the opposite of what they had intended. It would be unfair to ask an individual to rise above their level of ability to please one person in a context in which a majority of the individuals participating are either satisfied or not concerned. How can a solution be reached that would offer the most God honoring experience for both musicians? If both musicians understand the division of Praise and Worship the solution might be reached. The virtuoso must understand that the music played in a sacred Praise context serves the purpose of communicating to God the glory and recognition he deserves. The music that he performs and finds satisfaction in is worthy of his time but his or her mindset must change when they walk in the doors of a church to participate in congregational praise. On the other hand the keys player in the band must understand that his goal cannot be to satisfy whoever may or may not be listening in the congregation, but to effectively lead the congregation in Praise while simultaneously

participating. If both of these musicians have this understanding and focus on their own communications with God, then they will more aptly fulfill the purpose of Praise which is to glorify God, and do so with a peace and satisfaction that they would not have known while in their old way of thinking.

Aaron Gillespie is the drummer for Christian melodic-hardcore band Underoath and several projects. He is a very talented and powerful drummer, setting the standard high for drumming in the hardcore genre even at an early age by drumming harder and faster than anyone else in the genre at the time. He is also an example of why this understanding is necessary. In an interview with punk magazine *Alternative Press*, he opened up to the interviewer about his youth and growing up in church. The conversation naturally turned to his musical experience in church during his youth and how that affected his drumming. The interviewer recalled that Gillespie had said that was not allowed to play drums in church as a youth because he played too loud, to which he replied:

Yes, that's true. I got my heart broken as a kid. They wouldn't allow me to play because of that. It was heart wrenching as a little boy. I had this big falling out as a drummer after that. I didn't play for a really long time. I felt inadequate. I didn't really grasp yet that I could play differently or that I could play a different style of music that would accommodate me. I was too young to understand. When someone told me I was playing too hard, I didn't even know what that meant. I guess it was just the way that I heard it or saw it and thought it should be. So I stopped playing drums for a while and didn't start playing again till my early teens. There was this time where they needed two drummers for some production and they let me play again.²⁵

Shortly after taking up drumming again he joined Underoath and has gone on to have one of the most successful careers that hardcore music has ever known. He has said in his testimony which

²⁵ Karan, Tim. "Chalkboard Confessional: Aaron Gillespie." *Alternative Press*, October 26, 2009. <http://www.altpress.com/features/entry/chalkboardgillespie>.

he has given at many concerts and youth events, that even though he was in a “Christian” band he had fallen away from his faith and had made many harmful decisions in his personal life because he was not pursuing a relationship with God. Arguably, despite all that Aaron Gillespie has accomplished in his career, if he had not been rejected by his church for the style of his drumming he would have continued to play through his childhood and would have been an even better drummer than he already is. More importantly if he had understood that the church’s rejection of his style was not God’s disappointment, he may have gone into his career with Underoath in a better relationship with God and saved himself a good deal of pain.

Any Christian musician, like Aaron Gillespie, whose skills or tastes are inappropriate to the function of congregational Praise, must not be discouraged in pursuing their craft. They can serve another purpose that also glorifies God. It is the mandate of Christian musicians to take control over the faculties of nature and making excellent music in every aspect of the term is part of that mandate. God is glorified when his people follow his commands. Fulfilling the cultural mandate is following God’s commands. Christian thinking of the past decade has come a great distance in validating the pursuit of perfectly acceptable styles of art. However it has not always been so open minded there are many years of prejudice in the church against such styles as Rock and Hip-Hop. These years have held back the Christian contribution of quality art in these genres enough that either Christians are no longer at the forefront of the production of excellent music or those that are making excellent music are forced to balance an artistic image that will satisfy the church and the world instead of allowing themselves to make a true expression of their heart, soul, mind and strength. This climate affects the minds and ambitions of Christian musicians in a negative way. If they are told that certain styles or types of music which speak to them are

unworthy of their pursuit, this will not only confuse them but hinder their productivity and the quality of their work.

All that being said there are Christian musicians who do understand that God is glorified by excellence in music; and making music with a posture of Worship brings God just as much glory as participating in Praise. These musicians are making phenomenal contributions to these genres, such as rap artist LeCrae. While charting at the top of the Billboard Top 200 list and Gospel charts at the same time,²⁶ he is maintaining the values that drive him in his faith but never failing to challenge his own way of thinking and those of others. He was interviewed for an article in *The Atlantic* and shared some thoughts about how Christians should view art in light of their worldview.

"We've limited Christianity to salvation and sanctification," he said. "Christianity is the truth about everything. If you say you have a Christian worldview, that means you see the world through that lens—not just how people get saved and what to stay away from. This means writing about things other than heaven and the glory of God. While that kind of music is necessary," he said, "Christians need to embrace that there need to be believers talking about love and social issues and all other aspects of life. In other words, people who identify as Christian—or religious in general—are also people; the music they listen to doesn't have to just be about their faith, but it's also possible for faith to be part of the music they like. That hasn't been the focus in some parts of the Christian music industry," Lecrae said.²⁷

Many artists like Lecrae who are creating music that is an honest reflection of who they are, while simultaneously maintaining a healthy relationship with God. It is possible to have both the

²⁶Green, Emma. "Lecrae: 'Christians Have Prostituted Art to Give Answers'" *The Atlantic*, October 6, 2014. <http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2014/10/lecrae-christians-have-prostituted-art-to-give-answers/381103/>.

²⁷Green, Emma. "Lecrae: 'Christians Have Prostituted Art to Give Answers'" *The Atlantic*, October 6, 2014. <http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2014/10/lecrae-christians-have-prostituted-art-to-give-answers/381103/>.

postures of Praise and Worship and the music that they represent operating in a single life without conflict.

If an individual believes in the tenets of the Christian faith and allows them to affect his life in a positive manner, and creates or performs music, he is a Christian musician. If a Christian musician accepts that Praise and Worship are different postures towards music that serve different purposes but can achieve the same goal, then they are a Christian musician who is free to pursue whatever creative endeavor best suits their nature. Whether it is music that communicates directly to God the honor he so righteously deserves. Or pursuing excellence in music that communicates between people or pursuing excellence for its own sake. They are free to do so, in the full knowledge that music belongs to God and he can be glorified by whatever he chooses, and no matter if a human is participating in Praise or pursuing an act of Worship, God will have his glory. Music is the freedom to break through the veil of the monotonous and sinful human existence and catch a slight glimpse of the perfectly beautiful glory of God that humanity so desperately desires to be reunited with. Stifling that freedom is an injustice against man and a sin against God.

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- The Sacred in Music: Albert L. Blackwell (pgs. 91-133)
- Art and the Bible: Francis A. Shaffer (pgs. 13-94)
- Music through the eyes of Faith: Harold M. Best (pgs. 11-60)
- Music art and the bible: Dr. Allen Schantz (pgs. 3-53)
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