

## Healing Beethoven?

by Robin Wallace

When my late wife, Barbara, passed away in 2011, after eight and a half years of profound deafness, one person in my church told me that her first thought on hearing the news was, “Now she can hear again.” I couldn’t help wondering if there was a different way to think about things. Imagine heaven as a place where being deaf would not be the profound handicap it is on earth, because everyone else there would know exactly how to accommodate a deaf person’s needs, or those of people with other disabilities.

In fact, many with disabilities resent the widespread societal assumption that they should want to be cured. This fact poses significant theological challenges that need to be squarely addressed.

Historically speaking, we are at a threshold in our understanding of disability. Around the time of Beethoven, a medical model became widely accepted, according to which the goal was to cure or overcome the disability. It is hardly a coincidence that Beethoven has come to be seen as a classic example of the medical model as applied to deafness. Although medical interventions did not provide him much help, some of his best-known compositions can seem to trace a personal story of overcoming adversity. The widespread acceptance of this view, I believe, has limited our understanding of Beethoven’s life and work.

Most members of the Deaf community—Deaf with a capital D to indicate that those in this community understand deafness as a cultural identity—are skeptical about medical interventions, like the cochlear implants that Barbara received after losing her hearing. I have found, though, that both Deaf people and disability scholars are becoming more open to medical intervention even as it is becoming widely understood that such interventions do not offer a cure. Our theological understanding of disability, I would suggest, needs to be open to similar nuance.

*This essay is a shortened version of Robin Wallace’s keynote address of the same name from this year’s annual SCSM conference hosted by Baylor University, presented on February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020 in Cox Hall.*

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### Contents

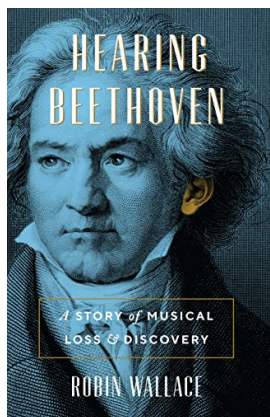
<b>Healing Beethoven?</b> Robin Wallace	1
<b>Resources: Theology &amp; Disability</b>	3
<b>From the President</b> Mark Peters	4
<b>Conference Report for 2020 SCSM Annual Conference</b> Alannah Rebekah Franklin	5
<b>Annual Meeting, 2021: Mercer University</b>	6
<b>Graduate Student Prize, 2020: Chris Blakey</b>	7
<b>Resources: Theology &amp; Disability</b>	7
<b>News from Members &amp; the Society</b>	8
<b>From the Editor</b> Chelle Stearns	8

As Bethany McKinney Fox notes in her book *Disability and the Way of Jesus*, the healing stories in the Bible have at least two dimensions. On the one hand, the healings resemble medical interventions, although nothing like modern technological medicine is involved. On the other hand, the stories are accounts of personal interaction. Without exception they involve an encounter between a healer and another person, and the people involved bring different needs and perspectives to the table.

From his experience working with cognitively disabled people at l'Arche, Jean Vanier learned that healing flows both ways, and that human community is enhanced when we embrace those who are marginalized, even if their underlying condition does not change.

In musical terms, this suggests that we should not wonder at how Beethoven overcame his deafness, or indeed, how any other great artist with a disability manages to thrive in spite of it. Rather, foremost in our minds as we approach their stories should be the question of what they uniquely have to offer. The idea that Beethoven was a better composer because he was deaf seems counterintuitive, but it meshes well with biblical narratives in which powerful insights are given to those seemingly least likely to receive them.

Beethoven, it is often suggested, used his music to tell a story of overcoming adversity. The consequences of this idea for our understanding of music—and not just classical music—are impossible to overestimate. But it is not the whole story. In fact, from the point of view of present-day disability advocacy, it is highly problematic.



In my book *Hearing Beethoven*, which is based on my experiences with Barbara and my lifelong study of Beethoven's music, I sought to establish a more humane way of understanding the composer's response to his deafness. What made deafness particularly challenging for Barbara was not just the inadequacy of medical interventions. It was, rather, the apparent inability of other people to adjust to her limitations. Such challenges are regularly faced as well by people with autism and other conditions that make it difficult for them to fit in. Disabled people may be reluctant to go to church because they fear feeling excluded, or that their attendance would place too much of a burden on others.

Perhaps less obviously, whenever one of the biblical healing stories is read from the pulpit, some disabled people hold their breath to see whether it will be interpreted in a way that stigmatizes them by suggesting that their disability makes them less than whole. They may find themselves sitting through sermons in which they are chided for their lack of faith or told that conditions like theirs are a judgment from God. Clearly a less black-and-white understanding

of the nature of disability and healing would benefit both them and the church. Such an understanding might begin with a more nuanced understanding of what disabled people like Beethoven have accomplished.

In *Hearing Beethoven*, I argue that deafness shaped Beethoven's music in ways that are central to his widely recognized personal style. In terms of Beethoven's influence on later music, the most significant of these is his use of short, highly recognizable, frequently repeated motives. While observing how Barbara learned to hear again after receiving a cochlear implant, I noted that small, definable units of sound were much easier for her to process than longer, less predictable ones. This was particularly true of music; a piece she recognized would begin to sound right as soon as she recognized what it was. A short, highly recognizable melody was relatively easy for her to identify.

Beethoven's melodic building blocks tend to be short and memorable. The worse his hearing got, the more he depended on frequent, almost obsessive repetition of such material. It is as though he was composing with the specific challenges of hearing loss in mind. The rhythmic quality of his writing can even be seen in his sketches. The result was a powerful musical style that can seem to tell a story of overcoming adversity.

Paradoxically, the emphasis on the heroic style in Beethoven reception has obscured what I believe is a more important way in which Beethoven can be said to have healed himself in his music—or perhaps I should say, the way in which Beethoven used music to open himself to healing. Difficulty hearing and composing music was not the most devastating effect of hearing loss for Beethoven; in fact, by making small adjustments beginning in his twenties, he was able to hear music adequately for far longer than is generally recognized. The more immediate crisis he faced had to do with social isolation and depression.

In response, I suggest, Beethoven brought healing to himself by broadening his music's emotional range and dynamism. Heroic affirmation was only one of the many moods he showed music to be capable of expressing. In the works of his middle years—not to mention those of his final decade—he also thoroughly explored tragic anger, mystical relaxation, capricious frivolity, and effortless transition between these and other emotional states too numerous and varied to be described in words. The result was a dawning awareness of music's full expressive potential: an awareness that enabled the coming century of Romantic music and that in many ways is still with us today. But it also marked a spiritual awakening on Beethoven's part. He deepened and enriched his emotional life, and in so doing enriched ours as well.

A series of recent experiments brings the problems involved in treating disability into sharp relief. Scientists have been working for several years with mice who carry a dominant gene that causes them to go deaf by the age of six months: roughly equivalent to the mid-twenties in human terms. Through genetic engineering, researchers have had considerable success in preventing this from happening. Not surprisingly, these experimental subjects have come to be known as Beethoven mice.

Let us suppose for a moment that Beethoven's deafness was genetic, and that modern medicine could have stopped or reversed it. Would or should we go back in history and make Beethoven a happier but less important and influential composer? The question is rhetorical, of course, but the issues it raises aren't. Most of us would probably agree that if we could alter a gene that causes deafness, let alone a life-threatening condition like Huntington's disease, we should at least be able to choose to do so. But our humanity is nourished by diversity, by encountering people with experiences different from our own, and by seeing value in those whom others often write off as ill or incompetent. If all disability were magically cured, would the result be a heaven in which people like my late wife could hear again, or would it be a world made poorer for the loss of their voices? My intention is not to resolve such paradoxes but to raise them. In the tension of these contradictions, I believe we can find both God and the freedom to think for ourselves about what is most important and most deeply human. And for that I am grateful.



**Robin Wallace**, Professor of Musicology, has taught at Baylor University since 2003. Dr. Wallace received his A.B. from Oberlin College and his M.Phil. and Ph.D. from Yale University. Prior to Baylor he taught at the Petrie School of Music at Converse College. Dr. Wallace is the author most recently of *Hearing Beethoven: A Story of Musical Loss and Discovery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), a probing study of Beethoven's deafness based partly on his experience with his late wife Barbara.

*Take Note: An Introduction to Music through Active Listening*, an introductory textbook published by Oxford University Press. He is an authority on the critical reception of the music of Beethoven, which is the subject of his first published book. His publications also include numerous journal articles, reviews, book chapters, and translations of early 19th-century Beethoven reviews.

## Resources on Theology & Disability

- Basselin, Timothy. *Flannery O'Connor: Writing a Theology of Disabled Humanity*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013.
- Betcher, Sharon V. *Spirit and the Politics of Disablement*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2007.
- Brock, Brian, and John Swinton, eds. *Disability in the Christian Tradition: A Reader*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2012.
- Eiesland, Nancy L. *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994.
- Reynolds, Thomas. *Vulnerable Communion: A Theology of Disability and Hospitality*. Ada, MI: Brazos, 2008.
- Swinton, John. *Becoming Friends of Time: Disability, Timefulness, and Gentle Discipleship*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017.
- McKinney Fox, Bethany. *Disability and the Way of Jesus: Holistic Healing in the Gospels and the Church*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2019.
- Yong, Amos. *The Bible, Disability, and The Church: A New Vision of the People of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2011.
- Young, Frances. *Arthur's Call: A Journey of Faith in the Face of Severe Learning Disability*. London: SPCK, 2014.



## From the President

### Mark Peters

Grace and peace to you, friends.

I do not need to tell you the unprecedented time of crisis through which we are now living. Over the past four months, our whole lives—including our lives as students, professors, scholars, and musicians—have been turned upside down. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, we moved off campus, held classes and meetings online, worried about the present, worried about the future, sought more than ever a work/life balance, encouraged each other, carried on as best we could.

And then we witnessed the murder of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin and his colleagues, on the heels of the murders of Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor. The result of these murders was not a crisis. The result was a wider recognition of the crisis of racism that has been ongoing in North American for more than 500 years.

In the midst of these local and global crises, we, as able, have continued to learn and to teach, to read and to research, to write and to publish. We have also adapted our lives, finding new ways each day to live and be in the world. We have joined Black Lives Matter protests and rallies. We have continued to affirm that the lives of persons of color matter, that the patterns of racism, injustice, and oppression in the United States and around the world must end.

We have also sought each day to live our vocations as scholars and teachers and students and musicians and human persons made for community. There is truly something good and important, essential even, about the work of artists and musicians, scholars, theologians, liturgists, and church musicians that requires that we continue to share the gifts of our vocations with each other and with the world.

I have thought often in these months of C. S. Lewis's famous sermon, "Learning in Wartime" (1939), in which Lewis affirms that learning is a deeply human activity and one that is at all times necessary. He argues that if we waited to pursue learning until the world was not in crisis, then we would never do so: "If [humans] had postponed the search for knowledge and beauty until they were secure the search would never have begun" (in *The Weight of Glory and Other Essays*, 1949).

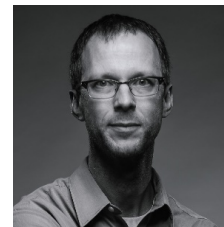
I have also had the privilege in the past half-year of living with Ariel Burger's new book, *Witness: Lessons from Elie Wiesel's Classroom* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018), first for a [review essay](#) for *Christian Scholar's Review* and then with Trinity students in an Honors seminar, Remembering Rightly: The Ethics of Memory. Wiesel consistently affirmed education as life-giving, as humanizing: "Whatever you learn, remember: the learning must make you more, not less, human." He also affirmed that our learning must make a difference in the world: "If we act with greater

sensitivity to others, if we act with courage and choose humanity over inhumanity, it does not seem that it can affect the larger trajectory of history. But I believe it can"; and, "Tell them we can do so much more. And since we can, we must" (Wiesel, qtd. Burger, 26, 162, 186).

So let me affirm what you already know: your work is crucial, your learning is crucial, your teaching is crucial, your caring for your students and peers is crucial, your pursuit of knowledge and beauty is crucial, your activism for what is right—through words and actions and teaching—is crucial. Your pursuit of Christian scholarship in music is an important contribution to making the world more human.

As you will read in this Newsletter, the work of the SCSM continues. In a small step to work toward a consistent posture of anti-racism as a society, the Executive Committee has established a new standing committee on Access and Equity. As a society, we seek to affirm and to communicate more clearly to scholars of color: you are seen here, your voice matters here, your research matters here, you matter here. If you have ideas on how the SCSM can better do this, or if you are interested in joining the committee on Access and Equity, please email me at [mark.peters@trnty.edu](mailto:mark.peters@trnty.edu).

Finally, thank you to all those who have contributed and will contribute their humanizing and life-giving efforts to our annual meeting at Baylor University; to the society's second book, *Sacred Music in the Americas*; to our upcoming annual meeting at Mercer University; and to the ongoing work of the society. Let us continue together our pursuit of knowledge and beauty.



**Mark Peters** is professor of music and director of the Center for Teaching and the Good Life at Trinity Christian College.



## Conference Report

### Baylor University, Waco, TX

### February 6-8, 2020

by Alannah Rebekah Franklin, Florida State University

The annual meeting of the Society for Christian Scholarship in Music, held from February 6 – 8, 2020 at Baylor University, was a resounding success. For the first time, there were two to three concurrent sessions throughout the duration of the weekend, totaling thirty-eight papers. Additionally, there were eight posters, a thoughtful plenary lecture by Robin Wallace followed by a discussion panel, two lecture recitals, and a mental health discussion panel. Social events included a beautiful reception on Thursday evening and a plated dinner on Friday evening. Most events were held in the stunning Armstrong Browning Library, which featured the Cox Reception Room, a seminar room, lecture hall, Foyer of Meditation, and “Treasure Room” dedicated to the Browning poets.



The conference started on Thursday afternoon at 1:30pm with opening remarks by Mark Peters, after which the first concurrent sessions began. After a coffee break, Jonathan Embry presented the first lecture recital, held at Seventh and James Baptist Church on their 1983 Schantz Opus 1754 organ. Embry demonstrated, through presentation and

performance, the choral-style writing found in Hugo Distler's organ and church compositions. Presentations throughout the conference as a whole involved an especially diverse range of scholarship, including composer and piece studies, cultural and theological explorations, theoretical analyses, ethnographic and disability studies, as well as scientific connections.

Thursday evening's keynote address by Robin Wallace, “Healing Beethoven?,” set the tone for a thoughtful discussion of disability, personal experiences, and interpersonal care that continued

throughout the conference. As Wallace shared stories of his own interactions with the Deaf community, his late wife Barbara, and his long-time research subject Beethoven, he nuanced the idea of deafness, Beethoven's style, and the need for community. This led seamlessly into the evening panel session on “Theology, Disability, and Music,” where William C. Gaventa, Devan Stahl, Meg Wallace, and Tanner Wright discussed modern disability issues such as technology, community understanding and engagement, and Christian approaches to the topic. A dessert reception concluded the evening for some members, while student representative Hannah Porter Denecke hosted the graduate student reception in the seminar room of the Armstrong Browning library, complete with Waco's famous Dr. Pepper floats.

Friday's poster session was a new addition to the conference, presented by a number of Baylor students and other scholars doing similar research. Each poster highlighted fascinating ethnographic work in local and nearby churches, and studies of congregational music traditions both old and new. Next came the graduate student panel discussion on issues of mental health and the balance of spiritual life, work, and study. Led by Hannah Porter Denecke, David Calvert, Steven Guthrie, and Jacob Sensenig, the panel focused on the search for balance and practices panelists use to find and maintain a healthy lifestyle. This panel was welcomed by graduate students, especially, as the student cohort of SCSM is currently invested in seeking such balance in study, work, and the job search process.

At the lunch and business meeting in the Cox Reception Hall, members of the board presented a moving tribute to the late and esteemed Robert Judd, Executive Director of the American Musicological Society and founding member of SCSM (back when it was FMCS). The meeting also featured information on forthcoming [Conference report continued...](#)

volumes, positive financial updates, a request for continued contributions to the graduate student travel fund, a proposal for a new Christian Music Reader, and the announcement that Joshua Waggener will transition from his role as Vice President to a new role as President in 2021. Christopher Blakey was awarded the student paper prize, and attendees eagerly looked forward to his presentation scheduled for the next morning. Friday evening's plated dinner at Baylor's Cashion Banquet Hall provided a welcome chance for conference attendees to socialize, and the Baylor Wind Ensemble concert was a relaxing end to the day.

Saturday opened with two concurrent sessions, the second of which featured the student prize winner, Christopher Blakey, and his work on theological ideas present in Vaughan Williams's *Sinfonia Antartica*. Discussing aspects of theology, music theory, natural biology, and cultural-philosophical ideas of the time, Blakey's well-rounded research led to an informative presentation. Donté A. Ford's lecture recital, "'Jesus Only...Help Me Sing': Messages of Jesus and Holiness in the Music of C. P. Jones," concluded the conference. Not only did Ford present the life and work of C. P. Jones, but he invited us to participate in a hymn sing, and to listen to a beautiful vocal solo by Rylan André Harris. Both Ford and Harris led and engaged the audience through singing and inspiring piano accompaniment. This was a fitting way to end a conference that involved so many discussions of congregational singing. Mark Peters led the Valediction, and all parted in peace. Those who were able to stay were invited to the Truett Theological Seminary Chapel for a shape-note singing in the afternoon.

After a weekend of sharing knowledge, singing, and eating together, the Society for Christian Music Scholarship is already planning for next year's conference, which is to be held at Mercer University in Macon, Georgia and organized by local host and SCSM member, Dr. Nathan Myrick.



**Rebekah Franklin** is a PhD Candidate in Musicology at Florida State University, and an active cellist in the Gulf Coast area. Her dissertation research explores how singing J.S. Bach's *Passions* in twenty-first century American festival contexts creates spaces of community.

## Select Resources on African American Music & Black Liberation Theology

Abbingdon, James. *Readings in African American Church Music and Worship*, Volume I & II. Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, 2001/2014.

Banfield, William C. *Cultural Codes: Makings of a Black Music Philosophy*. Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2010.

Boyer, Horace Clarence. *How Sweet the Sound: The Golden Age of Gospel*. Washington, D.C.: Elliott and Clark Publishing, 1995.

Burnim, Mellonee V., and Portia K. Maulsby. *African American Music: An Introduction*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2006.

Cone, James. *The Spirituals and The Blues: An Interpretation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992.

Copeland, M. Shawn. *Knowing Christ Crucified: The Witness of African American Religious Experience*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2018.

Floyd, Jr., Samuel A. *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting its History from Africa to the United States*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Guenther, Eileen Morris. *In Their Own Words: Slave Life and the Power of Spirituals*. St. Louis, MI: MorningStar Music Publishers, 2016.

Jones, LeRoi. *Blues People: The Negro Experience in White America and the Music That Developed from It*. New York, NY: William Morrow, 1963.

Kirk-Duggan, Cheryl A. *Exorcizing Evil: A Womanist Perspective on the Spirituals*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997.

Lovell, John. *Black Song: The Forge and The Flame*. New York, NY: Paragon House Publishers, 1986.

Southern, Eileen. *The Music of Black Americans: A History*. Second Edition. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1983.



# 2020 SCSM Graduate Student Prize: Christopher Blakey

The SCSM Graduate Student Prize is awarded annually to a graduate student for a distinguished scholarly paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society, with a cash prize of \$250. Recent recipients have included Sonja Wermager (2019) for “‘That Hart May Sing in Corde:’ Poetic Paraphrase of the Psalms as Defense of Church Music in Matthew Parker’s *The Whole Psalter Translated into English Metre* (1567)”; Andrew Janzen (2018) for “The Good Road: Indigenous Christian Songs, Senses and Place of Identity”; Emilie Coakley (2017) for “Time for Prayer or Time for Work?: Nostalgia, Memory, and the Changing Reception of Church Bells in a City Soundscape”; Braxton Shelley (2016) for “Tuning Up: Towards a Gospel Aesthetic”; Bo kyung Blenda Im (2015) for “Amnesia and Anamnesis: Voicing an Alternative Modern Christian Subjectivity in South Korea”; and Cesar Favila (2014) for “Sacred Music and Its Sacred Space: The Early Modern Novohispanic Convent Coro.” The prize is open to all graduate students whose papers are accepted for presentation at the meeting.

*Christopher Blakey, “Music Theology and Vaughan Williams’s Sinfonia Antarctica”*

This year’s Graduate Student Prize was awarded to Mr. Christopher Blakey for his paper, “Music Theology and Vaughan Williams’s *Sinfonia Antarctica*.” A quick look at the conference program points to a change of mind for Mr. Blakey, as he shifted from a more general exploration of Vaughan Williams’ natural theology (“Natural Theology and the Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams”) to a more specific exploration of musical theology in his *Sinfonia Antarctica*. His instincts to write a different paper paid off and resulted in an exemplary scholarly paper.

Mr. Blakey is a Ph.D. student in the music department at Durham University, having also earned his B.A. (first-class) and M.A. (distinction) at the same institution. He currently holds the Northern Bridge studentship and is supervised by Professor Bennett Zon and Revd. Professor David Wilkinson. Blakey’s research is focused on the music of Ralph Vaughan Williams through the lens of natural theology and biological evolutionary thought.

Mr. Blakey’s paper was selected by a committee chaired by Cathy Ann Elias (DePaul University) that also included Pedro R. Aponte (James Madison University), and Martin V. Clarke (The Open University, UK). He received high praise from the committee members. One argued,

This paper flows smoothly. The main argument on ‘music as theology’ is well built upon assumptions that are clearly stated. It makes good use of scholarly models and builds well upon those models to create a novel contribution to scholarship. The musical analysis fits the overall narrative quite nicely.”

A second committee member commended the interdisciplinary ability demonstrated in the paper,

Very impressive work combining theological reflection and musical analysis in convincing detail and argument. The case study was thoroughly presented, but also ably situated in a wider field of research. The bold attempt to explore music as theology was aided by rigorous engagement with a wide range of secondary literature, both theological and musicological. While the musical analysis employed complex theory, it was presented in a way that ought to make it accessible to readers approaching this from different scholarly backgrounds.

Thus, it seems, not only was this an excellent paper, but his writing was also clear and accessible to a multidisciplinary panel and audience, not an easy task. Mr. Blakey’s scholarship embodies much of what SCSM aspires to create and promote in the realm of music and Christian scholarship, and we look forward to hearing more from him at future conferences and beyond.

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(Trinity Christian College)

**Vice President:** Joshua Waggener

(Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary)

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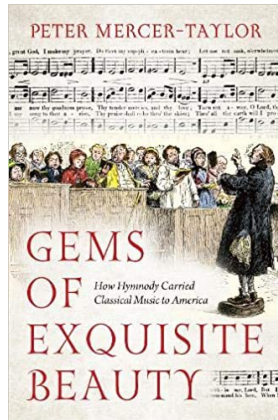
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## SCSM Member News!



**Adam Perez**, doctoral candidate at Duke University recently published “Enthroned Upon Praise: The Early History and Theology of Integrity's Hosanna! Music.” In *Essays on the History of Contemporary Praise and Worship*, ed. Lester Ruth (Wipf and Stock, 2020). He also received a 2020 Dissertation Fellowship granted by Hispanic Theological Initiative. Congrats, Adam!

**Peter Mercer-Taylor**, Professor of Musicology and School of Music Director of Graduate Studies at University of Minnesota, received an NEH-Mellon grant. With this grant he is creating a website of contemporary choral and piano recordings of nearly 280 early-American hymn tunes. This work is inspired by his forthcoming book [\*Gems of Exquisite Beauty: How Hymnody Carried Classical Music to America\*](#). See the [NPR article](#) to hear recordings of some of the hymns.



*Sacred Music in the Americas* has been accepted for publication by Rowman & Littlefield. **Andrew Shenton** (Boston University) and **Joanna Smolko** (University of Georgia), the volume's editors, are in the process of finishing the last edits before sending the collection of essays to the publisher. Essays range from South and Central American liturgy and hymnbooks to the contextualization of Christian singing in various parts of the Americas to explorations of the ethics and justice of Christian songs to Indigenous hymnody. This should be a wide-ranging and enjoyable volume. *Sacred Music in the Americas* will most likely be available by the end of 2020.

Rowman & Littlefield have also accepted a proposal for a series of edited scholarly volumes from SCSM, which began with *Exploring Christian Song*, edited by **M. Jennifer Bloxam** (Williams College) and **Andrew Shenton**. The next volume will be titled, *Sacred Contexts in Secular Music of the Long Nineteenth Century*. The editors, **Markus Rathey** (Yale University) and **Effie Papanikolaou** (Bowling Green State University), invite submissions that use a variety of methodologies and approaches (historical musicology, ethnomusicology, music theory, theology, liturgical studies, etc., as well as cross-disciplinary perspectives). Please submit an abstract no longer than 350 words to [scsm.collection2021-at-gmail.com](mailto:scsm.collection2021-at-gmail.com) by 15 October 2020. Contributors will be notified by 30 November 2020. Essays of around 7,000 words will be due 1 April 2021, with an expected publication date of Fall 2021. Further details can be found on the SCSM website and questions may be addressed to the editors at the e-mail above.

## From the Editor

I cannot even begin to process all that has happened since the SCSM met at Baylor in February. An ongoing pandemic that has required schools at all levels to reimagine education as communities around the world have quarantined their citizens and limited public gatherings. We have all experienced the pain of cancelled concerts (both to perform and attend), cancelled graduation ceremonies, and online classes.

In the midst of all of this, protests have erupted and continued in many communities across the US in the wake of the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, and Breonna Taylor. In protests, I have noticed the power of historic prayer gestures of the holding up of hands (as protesters petition “hands up, don’t shoot”) and quiet kneeling (marking in silence the amount of time Floyd was held down). Complaint and lament mingle in these public spaces, pleading for change.

During all of this, I have been privileged to collaborate with my friend, Stephen Michael Newby, on an essay about the Black National Anthem, “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” for the SCSM volume, *Sacred Music in the Americas*. Our conversations have ranged from concern for friends with Covid 19 to our scholarly work to the public liturgy of the streets. I am grateful for such friendships, but also for the unexpectedness of life-giving and relevant scholarship. Ours is a sacred calling, and though it may not always feel like it, each of our voices and insights are needed in the world today. I echo Mark’s entreaty for us as a society, in such a time as this, to dive deep into the work you have been called to do, it is a sacred and blessed gift in such times.

In one of the sections above, I have shared some of our selected resources on African American Music and Black Liberation Theology. If you have resources or lists to share, please send them my way and I will post them on the SCSM blog.

Blessings and peace,  
Chelle Stearns