New SCSM Publication!


The Society for Christian Scholarship in Music is proud to announce the release of a new book in its series of publications. After Exploring Christian Song (ed. by M. Jennifer Bloxam and Andrew Shenton) and Christian Sacred Music in the Americas (ed. by Andrew Shenton and Joanna Smolko), the new volume, Sacred and Secular Intersections in Music of the Long Nineteenth Century: Church, Stage, and Concert Hall (Lexington Books, 2022), explores the impact of religious subjects on secular music in the nineteenth century. The editors, Eftychia Papanikolaou and Markus Rathey, have assembled nineteen fascinating essays that range from theological reflections about the spiritual power of music around 1800 to studies of religious themes on the Parisian stage and the singing of hymns in the trenches of the American Civil War.

As the editors highlight in their preface, the book conceives of the “the category of the sacred not as a monolithic attribute that applies only to music written for and performed in a religious ritual. Rather, the ‘sacred’ is viewed as a functional as well as a topical category. What follows is adapted from the book’s introduction, which the editors decided to set in a dialogical form.

EP: We are both familiar with narratives that placed special emphasis on how the secular concert hall replaced the church as the primary venue of musical creativity, but the reality is much more complex. Even though innovative genres such as string quartet and symphony had their place in secular venues, the church remained an important supporter of musical performances, and church buildings still were the main space where many people experienced large-scale musical performances. Romanticism did not displace religion; rather, it embraced its most powerful ideological tenets.

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MR: In Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder’s famous narrative, the fictitious musician Joseph Berglinger listens to music in a concert “as if he were in a church.” Wackenroder’s account of the life of a musician is one of the foundational texts for what would become over the following decades the idea of “Absolute Music.” But even more, Berglinger’s reflections on his listening experiences is a reminder that the “sacred” is more performative than it is essential. He does not describe the nature of the music or its style; it is the listeners and their attitudes that establish the sacred in the secular space of the concert hall.

EP: This description truly gives us a glimpse into the missing link of how audiences perceived the religious implications of all genres. As several of the essays illustrate, many composers used religious music in their secular compositions with the intent that audiences would “listen” to these symbolic sonic messages and decode their implications. On the other end of the spectrum, inferences of the sacred were inserted even in music prevalent in the domestic sphere, thus creating a nexus of meanings that operated on the levels of the symbolic and the commonplace.

MR: Many contributions in this book have ramifications for a broader re-evaluation of the relationship between “sacred” and “secular” in the long nineteenth century. It becomes apparent that references to religion were often not confined to music alone but that they frequently appeared in a multisensory framework. I would suggest that this multifaceted crossover was not only confined to the arts proper but that it even shaped the discourses about music in aesthetics and historiography.

EP: Yes, one of the ideas that struck me early on in my research on romantic masses was how tight constructions of the sacred and the secular appeared in nineteenth-century historiography. Older scholarship privileged opposition between the two and, even in the twentieth century, a composer’s entire corpus of music was usually studied in accordance with this binary: sacred music genres (masses, motets, etc.) were exalted as products of the loftiest compositional activity, whereas secular genres (symphonies, chamber music, opera) belonged to a separate, worldly artistic sphere. These binaries were artificial, however, and they failed to account for the permeability and cross-pollination of musical vocabularies between sacred and secular compositions, church and concert music. Several of the chapters in the book bring up the concept of Kunstreligion, which is difficult to explain with a short definition. Do we have a good way of approaching that elusive idea?

MR: Kunstreligion is a rather ambiguous term that can denote anything between music that borrows religious subjects and musical experience that replaces organized religion. Glenn Stanley has rightfully cautioned that it is a “slippery term.” My problem is that Kunstreligion is often used to imply a one-directional relationship: art becomes, and thus replaces, religion. This is partly true; however, the relationship is much more complex than the term suggests. At its core, the shift we are trying to explore in our book is a shift in the modes of listening. The sacralization of musical listening around 1800 comes at the heels of the French Revolution, which had attempted to replace the Christian religion as the leading ideology in France and beyond the French borders. The history of music and religion in the long nineteenth century is a history of not only secularization but also of re-sacralization.

EP: In fact, sacred and liturgical music that was written for the church adopted the most recent musical developments from the worlds of symphony, chamber music, and opera. Operatic and symphonic elements infiltrated sacred genres, often in stark opposition to contemporary attitudes and writings. As many of our authors assert, Hoffmann, Thibaut, Schleiermacher, and others exalted sacred music of the past and advocated for a return to the Andacht (devotion) and Reinheit (purity) of earlier musical styles. These ideas were absorbed by composers who, nonetheless, continued to write liturgical music that had a strong secular profile, despite the prevalent aesthetic views of the time. Liszt and Bruckner did write sacred music that harkened back to earlier styles of history, but they also wrote masses of the symphonic type, that had a place less in the liturgy and more in the concert hall.

MR: The interconnection between “sacred” and “secular” idioms and genres can also be seen outside the strictly liturgical repertoire. In the same way some composers did not subscribe to these binaries, some musical genres stand between these two alternatives.

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This year’s annual meeting was a major comeback for SCSM as we were able to meet in person once again. Gathering together for stimulating conversations, papers, and meals at the beautiful Mercer University in Macon, Georgia was a truly healing experience after the time of separation that has been experienced worldwide. There were many new members and first-time conference goers in attendance, as well as longtime members who were able to welcome and acclimate those learning what SCSM is all about. We also celebrated the large number of graduate students who were there to present and absorb knowledge from others. There was a broad range of paper, panels, and performances that created an academically invigorating atmosphere.

The concurrent opening sessions provided a glimpse at the diversity of scholarship that takes place in our society as presenters “Engaged Pop Culture” and examined “Contemporary Practices of Worship.” Both sessions and the presenters that led them showed us how more modern thought and practices can be incorporated into our study of worship and music in the church. These were followed by the plenary Keynote address with Dr. Jean Kidula, Professor of Music (Ethnomusicology) from the Hugh Hodgson School of Music at the University of Georgia. This address used a case study of the praise and worship song “Way Maker” by Sinachi to look at issues of unity and cultural translation within Christian communities via processes of promotion and dissemination. After hearing from Dr. Kidula we were blessed with the beautiful Kaleidoscope Concert performed by many talented Mercer music students. Thursday evening was rounded out with the conference banquet which solidified the fellowship that in-person meetings can truly provide.

Friday was a day packed with various amazing papers and presentations. The three morning concurrent sessions spanned topics surrounding diversity and inclusion in worship music. The afternoon provided opportunities to hear three graduate student poster presentations as well as our secondary plenary session “Ethnographic Research and the Study of Christian Music.” This panel discussion provided insight into what ethnography is as well as how care and humility are important factors when researching any community. The rest of the afternoon was full of even more stimulating papers presented on myriad topics included performance, composition, and theology.

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New SCSM Publication continued…

EP: The cross-fertilization between the sacred and secular spheres was much more productive than the binary of “sacred” vs. “secular” suggests. Historiography has a fondness for opposites, as suggested earlier, and one genre was consistently left in limbo—that is, the nineteenth-century oratorio. Secular oratorios and oratorio-like compositions were often viewed as sacred music, mainly because of the cross-pollination of their musical vocabularies, and our book includes essays that problematize the nature and function of such compositions.

MR: The conversations about Kunstreligion and the cross-fertilization between sacred and secular music usually focus myopically on the concert hall as the “new church.” Several chapters in our book show that opera also participated in the amalgamation of secular and sacred idioms. Within the aesthetic hierarchy of musical genres, however, opera was not able to catch up with the lofty ideal of the church-like concert hall. How do musical stage works fit into this aesthetic framework? And how does the operatic stage participate in the use of religious symbols during the long nineteenth century?

EP: Opera is definitely another such genre that participates in this synthesis. Romantic opera, of course, was riddled with religious themes and this aspect would require an entirely separate volume to explore fully. We have included some quite similar and also antithetical examples in this collection that the readers will be excited—and maybe even surprised—to read.

MR: Such musical and ideological intersections are especially timely and have allowed us to expand our scope.

EP: It is wonderful to have a group of chapters that expand the predominantly Euro-centric focus of this volume in an invaluable way.

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Sacred and Secular Intersections in Music of the Long Nineteenth Century: Church, Stage, and Concert Hall

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If you have news, publications, conferences, announcements, new degrees, performances, opportunities, pictures, etc. to share with your fellow SCSM members, please email: news.scsm@gmail.com
The day was rounded out by a spectacular organ lecture recital by Isaac Johnson on “Gregorian Chant Revival and the Organ Masses.” The final day of our annual meeting maintained the high standard of research that was presented over these three days. The three concurrent morning sessions outlined church music education and hymnology/context/localization. The day was finished with an excellent hour-long graduate student panel on navigating careers outside of academia.

The SCSM 2022 Annual Meeting was a much-needed return to face-to-face communication. Even with the hybrid format for some of the presentations, the energy that was given from the presenters was amazing and made us all excited for what is to come in this society. We look toward next year’s meeting at Duke University with joyful anticipation!

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Austin Testerman is currently a graduate student pursuing his M.M. in Musicology from Florida State University. As a fifth generation Floridian, Austin is interested in researching local music and worship histories in communities around his home state. His thesis research looks to outline the evolution of musical and worship practices at First Baptist Church Midway in Plant City, Florida. He is currently serving as the Instrumental Director at First Baptist Church of Tallahassee where he conducts the orchestra and assists with handbell choir. When not researching, Austin enjoys playing Brazilian music with FSU’s Grupo Jaragua, and getting way too competitive playing Mario Kart with his fiancée.

SCSM 2022 Graduate Student Paper Prize Winner:
Matt Bickett, Yale Institute of Sacred Music,
“Music at the Limits of Theological Writing: Toward a Decolonial Musical Theology”

From the Selection Committee chair, Cathy Ann Elias: This well-argued paper draws on an impressive range of scholarly perspectives and disciplinary approaches. The analysis and conclusion are well crafted, with clear reasoning and supporting evidence. The appropriateness of the new approach is cogently presented. We look forward to more exploration of what such an approach might look or sound like in a larger context. Congratulations to Matt Bickett!”

Matt Bickett is a current graduate student in the Master of Arts in Religion program at Yale Divinity School, concentrating in Theology. His research interests include theological anthropology, Appalachian religious traditions, mutually beneficial interactions of musicology with Christian theology, and histories of keyboard performance traditions from both the Western canon and the Appalachian region. Matt graduated from Oberlin College and Conservatory of Music in 2020 with undergraduate degrees in religion and music, and the MM in Historically Informed Performance.

New SCSM Publication continued…

MR: The scholarly discourse about religious music in extra-liturgical spaces has usually been dominated by European music and Austro-Germanic music in particular. By expanding the view to France, England, Russia, Poland, and Italy, this volume already decenters the discourse and shows how these paradigms are reflected within other cultural and sociopolitical circumstances. The chapters that explore American music and the sacred, from the Fisk Jubilee Singers to music that emerged around and after the Civil War, represent great examples whereby religious music served a multitude of functions—spiritually, socially, and politically.

EP and MR: The book is an invitation to think outside of the boxes of established binaries: “sacred” vs. “secular,” “church” vs. “concert hall.” Instead, it offers new approaches that highlight the multi-sensational intersections that blur the lines and thus paint a more detailed picture of music in the long nineteenth century.

Efthychia Papanikolaou is associate professor of musicology at the College of Musical Arts at Bowling Green State University.


Save the Date for the SCSM 2023 Annual Meeting

Duke Divinity School is excited to host our 2023 conference on March 2-4. Our keynote speaker will be Rev. Dr. Luke Powery, the Dean of the Duke University Chapel. We will also be treated to a concert in Duke Chapel, led by Dr. Zebulon Highben, Director of Chapel Music at the Duke University Chapel.
Martin Clark (The Open University) is organizing a conference (both in person and online) to celebrate the 250th anniversary of “Amazing Grace.” Here is the announcement from the website:

“The Open University’s Music Department, the Cowper & Newton Museum and Olney Parish Church are delighted to be co-hosting this conference as part of a year-long programme of events to commemorate the 250th anniversary of ‘Amazing Grace’, widely believed to have first been sung at Olney on 1 January 1773.

Friday 15 July: a full schedule of papers on the hymn and its legacies held at The Open University’s Walton Hall campus.

Saturday 16 July: keynote lectures, a roundtable panel, and a lecture-recital held at Olney Parish Church. Keynote speakers are Prof D. Bruce Hindmarsh, author of John Newton and the English Evangelical Tradition: Between the Conversions of Wesley and Wilberforce and Prof Anthony G. Reddie, author of Is God Colour-Blind? Insights from Black Theology for Christian Faith and Ministry. The roundtable panel will include the Rt Rev’d Rose Hudson-Wilkin, Bishop of Dover, and the Rev’d Dr Janet Wootton, President of the Hymn Society of Great Britain and Ireland.”

Conference Information (times are GMT+1):

Date: 15-16 July, 10:00 - 17:30 (with a concert on Sunday 17 July at Olney Parish Church)
Location: Walton Hall, The Open University, and Olney Parish Church
Deadline for participant registration: 8 July 2022 (for in person attendance), 11 July (for online only)
For further information: please contact the conference organiser on amazing-grace@open.ac.uk.
Conference website: https://fass.open.ac.uk/research/conferences/amazing-grace/?fbclid=IwAR0wYXrv4VZx3-cxXgk1LM_gnFKKj3cR5L274xv6J6z0Up362p6ZzmDJs
To Register: https://fass.open.ac.uk/research/conferences/amazing-grace/registration

Bo kyung Blenda Im (Harvard University) has just been appointed assistant professor of sacred music and of divinity beginning next summer on July 1, 2023.

Here is what Yale posted to describe Dr. Im:

“Bo kyung Blenda Im is an ethnomusicologist who specializes in popular culture and Christianity in Korea and the Korean diaspora. Her interdisciplinary research primarily addresses music studies and actively dialogues with religious studies, Korean studies, ethnic studies, and anthropology.

Im is currently the Global Korean Diasporas Postdoctoral Fellow at the Korea Institute, Harvard University at Harvard University In her dual roles at the Yale Institute of Sacred Music and Yale Divinity School, Im will teach courses that broadly integrate the study and practice of religion with that of music. As opportunities arise, Im will offer courses to other constituencies at Yale. During her year as post-doctoral associate, Dr. Im generously contributed many insights and much work to the ISM’s efforts in diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging, which her work both explicates and supports.”

SCSM Members on Podcasts! Here are just a few for your listening pleasure. Please see the SCSM blog for more (or if you want your podcast added, email news.scsm@gmail.com):

Adam Perez (Belmont) and Anneli Loepp Thiessen (University of Ottawa), “The Boys Club of Contemporary Worship?” Conversation on Contemporary Worship Podcast, April 11, 2022: https://anchor.fm/contemporary-worship/episodes/The-Boys-Club-of-Contemporary-Worship-Music--w-Anneli-Loepp-Thiessen-e1gu1bb/a7nm86f

Jeremy Perigo (Dordt) and Nathan Myrick (Mercer), “Relational Ethics in Christian Worship Music,” Worship/Theology: bridging faith and ministry praxis Podcast, June 15, 2022: https://open.spotify.com/show/7vcZpG7Rtt7PVwcldfGm/j?si=ad3c74ad7f2a4f07

From the Editor

Last weekend my orchestra, Northwest Symphony Orchestra, played for a Solstice Festival in our adoptive home of Burien, just south of Seattle. We played a free concert for the community. We partnered with Encanto Arts, a local arts organization dedicated to celebrating work from the Latinx community as well as a local non-profit raising money for Ukrainians fleeing war torn areas of their country.

The evening began with a dance company who performed traditional dances from Latin America. The orchestra then played music from around the world, including the Ukrainian National Anthem. We were also joined by the mayor of Burien who is an amazing tenor. He sang pieces that ranged from the operatic to Mexican popular music (and yes, the audience often sang along!). A celebratory and community building evening all around! Along the way, we heard from local politicians, community leaders, and representatives from the Ukrainian community. Music that makes its way out of the concert hall and into the local community enables diverse groups to meet and care for one another through celebration and lament.

I want to claim that there is a deeper meaning and significance in concerts like this that helps to uncover something of the possibilities for the role of the Christian in the secular sphere. Fun, entertainment, community building, facilitating charitable giving, and developing a capacity for generosity are all fine goals and tasks unto themselves, but when they come together, something new begins to form. By turning to the thoughts of visual artist and culture maker Makoto Fujimura we can begin to sort out what might be happening when such collaborations occur.

In his opening remarks to the Encounter 10 Conference in 2010, Fujimura articulated a generative vision for the role of artists within communities. He argued that the goal and the success of any artist should, primarily, be defined by Shalom. He pointed out that Shalom is not simply peace or the absence of war, but instead “creativity” toward the “full thriving of our lives.” He maintained “that despite the fact that we face trials and broken relationships in our lives that we’re still looking to this vista that allows us to see ourselves fully human and able to use all of our capacity to create the world that ought to be, and that is Shalom. And, therefore, our goal has to be Shalom.” In his vision, he argues for what he refers to as “the Shalom Economy,” where creativity, social equity, and monetary capital come together to help re-build the world around us.

What Fujimura desires is for artists, non-profits, and for-profit businesses to collaborate in creative and generative ways, with the goal of greater Shalom. He calls for greater co-dependence between these realms, especially for Christians participating as artists, as advocates, and as businessmen and women. To establish the “New Capitalism,” all three realms must work together to efficiently use the capital at hand – artistic capital, social capital, and material capital (resources). And we should use all of this “capital” to start building the path to Shalom. Fujimura’s motto for his vision is: “Quest for love, and you will get success (Shalom).” In other words, this is the collaborative and generative use of artistic, social, and material capital to (as he borrows from 1 Cor. 13) love more patiently, love more kindly, love more humbly, be more slow to anger, to see fully the humanity of ourselves and of others in all that we do and say.

On a warm and sunny evening at the end of June, with my violin in hand, sunglasses on my face, and music flying about in the wind, I think there was a small glimpse of this kind of Shalom economy. May it be so.

Peace, Chelle Stearns
Seattle, WA

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