

Music and the Sacred: The intersection of religion and the auditory arts

Student leader

Micah John Walter '14 (mwalter@haverford.edu; major in music and computer science)

Faculty advisor

Robert Germany (rgermany@haverford.edu; professor of classics)

Seminar Description

Music is a powerful force in today's world. Its influence can be seen in popular culture, with successful songwriters and performers receiving celebrity status; in film, where a soundtrack may be what makes a production great, or where the soundtrack writer may be better known than the producer or director; and not least, in religion, where musical styles are as varied as—or more varied than—in any of the other categories mentioned.

To what extent can we say that religion has been shaped by music, or music by religion? And is the religious music in general use today comparable to historical sacred music, or is it fundamentally different? Music has a very traceable history in the past few centuries, so navigating these questions becomes both easy and difficult—easy because historical evidence is abundant, but difficult because the musical trails are so complicated.

In this seminar, we will look at several different topics in the purview of music, history, psychology and religion, and examine several different religious traditions in the light of these topics. In what ways is the development of these musical traditions similar, and in what ways is it different? Can we see patterns across geographical and temporal boundaries? Finally, can we compare what we see in the present day with the historical traditions we have studied, or do we really live in a different world, religiously and musically, than in the past?

We will discuss the historical context of all of the music mentioned, examine the texts, and listen to—and even sing—the melodies themselves. No prior musical background will be necessary; students both with and without experience in music will be enriched by the traditions studied, which may differ substantially not only between themselves but also from Western classical music. Students from all backgrounds will at the same time feel at home and widen their horizons throughout the seminar.

Course outline

The subject to be discussed is, of course, very broad. In order to be able to delve into the material, the discussion will be broken down into discrete topics that can be analyzed independently on a smaller scale; later discussions will then help to bring everything together. A topical arrangement also facilitates comparing distant traditions in a meaningful way; furthermore, it allows for dynamically shaping the discussion to stress particular

religious traditions, geographical areas or time periods according to participants' interest, while still following a structure that has already been laid out. The following sections give a rough guide as to the content to be discussed in the individual sessions. The reading and listening lists following each description are not restrictive, but, depending on the course of the seminar, may be adhered to or revised. Participants who are interested in a particular part of the seminar may wish to read or listen to all the works listed (or even explore similar titles), while others may still participate in discussion with a smaller core of materials.

Sacred music: Tautology or contradiction?

The English word *music* is derived from the Greek Muses, divinities associated with the arts. This represents a tight relationship between religion and music in the West. By contrast, in Islam, music is understood as completely separate from formal religion; while such aspects as the recitation of the Qur'an or the Adhan may seem like music to Western ears, they are seen as elevated forms of speech. In both the West and India, classical music developed out of, and then parallel to, the religious environment in which it originated; could this be seen as demarcating the beginning of the line between secular and sacred in music, blurry as such a line may be?

- Guy L. Beck (editor), *Sacred Sound: Experiencing Music in World Religions*.
- Albert L. Blackwell, *The Sacred in Music*.
- St. Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* (selections); *De musica*.
- Jeremy S. Begbie and Steven R. Guthrie, *Resonant Witness: Conversations between Music and Theology*.
- Monks of Sherab Ling Monastery, *Sacred Tibetan Chant*.
- The Byzantine Choir of Greece (Lycourgos Angelopoulos) and the Melodi Choir (Divna), *The Glory of Byzantium*.
- Mishary Rashid al-Afasy, *Zekrayat*.

The Mechanics

In order to examine traditions of chant and music at a deeper level, it is necessary to have some command of such material itself. We will thus be studying several systems of chant or music in varying degrees of detail, partly based on the interest of the participants and the accessibility of the material. (For example, Gregorian chant may be one ideal choice for in-depth study because it is familiar as the basis of western tonality and simple in its use of purely unison melody.) As mentioned in the introduction to *Sacred Sound*, a guiding principle in some schools of anthropology is that of the observer participating in the organic life of the community in which he is studying. Along these lines, it makes sense to put at least a modicum of effort into actually performing some simpler examples. We will also make use of a lot of listening materials in order to gain a first-hand, rather than solely theoretical, experience of the material.

- Cynthia Bourgeault, *Chanting the Psalms*.
- Richard L. Crocker, *An Introduction to Gregorian Chant*.
- Constantine Cavarnos, *Byzantine Chant*.

- Brother Ambrose, *A Short Introduction to Znamenny Chant and its Notation*.
- Benedictine Monks of Santo Domingo de Silos, *Gregorian Chant: The Definitive Collection*.
- The Benedictine Nuns, *Voices*.
- Fr. Apostolos Hill, *Hymns of Paradise: Hymns of Life and Hope*.
- Nuns of St. Paisius Monastery, *The All-Night Vigil*.
- Cappella Romana, *The Divine Liturgy in Byzantine Chant in English*.

Discrete traditions or borrowing traditions

Coming from an analysis of the elements of sacred chant and music themselves, we take a look at their similarities and differences. In what ways can we see the doctrines of the religious traditions represented as affecting the course of the development of the musical forms? Are there certain patterns that seem to override such concerns, and which show up across continents and faiths? To what extent can we see borrowing across cultural and geographic boundaries?

- John Arthur Smith, *Music in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*.
- Martin Tel, Joyce Berger and John D. Witvliet, *Psalms for All Seasons: A Complete Psalter for Worship*.
- Graham Harvey and Karen Ralls, “Indigenous religious musics” (from *Sounding the Sacred: Music as Sacred Site—The Search for a Universal Sacred Music*).
- Edward A. Lippman, *Musical Aesthetics: A Historical Reader* (selections).
- Ensemble Organum, *Chants de L’Église de Rome: Période byzantine*.
- Cappella Romana, *The Fall of Constantinople*.
- Cantor Yehoshua Vider, *Pearls of Jewish Liturgical Music*.

Chant vs. music: ornamentation and simplicity

Continuing from the session on ‘tautology or contradiction’, this session examines the continuum between formal speech and music, with cantillation and chant as intermediate stages. Is it possible or usual for chant forms to survive after the transition to more developed forms, such as polyphony, have been developed? In addition, we may look at how this move from simple to more complex forms of music may have helped the transition to secular music; this appears in the role of liturgical forms in classical music in the West as well as India.

- Elizabeth Eva Leach, *Guillaume de Machaut: Secretary, Poet, Musician*.
- Bruce W. Holsinger, *Music, Body, and Desire in Medieval Culture*.
- Robin A. Leaver, *Luther’s Liturgical Music: Principles and Implications*.
- Johann Sebastian Bach, *St. Matthew Passion*.
- Sergei Rachmaninov, *Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*.
- The Sixteen, *Ikon*.
- Cappella Romana, *Peter Michaelides: The Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*.

Psychology and physiology

Looking at the effect of music on religion can be enlightening; however, it may not be the whole story—it could also be that music has a direct psychological effect. Mysticism and religious music often seem to be intertwined; a look at the music and personal lives of

composers such as Hildegard of Bingen, for example, may demonstrate such a connection. Other studies indicate that Gregorian chant, for example, has been demonstrated to reduce stress levels in listeners; others have hypothesized that the fortissimo singing in the shape-note tradition has a cathartic effect. Can we look at the psychological effects of music in general and connect it with music's place in religion?

- Oliver Sacks, *Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain*.
- David Aldridge, *Music and Altered States: Consciousness, Transcendence, Therapy and Addictions*.
- Hildegard of Bingen, *Selected Writings* (Penguin Classics).
- Cologne Sequentia Ensemble for Medieval Music, *Hildegard von Bingen: Canticles of Ecstasy*.
- Bhagdro, et al., *Tibetan Freedom Chants*.
- Hieromonk Vasily Mozgovoy, *Blessed Optina: Chants of the Optina Monastery*.

The present day

In what ways have past traditions of religious music affected those of the present day? Do the forms of music used in religious worship and experience today demonstrate continuity with these historic forms, or do they represent a paradigm shift? Furthermore, if sacred music of the present day does resemble historic sacred music in specific aspects, to what extent can we say that today's forms are an organic continuation of the historic forms rather than a mere mimicking or revival of those forms? Is the role of music in religion (and vice versa) changing, or is it still generally speaking the same as it has been?

- Michael J. Miller, *Musica Sacra: Music at Mass, A Liturgical and Pastoral Challenge*.
- Mary E. McGann, *Exploring Music as Worship and Theology: An Interdisciplinary Method for Studying Liturgical Practice*.
- Peggy Lovrien, *The Liturgical Music Answer Book: ML Answers the 101 Most-Asked Questions*.
- Edward Foley, *A Lyrical Vision: The Music Documents of the US Bishops*.
- Taizé, *Mane Nobiscum*.
- *Music of the liturgy in English: according to the use of the Episcopal Church*.
- Adolphe Attia, *Jewish Liturgical Music*.
- Hillsong, *God He Reigns*.
- Cappella Romana, *Lay Aside All Earthly Cares: Orthodox Choral Works in English*.
- Debbie Friedman, *Songs of the Spirit*.

Multimedia

Due to the highly aural nature of the seminar, materials to be analyzed will include not only texts but also a variety of audio recordings. In addition, the participants may make a field trip to a nearby location where some of the content we have discussed can be experienced here and now. Depending on the guest speaker invited, there may be a chance to have some kind of 'performance and conversation' event at Haverford College.

Potential guest speakers

Among the speakers who would be most interesting and relevant to the seminar are the following performers and students of liturgical music:

- [Alexander Lingas](#), director of Cappella Romana and lecturer at [City University](#)
- [Fr. Apostolos \(Kevin\) Hill](#), producer of [several albums](#) of Byzantine chant
- [Fr. Jerome F. Weber](#), member of the international musical society [Cantus Planus](#)