

Conference Report

“Christian Congregational Music: Local and Global Perspectives”

Ripon College Cuddesdon, Oxford, 1-3 August 2013

Report compiled for the Society for Ethnomusicology newsletter, January 2014
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Building on the success of the first conference, held in September 2011 at the same venue, the 2013 conference included 96 participants from 16 different countries. With more than 70 scholars delivering papers, nine invited speakers presenting lectures and films, and two organised plenary roundtables, attendees engaged enthusiastically in discussion across a broad geographical and disciplinary spectrum.

Attendees gathered in Ripon College Cuddesdon’s beautiful newly constructed, award-winning chapel for a welcome by its principal, Martyn Percy, and the other organizers, Monique Ingalls (University of Cambridge, UK), Mark Porter (City University of London), and Tom Wagner (Royal Holloway, University of London). Monique Ingalls’ welcome remarks set out the goals for the conference: to foster interdisciplinary conversations on congregational church music; to encourage international perspectives on musical practice and scholarship; and to enrich the field by including multiple ecumenical perspectives and contributions by scholars from both inside and outside the faith traditions they study. It was also announced that each conference participant was given a complimentary copy of *Christian Congregational Music: Performance, Identity and Experience*, an edited volume of papers focused on three themes of the 2011 conference, hot off the Ashgate press.

Ethnomusicologists featured prominently within the plenary sessions and included Byron Dueck (Open University, UK), Marie Jorritsma (University of Witwatersrand, South Africa), Roberta King (Fuller Theological Seminary), Suzel Reily (Queen’s College, Belfast, UK), and Zoe Sherinian (University of Oklahoma). Invited talks focused on themes of negotiating locality and individuality through song in Catholic liturgical festivals in Brazil and amongst aboriginal communities in Canada; representing diversity in congregational singing in the United States; the influence of everyday listening practices on the experience of music in church; the role of improvisation, indigenization and inspiration in global Pentecostal traditions; travelling musics and geographies of devotion amongst communities affected by forced migration in South Africa; and discourses of modernity, global circulation, and urbanisation in congregational music. Evening presentations featured screenings of excerpts of two documentary films, one focused on peace and reconciliation between Muslims and Christians and another on Tamil Christian indigenous hymnody.

Representing musical practices from all six continents and a wide range of denominational affiliations and disciplines, including musicology and ethnomusicology, theology, anthropology, history, and education, panel sessions explored a wide range of themes. Two plenary roundtables were also held. In the first, regarding the promise and challenges that are in some ways particular to engagement with plural perspectives in faith-centred musical practices, speakers discussed the impact of their own subject positions on their scholarship. A final panel to close the conference observed emerging themes and suggested future areas for research and current gaps in scholarship to be explored.

Apart from the formal events, the conference afforded plenty of opportunity to socialise, explore the beautiful campus and village grounds, and several people enjoyed an informal, spontaneous Sacred Harp sing. Many expressed the view that the newly published edited volume, emerging future publication projects, and growing participation in the conference evidence the formation of a cross-disciplinary scholarly community of academics and practitioners of Christian congregational music. Participants were enthusiastic about the next conference, already in planning, to be held 4-7 August 2015.

View conference details at: <http://congregationalmusic.org>.

View information about the edited volume proceeding from the 2011 conference:

<http://www.ashgate.com/isbn/9781409466024>

To join the conference listserv, visit <https://groups.google.com/group/christian-congregational-music>

Any additional questions can be directed to conference@congregationalmusic.org.