

Conference Report: “Christian Congregational Music: Local and Global Perspectives,” Ripon College Cuddesdon, Oxford, 4-7 August 2015

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The third biennial Christian Congregational Music Conference was held again at Ripon College Cuddesdon, a location that previous and new attendees cite as instrumental in creating a stimulating sense of community among participants. The organising committee, Martyn Percy (Dean, Christ Church, Oxford), Monique Ingalls (Baylor University), Mark Porter (Max-Weber-Kolleg Universität Erfurt), Tom Wagner (University of Edinburgh), and Laryssa Whittaker (Royal Holloway, University of London), were pleased to welcome 90 participants from 20 different countries.

New this year was the addition of a study day, held the first day of the conference, with seminars led by invited speakers creating opportunities for in-depth, small group discussion. Participant feedback indicated that the readings selected by speakers and the opportunity for discussion was invaluable and rewarding. Participants also enjoyed the addition of organised music workshops this year – a Sacred Harp and Convention Gospel workshop run by Joshua Busman, Deborah Justice, Stephen Shearon, and Sue Gray, and a Gospel choir workshop led by Donna Cox.

Ethnomusicologists again represented a large proportion of participants and special guest speakers, but the growing interdisciplinarity of the field was also evident by a healthy representation of theologians, historians, and anthropologists, in particular. This interdisciplinarity provoked new perspectives, suggesting that the musicological and ethnomusicological fields that have been key contributors to Christian congregational music scholarship may fruitfully gain new insights about both their research subject and their disciplines.

In addition to the rich seminars they led on the first day, the seven invited speakers focused on the conference theme of theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches for the study congregational music, contributing a wide historical, geographical, and disciplinary range of perspectives. These included singing as a bodily discipline in charismatic Nigerian churches (Vicki Brennan, University of Vermont); the potential of Christian music to promote wellbeing amongst Yolngu people in Australia (Fiona Magowan, Queen’s University, Belfast); the perceptibility of ‘a common faith’ through the theoretical juxtaposition of religious conviction and ‘the ethics of style’ in Trinidadian musical practices (Timothy Rommen, University of Pennsylvania); the methodological approaches of liturgical scholars studying Christian hymns

as historical texts (Lester Ruth, Duke Divinity School); theoretical intersections of gender, musical practice, and liturgy (Teresa Berger, Yale Divinity School); affect and the ineffable in early church music traditions (Carol Harrison, Oxford); and a film screening on the documentation of Aramaic (Syriac)-language Christian liturgical traditions in India (Joseph Palackal, Christian Musicological Society of India).

Another new and very welcome feature this year was an outing to Oxford. Participants had the opportunity to take a guided tour of Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, or a walking tour of the city, and to participate in an intimate choral eucharist held at the cathedral in the evening. The service was followed by a reception generously hosted by Martyn Percy in the gardens of his residence, the Deanery of Christ Church Cathedral. Participants soaked in the history of the college and the deanery, from its establishment by Cardinal Wolsey and King Henry VIII to its history as the home of Dean Henry Liddell, father of the real-life Alice of Lewis Carroll fame.

The reception also celebrated the launch of the Ashgate Congregational Music Studies Series, noting the volumes previously published and announcing the addition of new projects in development. Following in November, conference participants received a complimentary copy of *Congregational Music-Making and Community in a Mediated Age*, an edited volume of papers focused on three themes of the 2013 conference. Also launched at the conference was *The Spirit of Praise*, edited by Monique Ingalls and Amos Yong, and the forthcoming *Oxford Handbook of Music and World Christianities*, edited by Jonathan Dueck and Suzel Ana Reily, was previewed.

Participants once again enjoyed the opportunities to socialise on the beautiful campus grounds or in the village, and cited the community and collegiality of the event and the interdisciplinarity of the themes and the new perspectives yielded as highlights. The next conference, already in planning, will be held 18-21 July 2017 in the same location.

View conference details at: <http://congregationalmusic.org>. View information about the *Ashgate Congregational Music Studies Series*. To join the conference listserv, visit <https://groups.google.com/group/christian-congregational-music>. Any additional questions can be directed to conference@congregationalmusic.org.

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