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Spiritual Connections Made through Music Making

Sharing Faith and Music in an Australian Setting

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Spiritual Connections Made through Music Making: Sharing Faith and Music in an Australian Setting

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Abstract: The musical involvement of people over the centuries is fundamentally interwoven with spiritual experiences (Seifert 2011). This paper discusses the connection between music and spirituality in an inter-denominational group in the southeastern suburbs of Melbourne. With ethical clearance, through semi-structured interviews with two church leaders and the music worship team, subsequently employing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), I analyzed and codified the data gathered. Two overarching themes are discussed: insights into music and spirituality; and connecting music to worship with self and others. The findings show that music in worship may provide a rich pathway for people to explore, experience, and express their spirituality, and to connect to the wider multicultural society. It also adds to the current debates on whether music has spiritual significance for some people apart from community expressions of spirituality through music. Limitations of the current study are acknowledged and generalizations cannot be made regarding connections to music and spirituality. However, the findings do indicate that music in worship can enrich one’s spiritual experience and connection with God and others.

Keywords: Spirituality, Worship in Community, Music

Setting the Scene

The arts continue to pervade society and play a significant role in religion and spirituality. From all of the art forms (dance, drama, music, visual arts and media arts), music is commonly used in religious expression as worship to The Creator, and in Christianity used specifically to praise and worship God the creator. Music has been part of the practice of the early church and has been firmly grounded in biblical foundations, “giving glory to God. It communicates the thanksgiving and joy of the created to their creator” (Archbishops’ Commission on Church Music 1992, 37). At the heartbeat of services, music connects people and builds faith and hope. Faith is linked with music in worship and devotional life; the two are “intertwined with spiritual experience” (Seifert 2011, 19). As social beings, having close relationships, feelings of a sense of belonging and an identity is as important to human survival as that of food, clothes and shelter. Hamilton and Denniss (2000) identifies that family, community and the natural environment matter and are vital to the individuals wellbeing. The church as a body of Christ signifies this sense of belonging where shared and corporate worship can exist for people from a variety of different ethnicities, languages and ages. The common thread that binds people in such settings is their faith and hope in God, which may be expressed through music. My case study situates itself within my ongoing wider project entitled Spirituality and Wellbeing: Music in the community that began in 2013.

This paper focuses on interview data with the two church leaders and the worship team regarding music and spirituality in church within a local multicultural community in Melbourne. Melbourne is known as a multicultural metropolis. As the second largest city in Australia, Melbourne is made up of people from all over the world where “140 cultures are represented from Victoria’s original Indigenous inhabitants to more recent migrants from Asia and Africa. Our community includes people from Somalia, South Korea, New Zealand, Malaysia, Indonesia, China, the United Kingdom, Vietnam, Italy, India, Greece, Japan and more” (City of Melbourne 2014). According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 2014) 22.5 million people reside in Australia coming from 200 different countries speaking over 300 languages at home and belonging to more than 100 different religious groups. The ABS (2014) reports, “while the
majority of Australians continue to belong to a Christian religion, the proportion has fallen by more than a third, from 96% in 1911 to 61% in 2011...Catholicism overtook Anglicanism as Australia's largest religious group”. Though other denominations have slowly occurred, Catholicism continues to remain constant. My case study strongly aligns with Pentecostal worship, which aims to bring God’s healing power to people’s lives, as well as equipping God’s people to effectively carry out their ministry in the church community and beyond. The church through worship provides a place and space for people from various cultures, ethnicities, languages and countries to connect and communicate as they share faith and music in their local setting. Through observation and interview data in 2013 two overarching themes are discussed from the present study: insights into music and spirituality; and connecting music to worship with self and others. The findings show that music in worship may provide a rich pathway for people to explore, experience and express their spirituality and connect to the wider multicultural society. As this paper only presents data from one case study in Melbourne, a limitation in itself, no generalizations can be made, nevertheless, the findings may contribute to discussions about music and spirituality in multicultural societies.

Making Connections

Though much has been written about the differences between religion and spirituality over the centuries “little consensus has been reached about what the terms actually mean” Zinnbauer et al. (1997). There are several nuances regarding the two. I do not wish to discuss the debates around such issues; rather, individuals can access their spirituality through religious beliefs and practices where religion is situated within a spiritual community. Most would argue that religion largely talks about God, and spirituality helps to make people godly. Roof (2005, 138) asserts, “religion refers to scripture, rituals, myths, beliefs, practices, moral codes, communities, social institutions, and so forth that is, the outward and objectified element of a tradition”. Spirituality he points out “is more elusive and varying in its meaning, both historically and currently”. Although spirituality and religion are often used together and interchangeably, the notion of spirituality may be expressed in a religious context (Fisher 2001) and can be practiced in a variety of ways. According to Dierendonck (2011) spirituality deals with the essence of life, gives meaning to life and allow for the experience of the scared. A pathway for people to transform their lives, an opportunity to feel close to God, seek solace and having purpose in life (Cohen 2002). In this way the notion of spirituality and religion are interconnected, they present both an inward and outer encounter, which can be experienced and expressed individually and communally (Harris and Mackrill 2013). Fisher (2013, 326) argues that a more recent shift in understanding spirituality has a dual structure of “personal quest for an external reality to an inward focus”. Christian spirituality, is the

awareness of a spiritual reality . . . that goes beyond the consciousness of the individual, that realizes God is revealed in the person of Christ, and that starts with faith in the Word of God in response to the gratuitous, free, sovereign initiative of God who seeks us even when we do not seek God (Bouyer 1961, 4-9, cited in Westermeyer 2013, 568).

Within this realm of spirituality and religion, people may encounter spirituality through an organized religion or individualized religion; connection to nature or personal spiritual practices or people may seek scientific answers and truth as a form of spirituality. People could seek spiritual experiences through the arts. Music falls under the umbrella of the performing arts practice and is expressed through singing in worship where the tune (melody and words) speak to both the mind and soul, and figuratively also to the spirit. According to the Archbishops’ commission on church music (1992, 45)
Almost all Christian traditions include the use of music in their worship. Worship can happen without it, but the recognition that music is one of God’s gifts, which we have to offer in worship, has ensured its place in the services of the Church from biblical times onwards.

Most traditional churches continue to have hymns sung with organ accompaniment that plays an important part of the service (Tshabalala and Patel 2013). Within less traditional churches like that of the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, a large part of the service focuses on praise and worship (Williams 2005). No doubt “music is central to worship” (Tshabalala and Patel 2013, 74). In less traditional churches like that of my present sample, a contemporary style of music is preferred. The experience of music making in church settings is largely through corporate singing or choirs and in most Pentecostal churches led by the worship team, typical in the present study. Through singing, Petty (2010) points out we give service to God by honoring him through his word and responding through our entire being. Kauflin (2011) states through singing we remember God’s word long after the sermon is spoken as we store in memory the tunes and texts (Linnman 2010). This connects us spiritually and emotionally to worshipping God through singing or instrumental playing. “The power that music has is used to enhance the relationship and communication with God, to deepen emotions and response to the Holy Spirit” (Tshabalala and Patel 2013, 80). Pentecostals believe that through worship in social settings like that of a church we connect spiritually with God and the Holy Spirit works through its worshippers (Tshabalala and Patel 2013, Wright and Rawls 2005). Miller and Strongman (2002) found in Pentecostal churches music also involves movement which yields happiness and emotional wellbeing that reinforces the social connections in places of worship. Music within Pentecostal churches contributes to shaping the collective congregations emotions. Often it is the worship leader as Jennings (2008) found that awakens people by leading the singing through fast tempos and setting the tone to emotionally connect them spiritually. “Emotional contagion within the congregation is spread through the emotional feel of the music” (Miller and Strongman 2002, 23). The elements of music such as variation in tempo, dynamics, and articulation can stimulate and excite the nervous system. Miller and Strongman (2002, 24) argues music in worship “elicits strong experiences of positive emotion as well as acting as a major facilitator of religious experience” more in-depth analysis of affective responses to music in Pentecostal church is needed.

Music can connect people to their “personal histories to the larger group”, and, can make people feel “more like outsiders or audience rather than participants in the liturgical event if the music is unfamiliar, inaccessible, or alienating in some way” (Kubicki 2002, 34). Numerous studies have been undertaken that show how singing is beneficial for wellbeing (Clift and Hancox 2001; Clift and Hancox 2010a; Clift et al. 2010b, Chorus America 2009a, 2009b; Southcott and Joseph 2009, 2013; Menhan 2013a, 2013b). Clift (2012) in his chapter “Singing, Wellbeing and Health” investigates the value and benefits of singing with both social and health needs. Although he draws on a wide range of international literature and studies that support the notion that “singing can be good for health and wellbeing”. He does make the point “there is some way to go before the real significance of singing and health and wellbeing is fully understood and widely acted upon in the practical contexts of health and social care” (121). Although the notion of wellbeing is associated with physical health, my present study does not investigate the connections music makes to physical health, rather, it explores the connections it makes to spirituality and worship for the worship team (as a group and independently) and the two pastors of the church (independently and as leaders).
Methodology

Having gained ethical clearance in 2013, I invited members of a community church in a South East suburb of Melbourne to participate in the project. I initially had visited the church in 2010 and subsequently visited a few times over the years to listen to the music and the word of God being preached. In August 2013, I had an initial conversation with the senior leader about my project and also with the worship team leader. I then emailed the invitation letter and Plain language Statement from my university and some sample questions inviting them to consider participating in the project. Purposive sampling was sought (Broadbent 2013). By Mid-September I received email consent to undertake interviews with the two church leaders (pastor and evangelist) who will be referred to as Ruth and Sam and also with 8 members of the worship team (5 females and 3 males). Ruth and Sam were in the group of 50+, they came to Australia 30 years ago as migrants from South Africa. The worship team was a mixed bag of migrants from various countries including Anglo Celtic Australians. Their age ranged from early 20’s to late 40’s and their music ability varied from beginner to highly competent performer. The focus group interview with Ruth and Sam took place at a convenient location that was comfortable for them in mid September after the service on a Sunday. The worship team interview took place as a focus group at the church after a rehearsal later in September where interviewees felt “safe and comfortable in sharing intimate stories” (Nixon et al. 2013, 216). The interviews with Ruth and Sam and with the worship team lasted approximately one hour each. The interviews were conversational and semi-structured in nature exploring “personal perceptions of experience to discover how individuals make sense of their social world” (Nunnerley et al. 2013, 1165). I asked a range of questions such as: why is music important in worship? What do you understand by the word spirituality? How does music impact on your spirituality and wellbeing? How does it make you feel when you sing or listen to music? The questions allowed me to probe and shape questions around issues of spirituality and the place and role of music in the life of the church or the individual.

The interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the interviewee and professionally transcribed in order for analysis to proceed (Cooper et al. 2012). The transcripts were sent to the participants for checking so that reliability and validity of the data was ensured (de Vries 2012). The interview process allowed me to investigate issues of spirituality, the place and role of music in the life of the church and community and whether music impacts or contributes to wellbeing. I used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to analyze and codify the data into themes (Eatough and Smith 2006; Reid, Flowers and Larkin 2005; Shaw 2010; Smith 2004). According to Shaw (2011, 32) “IPA can delve into an individual’s reflection of routes taken through life and tease out what different eventualities mean”. IPA aims to “capture the essence of a participant’s subjective experience in his or her own terms, delineating key elements and using the participant’s terminology” (Harper 2011, 89). When adopting IPA, the researcher tries to understand what it means for the participant (Smith and Osborne 2003), and is trying to comprehend what the participant is trying to say of the world around them (Roberts, 2013). Employing IPA involves “a two–stage interpretation process as the researcher tries to make sense of participants’ sense making” (Pringle et al. 2011, 14). Therefore, the transcript is read “several times to give familiarity with the interview as a whole” (de Visser and Smith 2006, 688) in order to understand the data (Smith and Osborne 2003). When analyzing the data, I re-read the transcripts in order to construct themes from the interviews (Pothoulaki et al., 2012). The “multiple readings accompanied by general note taking” assisted me to summarize chunks of data (Lawson and Wardle 2013, 88), which is referred to by Nixon et al. (2013, 217) as a “tentative pool of categories”. This allowed for important points of interest to be highlighted (Lawson and Wardle 2013). In doing so, tables were drawn with notes on the side for preliminary interpretations (Pothoulaki et al. 2012). This allowed for eliminating and removing non-relevant information of the lived experience, grouping them into themes that “describes, illustrates and
illuminates” the experience Nixon, et al. (2013, 217). Throughout the findings and conclusion, direct quotations from the transcripts inform my discussion and support the theme analysis (Dallos and Vetere 2006). Pseudonyms are used for the name of the church and individuals.

**Amakaya Church: Findings and Discussion**

I chose the word Amakaya as the name of the church as it represents and signifies ‘home’, a place where people communicate, connect and care for each other in a warm and friendly manner. Amakaya is an African word from the Zulu tribe meaning ‘home’. Amakaya Church is situated in a multicultural suburb, 20km Southeast from Melbourne’s central business district with 70.5% of the population born overseas (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2013). The church was established in 2008 and is centrally located in the suburb. As with many Pentecostal churches the building is a shared community space (Jennings, 2008). At the time of the interview Ruth and Sam spoke of the church community as being a diverse multicultural community largely made up with people from around the globe (Australia, China, Germany, India, Malaysia, The Nederlands, New Zealand, Philippines, South African, Sri Lanka, United Arab Emirates, Vietnam and Zimbabwe). Given this rich diversity of languages, nationalities and varied dynamic traditions, all faces in this place of worship have a space to share their spiritual journey as a community of worshippers as they build faith and hope as migrants in a multicultural society. There are approximately 60 members in the church. Drawing on interview data from the two leaders and seven members of the worship team (musicians) this section of the paper provides insights into connecting music, spirituality and worship. The worship team is lead by a vibrant, passionate lady Gloria in her early thirty’s who plays keyboard and sings. Gloria structures the rehearsals and takes the lead “for what is to be sung and in what way” (Sandgren 2009, 477). There are approximately ten players (drums, bass guitar, lead guitar, conga, saxophone, percussion and keyboard) and singers who meet weekly as the worship team to choose the repertoire, rehearse and lead the music for the Sunday service. Not all play on a Sunday though as some have work commitments, nevertheless there are always at least three musicians accompanying the singing on a Sunday. Sam as the senior minister also leads the congregation with voice, he is also a musician and occasionally plays the drums. He has been in the ministry since 1985 and Ruth who was recently ordained in 2012, does not play an instrument. She preaches at times and sings. Music within Pentecostal churches contributes to shaping the collective congregations emotions (Miller and Strongman). From my observation at this church, it may be said that the words, expressive elements such as tempo, dynamics articulation and orchestration of a piece can affect mood and feelings. The congregation collectively tends to move or clap by following the worship leader as they respond to the words and the music. The words of so called worship and or praise songs can evoke emotionally responses to individuals depending on the situation or circumstance they find themselves. This though is not the focus of my paper, rather two overarching themes are discussed: music and spirituality; and connecting music to worship with self and others.

**Music and Spirituality**

The worship team started in 2008 when Amakaya Church was first established with a few players. Over the years, volunteer musicians have increased to ten. Members of the worship team’s musical ability ranged from beginner to advanced. Some players had undertaking practical and theory examinations in their younger days, some have and continue to perform in semiprofessional and professional bands and a few were mere beginners. The interviewees in the worship team described their time together as focusing on praising and worshipping God. When asked, “what does spirituality mean for you” in the focus group interview, the general feel was very positive about playing together, having a good collective feeling of performance, whereby the exhilaration of playing their instruments well-meant growing spiritually together as a team.
through music and through prayer. They always started and ended the rehearsal and Sunday service as musicians with prayer. They admitted on relying on the Holy Spirit for direction. The notion of spirituality for one interviewee as a musician meant “where my words can’t express it or be put into words so I articulate it in sound, what my heart is feeling to God”. Another found that spirituality and the connection to music was:

Expressing that love for God and to God, and in a way it’s a very personal thing and private thing as well as being a corporate thing, so I think coming together and doing it in a group setting is a reflection of how I do it at home in my private setting. And there’s a different feel to it when I do it in the group, sort of sharing, so there’s a different atmosphere

The bond of being together and working together as a team to praise and worship God was important. The notion of corporate worship and leading the congregation was an important aspect of serving God. One person remarked, “we all contribute to different parts of the band and the team and yeah serving God”. Hence, the spiritual connection the worship team had collectively and individually varied, one felt “being a bit sensitive to the Holy Spirit is important and not to get sidetracked”. The focus for another “is discovering who you are through a greater being”. Some members of the worship team played outside of church hence the spiritual connection when playing for God and in church one of the players found “it’s different, it’s more positive”. Another said the spiritual connection was “listening to music through CDs as a new Christian…how much music can change the atmosphere of a place”. The power of music is an effective way to help people grow spiritually. Music can be used as a listening tool whereby people get to know God and his word through songs (words) and sounds (instrumental meditative pieces). When people listen or sing along to music they connect the words of spiritual songs to God, which increases their faith and hope, and may can help people to grow spiritually. For the leaders of the Church when I asked what spirituality meant, Sam thought:

It is just being aware of God and having a relationship with God through Christ that brings you to a spiritual awareness that’s likely to be beyond yourself and you’re not the boss or the creator of your own world but there’s a God that cares and loves you and having that spiritual connection with him it opens the door to you know, to wholesome spirituality. Music in today’s context I mean is used for so many different reasons and situations but in a Christian context worship of God your music draws you closer to God. I think it opens up your spirit more towards him and it’s just a powerful medium to convey what you feel or what you sense, or what you’re trying to tell him or convey to God in worship.

Ruth agreed, she added “spirituality is very personal, a very intimate relationship with God”. Her comment of “like the way we’re sitting now, talking to each other, it’s just that” personalizes the closeness and relationship one can have with God the Father”. As the leader of the church Sam felt:

By attending service, as part of corporate worship is a good place to start where you get built up, you get equipped to really be the ministers of the gospel so to speak or the spiritual sense from your Monday through to Saturday’s.

Ruth believed daily one should through your personal prayers have an encounter with God, through his Word of God”. She felt “that’s what brings you strength and wisdom to face the day and do it in a way that helps to grow spiritually and makes you stronger”. Sam as a preacher and musician makes the point when playing for God or using your gifts and talents it is to worship
God. He said “there’s never any harm in you playing and enjoying just the feel of playing…but in your heart you’re doing this because you’re trying to honor God in what you do”. Over his years of ministry he found when musicians become “egotistical, saying look at me, and trying to get the applause” that can becomes a problem as it has do with self rather than with giving honor to God the creator from whom all gifts and talents flow. Although musicians contribute hugely to creating the atmosphere for the service team Sam identifies “all the glory goes to God first” he added no doubt “the musicians are thanked and their skills are acknowledged”.

**Connecting Music to Worship with Self and Others**

Through music, the Word of God makes a connection to self and also to others. The words of hymns and choruses affirm God’s love, goodness, mercy and his presence. It gives people a sense of belonging and feeling connected to each other when they sing and worship together as a community. Sam as the leader of the church, found the multicultural locality of the church important to connect people with each other in the local community. Though people in the region speak many different languages the use of English is used in the service. Ruth recognizes “that is what’s binding people together with their music and they are coming, so we’re lifting one voice to heaven from many varied backgrounds”. The notion of each face having a place in the church community as well as in the wider community is central to the vision of the church. As a community of faith the church welcomes people from all backgrounds, languages and ethnicities. It fosters inclusivity by encouraging people to attend social events that the church holds in the community where faith and hope is shared.

Sam strongly felt that music actually binds people together even those that are not really churchgoers. He gave an example of a local pub where you find people generally will do sing-alongs. He stated:

> If you went down the local pub and you got up and you started to sing Amazing Grace, they’ll sing with you even though they don’t go to church, they’ve heard it, they’ve heard people sing it, they’ve heard anthems, they’ve heard it sung at a sporting event and there’s something about that hymn, they’ll just start to sing. It is a common well-known hymn so they just sing along and it makes them feel good.

The power of music and the words makes a connection like none other. As a leader of the church given the range of languages and ethnicities, Sam felt a hymn like Amazing grace is timeless. He believed:

> You can get people whether they are Chinese or whatever who may not fully understand the English but when they start to sing it is something that grips their heart. They will sing with gusto and sing it even if they can just basically understand the words a little bit. It is the music that rings a bell, the music draws them in, and it’s simple words, but it is theologically correct, people start to just catch on.

The music experience also has a spiritual connection where self is a central focus of the experience. In this realm, you are building your personal relationship with God and enhancing your own spiritual growth no matter what your language or ethnicity may be. Sam found the spiritual experience through worship and music “can enhance your soul area, your body, you have joy in your heart, you’ve got God’s peace in your heart, and that brings that wholeness and that brings up wellness and impacts your wellbeing”. As the church is situated in a multicultural community, people tend to struggle with English as it is not always their first language, however, Sam and Ruth found through learning to read and sing the words of songs and the bible, these parishioners are learning to speak and read English better. As Sam found with one couple where the man is Malaysian and the woman is Chinese “when you put the songs up on the screen she’s...
singing”. Though she may not speak well he found she engages in the English songs readily. This aspect is not the focus of this paper on showing the correlation of how songs can impact on English skills; rather, it may be argued that language is no barrier in the Amakaya Church when it comes to connecting to God and people, which may be similar to other religious settings.

The choice of music in the services caters for both young and old as it serves to connect people with self and others. Some of the pieces are prayerful where the words focused on the individual and others speak of the people of God (a wider community, all of humankind). The type of music ranges from loud, fast and modern orchestration like popular music to soft, slow hymn like tunes. Ruth particularly pointed out “you have to exercise a sensitivity, if there’s older people in the congregation I think you have to cater for different people and put a bit of hymns into the service”. Largely the music is choruses and largely draws on music from the Pentecostal church (Hillsong.) The music of Hillsong is accessible and downloadable to people all over the globe offering a wide range of devotional reflective worship music, to upbeat praise songs. For the worship team listening to each other when rehearsing or performing was a way to connect with each other as performers by watching each other’s body language. In particular watching Gloria the worship team leader, also the conductor, who as one player said “does a shoulder thing or something like that?” indicating when to start or stop. Another musician who is still new to the worship team said “I’m still trying to learn all these little things (connecting musically), I just listen to it, and eventually will get it right”. One of the players found though he has played for two years with the worship team, he still feels exposed as the only brass player yet strongly connects to the group. Through the making and sharing of music another member of the worship team remarked “I feel like we’re on a ship, we’re on an ark, we can’t get off, God has meshed all these different personalities altogether”. In the music group there are different language groups, a range of ages, both genders, a range of personalities, this in itself is a test of spiritual growth when coming together working as musicians in the church. Working together to plan, rehearse and perform the music is another way to connect to God that facilitates spiritual growth in self and others. One member of the team recognized playing and singing together is like a marriage “you have to compromise, you have to recognise what to give and to take, so that’s what I love about it, like we make it work, we’re so different some of us but we’re making it work”. This idea of trying and reaching out to make it work resonates with any relationship in non-church or spiritual settings.

The choice of music and songs, “sets the mood for worship…because they’re singing together it creates a sense of unity”. Including music in the worship is an important part of the service as one person rightly points out “I think it will be boring without music personally. The worship songs and music gets people into the mood to praise God for what he’s doing for us and what he’s done for everybody else, it would just be a totally different atmosphere if there was no music”. The music in worship transports people to “another place where we just kind of don’t deal with the junk that goes on around us but rather focus on God”. Having the opportunity to perform also has taken some members out of their comfort zones to perform and be on stage as one member recalls “at school I was always shy and I couldn’t sing and go out and try for things, but here it’s really kind of like pushed me to try”. For this member playing on stage as an adult, growing in confidence and competency is something that the group has helped make possible by always using words of encouragement during rehearsals and performances which motivates players to want to continue to play in the group. Another member added “one thing I’ve learned is not to rely on your own strength. You rely on Gods strength definitely when playing”. Drawing on the supernatural and calling on God as the higher being was essential for players and the leaders of this church when connecting through music.

One of the ways Sam wanted to connect the church to the wider community was also through developing a youth drop in center where music would be key. He felt part of the music scene and ministry was to “connect people to Christ, connect them to Jesus in a way that’s not condemning, a way that’s not judgmental, but at the same time telling them of God’s love and
JOSEPH: SPIRITUAL CONNECTIONS MADE THROUGH MUSIC MAKING

sharing with them”. Street ministry was one way forward to connect with the local community. Sam mentioned parishioners have started to talk to people outside of church in the local community and share God’s word of love. He pointed out “people just want a listening ear”. He felt through conversation people could pray for such people remarking “it’s not bible bashing it’s a very loving friendly way of befriending them, talking to them”. Ruth reiterated this by mentioning connecting to others is not a new concept is “is an old, old, biblical concept that’s going far back”. She was firm about reaching out to others in the community and said “getting together was important, as people are lonely”. She makes the point that life in Australia is “a different concept of community…it’s so fast and it’s totally different from where we come from so it’s important to connect with people…not just connecting on Facebook”. Many of the local people are from different countries and being a migrant herself many decades ago Ruth knows what it feels like to be new in a community and to fit in. She thought though modern technology was excellent and a great way to connect people, she still found “a lot of people even on Facebook are still even more lonelier than ever”. She further added:

That’s where people go and make a mistake I think. Connection is when you sit opposite each, next to each other, and look each other in the eye, cause we were made to have fellowship with God, and then fellowship with one another, to really feel each other, hear each other’s voices and look at each other in the eye, that’s connection you know.

Sam also recognized one cannot live in isolation, hence the church community is there to be a part of where “you can work through things, issues... have a network of support that is needed”. Since the church has been established five years ago, people in the community attend services and “some parishioners have even brought their neighbors to the service”. Ruth found the church through praise and worship (singing) to be key, “binding us together”. People come from all different backgrounds with different situations for example drugs, abuse, broken relationships, abandonment, unwanted pregnancies, loneliness, unemployed and so forth. Ruth identifies as leaders or as parishioners “we have to be careful not to judge these people”. She talked of one person where it was the music in particular that was drawing this person regularly to church she said “I think that music is bringing her, pushing her even into a deeper relationship. Her dependency is less and less on alcohol and more dependent on God because of music.” Ruth makes the point that the power of words in songs can “build you up or it can tear you down”. Cautioning, “some music has been the cause of influencing teenagers to commit suicide, to deal in drugs, to do the bad things” Ruth firmly believed that music is available to all people; it is “so powerful and universal. It has no gender, it can draw in people from different backgrounds, different cultures, and can bring oneness and that’s why we start with worship (songs) in the service”. As a minister she found everybody comes to the service with all sorts of issues or problems or backgrounds, “you have had a bad week but music just uplifts the spirit man and as soon as we come into church and the music plays who cannot but melt under that beautiful worship music”. Sam confirms this by saying music is like universal language, it connects to all age groups he found “the younger generation just relate to music so well and use music as part of their world.” Hence:

we use praise and bring them and lift them from where they are at, to where they need to be, where they can just relax, so that in itself brings healing, brings solace, and brings wellbeing to the our lives, just letting go of the week so to speak. Letting go of what happened that morning.

Music in worship helps one connect with self and others without trying too much as Sam points out “but just by singing, worshipping and playing and using the different instruments it lifts your spirit”.

37
Conclusion

The notion of ‘worship’ in this paper aligns with praising, honoring, glorifying, revering, adoring and worshipping God through music and the Word of God (spoken or written). This paper only reports on the findings from one Pentecostal church, a limitation in itself. Hence, no generalizations can be made across Pentecostal churches or any other church. However, the findings from the Amkaya Church do indicate that music in worship can enrich spiritual experiences for the leaders of the church, musicians and parishioners. “The role that music plays in religion and spiritual life is evident throughout history and across cultures” (Lipe 2002, 210). Given the locale of the church, a largely multicultural community, it was evident that the church was trying to reach out to people from the outside through street ministry and also through praise and worship inside the church. The leaders of the church and the worship team did not state whether they wanted to convert people to Christianity per se in their multicultural community, rather, they pointed out that the Amakaya Church was a place for people to feel loved and cared for and have a sense of belonging, a sense of community within a faith setting. They did find that music was an effective way to connect people to each other and also to God through praise and worship, prayer meetings, social events, community events. The use of song has been used since Old Testament times and “throughout church history, song has been part of worship” (Vaught 2009, 116). Music in worship touches the core of our being and enlivens “the hearts with the very spirit of God” (Lipe 2002, 225). The interviewees’ comments confirmed that music was an effective medium for people to make spiritual connections personally or through corporate worship. Spiritual connections are not confined to the institution of the church or to religion but are concerned with the connection “we can feel between ourselves and something vast, unseen, mysterious, and wondrous” (Millar 2000, 140). The music is said to prepare one’s heart and mind for the joy you can receive through God and through his son Jesus (Vaught 2009). Though music in church is seen as a social engagement and part of corporate community music making, Miller and Strongman (2002) argue more in-depth analysis of affective responses to music in Pentecostal churches is needed. Music in worship “elicits strong experiences of positive emotion as well as acting as a major facilitator of religious experience” (Miller and Strongman 2002, 24). The nature of the choice of music is “ determined by the nature of the church, and the nature of the church is determined by its mission” (Petty 2010, 72). There is no measured evidence of how music can impact on personal transformation, rather, music in worship may provide a rich pathway for people to explore, experience and express their spirituality and connect to the wider multicultural society.

Engagement with music in church settings provides hope and meaning for leaders, musicians and parishioners as it may provide a sense of purpose that “opens avenues of communication not only between people but also between people and the divine” (Lipe 2002, 233). As a visitor to the Amakaya Church on a few occasions since 2010, I have found music plays a significant role to ‘set the scene’ for worship. It is ever present in the service except for when the sermon is preached. This is similar to what Jennings (2008) found in his research and concluded that the service is a “space where the divine and human come into contact” through singing and also the Word of God. Similar to Jennings research, Amakaya Church is led into a spiritual realm by the worship team, the leader Gloria in particular plays a significant role as she leads people in song to have a spiritual encounter with God. In a similar way the two church leaders Sam and Ruth express connectivity through friendly happy faces, through song they too, like the worship team, do bodily movements during some of the songs and the congregation respond lifting their arms, closing their eyes and at times they also move to the music especially when the tempo is fast. As a Christian church in a multicultural suburb in Melbourne, music serves as one effective way to connect people spiritually to worship with self and others. This case study is a small sample hence recommendations is limited, however, it can be argued that more places like that of the Amakaya Church can provide people with a place and space where each face matters in a
multicultural society. Music in worship may be a useful mode for people to feel a sense of belonging and connection to a wider society. According to Hays and Minichiello (2005, 95) “music can provide many people with ways of experiencing and expressing their spirituality in their life that otherwise they might find difficult to access in other tangible ways”. This study calls for further research that investigates whether different types of music in church settings perhaps may contribute to intercultural and cross-cultural understandings in multicultural Australia.

REFERENCES


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The International Journal of Social, Political, and Community Agendas in the Arts is one of four thematically focused journals in the collection of journals that support the Arts and Society knowledge community—its journals, book series, conference and online community.

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