Modes of Congregational Singing:
"Being-in song-in-singing."

Joining In Song

In a spoken conversation, words add up into sentences, predicated on thoughts generated by an interchange between people. The words ebb and flow, changing in an improvised stream of ideas. There is unpredictability in conversation that sharpens the attention and demands some originality and care as to what and how words are spoken. And there is no predetermined beginning or end to a conversation; it drifts in and fades out according to the relational contingencies of the situation in which the participants find themselves.

> When I enter the church, I see that most people in the pews are sitting and talking to their friends, probably getting caught up on the news of each other's lives. It is an interesting sight and sound: a sort of giant living room with people relating politely to each other, their voices creating a gentle rumble. At 11:00, the worship leader announces, "Let's stand and sing our praises to God," and the musical introduction begins. It's amazing the change in atmosphere as the chatter stops and we begin to focus. One kind of sound stops and another begins as we start to sing. The individual conversations stop and we sing the opening song as one great, united proclamation. (June)

Singing a song together is a different experience from talking together. A song is a fixed roadmap indicating exact directions and boundaries that we must use if we are to travel together, all obeying the signs and signals. Usually, we don't each make up our own song as we go along, each singer contributing whatever comes to mind as in improvisational jazz singing. We adhere to a pre-existing construction given to us.

Just as music is not dots on lines in a songbook, but sound, likewise, a song to be a song must be given a voice. A song, therefore, calls to singers for its own sounded

Excerpt from: Adnams, G. (2008). *The Experience of Congregational Singing: An Ethno-phenomenological approach.* University of Alberta, Edmonton.

existence. It demands to be sung and we sing in obedience. In this way, a kind of conversation takes place between the unsounded song and the singer. In silence, the potential song offers symbols or musical ideas to be changed into physical sound. In a simultaneous translation, as it is being sung, the unsung song merges with the singers.

Sound is part of the world around us. It is hard to escape from sound: the noise of the crowd, the roar of the traffic outside, the background music in a store, our own breathing and heartbeat. Even if we are not attending to it, we still hear it. Sound is constantly impacting our ears. In this way, we are always a part of a soundscape (Schafer, 1969). We experience it as ambience. It is an interesting exercise to stop while reading something and just listen. What do you hear? Did you hear it while you were reading? How much noise is there in the background? We may hear a bird in a tree or the children across the street, the hum of a heater, an airplane going overhead, or the bell of the front door. We selectively layer our sonic environment, bringing nearer and clearer the most important and relevant sounds. Listening is an intentional kind of hearing. And by taking notice of (discovering) what we were hearing, we realize how we are in the world. For example, I may notice the quiet footsteps outside the door when I am expecting company. But when I am reading a book or making a cup of tea, I may be totally oblivious to these same sounds. Each mode of being probably has its mode of attentiveness to sound.

These forms of attentiveness are also enacted as we begin to sing; we "tune in" to the musical environment and listen to and for specific sounds or patterns of sound. They might be the instrumental introduction to the song or the melody that is being sung around us. We begin to sing by paying attention to these, not to the many other sounds present that may distract, mislead or interrupt. We draw the relevant sounds into nearness by this selective mode of being in the world. For potential singers, they are cues, sonic pathways that we follow, leading us to the experience of joining in the song.

Sometimes the sound of singing itself may issue a call to us. For example, a person standing outside may hear the church congregation singing and say, "It was the singing that pulled me in." The quality of the singing might be so magnetic, captivating that we cannot help ourselves. We are caught by the mood of the song as it matches ours at that moment, or our mood is swayed by the singing so that we take up the song as ours. We turn our attention to singing, or our attention is turned by the singing. "In and with his

voice, man stretches out and lays hold on the other, as he himself is attuned and held." (Plessner, 1970, p. 45)

But what of the quality of this attention; what are the dimensions of being-in-song-in-singing?

> I get frustrated when we are asked to sing a new hymn or chorus, one that is brand new to me. I get so involved in the mechanics of the music and text that I can't get "into it" at any level. I want to sing, but at that stage I'm struggling to follow the tune and the words, or being frustrated by how I don't know what's going to come next. (Robert)

How are we to understand this experience? It seems that in this learning mode, the more we think about the song, the more we are bound by it. When a song is new, our level of interaction is too much about the notes of the music and the letters and ideas of the words. This too is a kind of singing, for we make sounds in our attempts to master the song. But it is not fully engaged singing nor is it "just singing." The song is present to us as something that has to be learned and this becomes an end in itself. In the context of a worship service, it appears that it is most desirable to have the sense of being fully engaged in the act of singing, but in order to get there, we must come to a place that allows us, in a sense, to forget about some of the very things that make singing *singing* – music with word. This rather paradoxical relationship is paralleled in other expressive activity. For example, we are free to dance once we have learned the steps, when we don't have to think about our feet or the pattern they should follow. Similarly, when we can "forget" about the notes and the words, the song is ready to be sung.

Once songs have been learned, they are a part of our past, having been received and become familiar at another time. As a result, there are many aspects to the experience of singing learned songs that can be described

> as pre-reflective 'I can do it again,'...traditions which fund and orient my present encounters. They exemplify the past's continuance and the way that I, as a gathering of time, am a concernful flight and a stretching along. This does not mean that the persistence of the past is explicitly noticed or regarded. In fact, it

> suggests that the continuance per se is more likely strangely forgotten…We are able to do what we do, whether we notice this or not, because of the temporal gathering, the stretching along, of that which we have done already. (Anton, 2001, p. 124)

But what is it that we are able to do? What are some of the skills brought from our past singing experiences that fund the present? At a very basic level, we can form the sounds simply by imitation or by reading without having to interpret the shapes of the letters, analyze the combinations of syllables or figure out what specific pitch is indicated by the notes on the musical staff. Combining these more general skills within the context of the specific song that we have often sung, we don't have to think about what word is coming next or where the tune is going because we have traveled these paths before; we are able to perform the unique totality of the sequence of sounds that is the particular song.

All these have been so well learned in our past that they require no attention in order to become part of this present interaction with the world. We do them – embody them – without specifically noticing. An example: as I was re-reading the previous sentence, I suddenly became aware that I was rubbing my cheek with my finger. How was I able to do this? I did not direct or attend to every muscle being employed, but despite this, my hand found my cheek and stroked it without any conscious effort on my part.

Merleau-Ponty (1962) suggests that habits like this come about as a result of processes he calls "sedimentation" – knowledge that frees us to act without re-conceptualizing all of our prior learning (p. 150). Such sedimentation, acquired knowledge "is not an inert mass in the depths of our consciousness" but "what is acquired is truly acquired only if it is taken up again in a fresh momentum of thought" (p.150). When we sing a learned song, a new entity is brought into being as we create a version in the present, applying all of the necessary skills learned in the past. Thus, each re-living, each "I can do it again" comes with the possibility for freshness; an opportunity for re-interpretation, re-discovering the affective potential of the song. But what if this prospect for newness is not apparent?

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"Just Singing"

> There are far too many times in church when I am just singing. I'm just going through the motions without any significant thought about what I'm singing. I'm there in body but not necessarily in mind. I know the song and I can sing the words, and my mind may be somewhere else. I could even be thinking about something completely unrelated to church. And I'm not necessarily participating with any sort of religious feeling. I get very disappointed with myself when I think about it; I should be more engaged with what I'm doing if I'm at all serious about worship and singing in church. (Ernie)

How then can we account for this divided or shallow attention to singing – just singing – that may be the experience of some singers? There doesn't seem to be a "fresh momentum of thought" being stimulated and enabled by the effortlessness of singing a known song. Fresh thoughts may appear to be in the foreground of the experience of some singers but they are not necessarily thoughts in any way related to the singing. It would seem that the quality of the re-singing of a song is contingent upon the degree and nature of attention given to in the moment re-living-through the song. This is a singers' challenge – being-in-song-in-singing.

"Un-minded" singing

> I was singing a familiar hymn and at some point during the second verse, I "checked out." I didn't realize it until we got to the end of the verse and then I sort of woke up to the fact that for the past few moments, I had been completely unaware of what I was singing or even that I was singing! I had been thinking about our approaching family vacation but apparently kept on singing the lines of the song on automatic pilot. (Joanne)

This singer apparently began to sing purposely, paying attention to what she was doing and then, at some point, her awareness was somehow redirected. Although or because the song is familiar, consciousness of it fades and singing the song becomes untended or neglected. Thinking about something else, attention is on another place or subject. Singing on auto-pilot is an apt metaphor: all systems are operational as prearranged and are programmed into the controlling mechanism – the auto-pilot – therefore there is no

need for superintendence. The pilot is now free to attend to other things. In that moment the mind has wandered, as if it has places to go; there are more interesting or important things with which to occupy itself. Singing has somehow slipped away from mindfulness and is replaced by another stream of thought.

> This [Sunday] morning was one of those funny ones. I don't know how many songs we sang during the service. In truth, I cannot really remember what any of the songs were. I've just started a new job and I found myself distracted quite a lot by thinking of all the new things that were going on. It didn't matter what I was singing, I was not in church but at work! (Norman)

In this wandering, singers are reflexively oblivious to the sounds that they are making as the activity of singing is strangely rendered silent. The singers don't seem to hear their own musical sounds or the shapes of their words or of those who surround them. Song and singing have no presence to the music-makers even though their bodies are producing sound. Are they aware of their bodies in any way? Is this "senseless" singing?

When singers return from the mental excursion away from singing, there is recognition of temporary amnesia; for a time, the singers were unaware of how their body was engaged. However, while unaware of the act of singing, there is a memory of the appealing thoughts experienced. Is this like snoring and dreaming? When we are asleep we don't hear the sounds our bodies are making, but we are enjoying what is going on in our minds. But these singers are not asleep and their thoughts are not dreams. These are people in a church, with other singers, reading words from a page or screen, making sounds. Is it like daydreaming? Any sense of "being there" seems directed not by attention to space or time or body but only by attentiveness to thought. The mind is indeed active, but separated from any other consciousness. Singing in this state is not mindless; however, the singers are not minding their singing.

Un-minded singing as a pre-reflective "I can do it again," affords a fascinating contrast with extemporaneous (literally: out-of-time) speech.

> As we are undergoing speech, we do not experience both messages and meaning. Rather, the messages are simply experienced as meaning; they are thought itself, though in the mode of not being it…As we speak, we do not hear the noisiness of our own tongue as we do a foreign tongue. Instead, the noisiness is focally absent

> as we live speech as thought. Thought, as what is heard in lieu of the noises, is maintained and inseparable from acts of speaking. (Anton, 2001, p. 96)

When we speak extemporaneously, even though we are not thinking about the act of speaking, our very thoughts are engaged *as* speech (Anton, 2001). These experiences, extemporaneous speech and un-minded singing, are lived pre-reflectively but very differently. Both are funded by sedimentation – previously learned patterns of sounds – however, speech *as* thought is necessarily inseparable from the awareness of thinking, whereas un-minded singing or singing without thinking about singing appears as a sedimented "that which we have done already" (Anton, 2001). Thinking about singing is apparently not necessary to its replication; it has become by rote – "mechanical or habitual repetition" (Pearsall & Trumble, 1996). Like machines that have no thoughts, we can respond to a command and our singing is set in motion to proceed un-mindedly.

"Meaningless" words

> Sometimes, I must admit, I just sing the words. I'm just going through the motions, without really being deep in thought about the whole song. Other times I find myself sometimes so caught up in the music or trying to harmonize or read the actual parts of the music [the melody or harmony] that I lose the sense of what the words are saying. (Vince)

In this mode of (dis)engagement, there seems to be an awareness of the sounds of singing, of what is being sung, but not a significance of it, especially the words. It is possible that the narrative and emotive meaning of the words recedes into the background or becomes dissolved into some other kind of experience of meaningfulness that has less to do with the words than with the more elemental significance of the singing experience itself. Perhaps when the hymnic quality of the text becomes more musical, then the "message" or the meaning content of the hymn or chorus loses its prominence.

> I really get "into" singing when I concentrate on God, but it's always a struggle for me at church. If I'm not careful, all of a sudden I'm singing not for worship, but because of the beat of the drum, the music. I get caught off guard and get really stimulated by the music. I get this high, this feeling of euphoria and excitement

> and I start to perspire. This happens at every church service. I can feel the beat in me. I try to control myself, even the clapping of my hands. I try not to get into this because I can get carried away with the music not thinking about God. (Tim)

Interaction with the creation of music itself or the execution of the music by accompanists can have a powerful effect. The physicality of music – the pulse, the movement – can evoke a bodily response that is so prominent that it overshadows all engagement with the text. The irresistible nature of this musical drive has resonance with the beat of a primal mechanism that sustains human life – a pulsing heart. This is much more than the unconscious tapping of the foot or hand to the beat of a song; it can become an invasion, a synchronized occupation of the body.

As noted before, Augustine (1997), as a listener to song, was also troubled by this contest between word directed towards God and the power of music. "When…it happens that the singing has a more powerful effect on me than the sense of what is sung, I confess my sin and my need of repentance, and then I would rather not hear any singer" (p. 230).

> Modern worshippers experience musical distraction in this and other ways:
> In all honesty, I would have to say that sometimes I just can't sustain whatever the words are saying – I shouldn't say can't, I just don't. With many repetitions of a phrase or just a single word comes that danger of putting the mind on automatic pilot and sending it off into the mist somewhere while your emotions are vibrating or bouncing up and down because of the musical elements. You divorce your feelings from the ideas that produce them and then the feelings can become free floating things that ought to be cranked up irrespective of how they come. And so, by the repetition, it becomes boring. I then just sing the words largely for the feeling. So I now have a split. I'm singing one thing and if I really thought about it I might ask, "Are these words scriptural or true? I'm feeling so good because the tune is just carrying me along." I'd like the integration. I'd like to tie my good feelings to thoughts that I thought were good. (Edward)

Music by itself draws attention to itself as sound without any articulated reference that words bring (Ihde, 1976). We experience music alone and its "more powerful effect" in

ways that transcend accurate description, as we quickly discover when we try, often in vain, to describe our feelingful responses to pure music: that is, music without words. But song is not music alone; song is the inseparable experience of music and word and in this marriage, many things happen to words when they are sung. Rock critic and author Greil Marcus posits that "words in songs are sounds we can feel before they are statements to understand" (quoted in Frith, 1981, p.14). So, in a strange way, words may turn wordless in song; they may lose their propositional linguistic significance. When we speak a sentence propositionally we may state, claim, argue, ask, or explain something; or we may urge, admonish, or persuade someone to do something. But in song, these intentionalities may change. The words may become largely expressive and thus let go of their narrative or descriptive role.

> Singing enables us to step back from the word's immediacy as communication and to make it an aesthetic object; it allows us to contemplate and to celebrate the word rather than simply hear or speak it. It does not simply convey the word but places it in the context of "something for which there are no words." (Viladesau, 2000, p. 48)

Singing a song gives us an aesthetic and artistic location, a place for us as singers to engage in musical creation. It is true that the words of a song grant us a known vocabulary, a link to our life-world, a familiar utterance within the more mysterious and less definable musical realm. In this musical experience of vocal music, words sung sometimes seem to take flight, as if being carried on the melody. They are now sculpted and directed by the music, released from their everyday semantics. Singers give breath to this non-semantic freshness of sung words and in so doing are able to articulate some sense of meaning that is other than the word.

"Dispassionate" singing

> There are many times, probably most of the time, when I am just singing: enjoying the fact that I am singing, glad to be in church – all that positive stuff – but feeling nothing but this generic enjoyment. I could be singing about anything; it may as well not be a religious song because the rich, spiritual meanings of the

> texts are just not resonating with me. In my head, I believe the words I'm singing but I don't feel them in the way that tells me I am singing something special or connected to my spiritual life. (Betty)

It is also possible to sing being fully cognizant of some significance of the tune and text and yet not have an adequate feeling of the song. Can we uncover this sense of barrenness by exploring what is not there? How are we to understand the feeling that a song sometimes does not resonate? It would seem that for a song to resonate and produce a certain feeling, it must somehow be felt to have a deep inward trajectory in addition to the sense of singing out.

The Latin root of resonate is resonatia which means echo (Hoad, 1996) – a repetition of sound by reflection (Pearsall & Trumble, 1996).

> As a resonant appeal, feeling stands…between "reaction" and "rejoinder." It is too loosely connected to the occasion to be a reaction which is triggered directly, like a reflex. It is not simply induced (by a stimulus) and set in motion, as it were; rather, a quality "speaks" to the person and awakens a resonance in him. And, again, the feeling is too intimately connected to the occasion to be a rejoinder. The occasion does not first evoke a personal attitude, and it creates no problematic situation, but causes the person (though from a distance, like an echo) to resound. As a commensurate oscillation in which the whole man is involved, more deeply or superficially, more calmly or with greater agitation, feeling occupies the mean between reaction and rejoinder, the two types of response known to life. (Plessner, 1970, pp. 129, 130)

Ideally, the song is penetrating us, somehow addressing us and we are co-responding with and to the address. We want something of our being to sound back in an imitative reply to what is being sung; we desire a parallel sounding of the sound, a sympathetic vibration to be sensed profoundly within us. It is feeling that the song is beyond merely knowing; it is in some way possessed by us and we are possessed by the totality of the song.

How then do we describe the opposite – this dispassionate mode of being-in-song-in-singing? It appears that the song does not adequately penetrate us or sing to us in the desired way. We sense that in the occasion of singing, we are responding differently than that which is called for in and by the song; we are not sung by the song. We are sounding,

but not resounding from an adequate depth; but it is a safe and comfortable shallowness. Perhaps it is like having a polite conversation with friends about ordinary things – pleasant but not passionate. Do we not live most of our lives on this level? Perhaps there is an expectation that we as congregational singers will enter each song with the kind of vulnerability that allows the song to shape us, the singers, and our singing. A dispassionate singer apparently does not adequately experience this or allow this to happen.

"Into" Singing

> I was in church, singing the hymn, when from behind me came the most captivating voice. This woman was singing the hymn in such a way that I was melting! She seemed to be so enraptured with God, but not in a gushy sort of way; she expressed a meaningfulness that came from somewhere in her soul and that spoke to me more than what she was singing. (Don)

As we join in singing with the rest of the congregation, we give something of ourselves – at least our voice. However, when we hear ourselves or others sing, we have a notion about the quality of the singing voice as a depth of engagement. We might comment that the singing was not enthusiastic or, by contrast, they were singing with all their heart. When we really enter into singing, we dig deep within our cavities to change the spirit of our singing. Barthes (1985) calls this quality of engagement the "grain" of the voice: "The 'grain' is the body in the singing voice, in the writing hand, in the performing limb" (p. 276). This kind of involvement seems to connect to the song all that our being can offer: a presence that makes the song shine with human realness. Our singing becomes vibrant with the substance of our lived life. In so doing, the singer becomes an incarnation of the essence of the song.

The singer is in a dialog with the song; in singing, the singer is being sung. The song resonates with life, with the inner life of the world.

> It is the not the inner life of the self, but of the world, the inner life of things. This is precisely why the singer experiences inner life as something he shares with the world, not as something that sets him apart from it. As he sings (and hears himself

> sing), he discovers that the things of the world speak the language of his own inwardness and that he himself speaks the inner language of things. (Zuckerkandl, 1973, p. 23)

In singing the language of our inwardness, we are turned inside out, so to speak. What was inside is now outside, for all to hear, including ourselves. Our deepest emotions seem to be caught in the net of our singing and propelled to the surface where they are tossed in the waves of the song. It is a kind of confession, a public declaration of who we are as bare, sung lives. As we sing in this way, together, we hear our vulnerability in each other's manifest humanity. "Deep calls to deep" (Psalm 42:7) and we respond in kind.

> I didn't want to quit singing that song; I wanted it to go on forever. I had no sense of time. I wanted to go to heaven right then. I had a mental picture of the angels around the throne of God. I was totally thinking of things outside myself. (Sue)

When we really "get into" singing a song, we sometimes seem to enter another place and another time. This other time is called into being by the very existence of the song and our permissive engagement with it. Schutz (1964) calls this other temporal realm the "inner time" of music. "Outer" time is time that can be measured by clocks or metronomes, that is, the time that the musician counts to assure the correct tempo or the measure of the duration of a song. Using outer time to measure a song from its beginning to end is a paradoxical activity. "We can only hope to measure it as it passes by, because once it has passed by, there will be no measuring; it will not exist to be measured" (Augustine, 1997, p. 262). By contrast, "inner time" is the step-by-step, ongoing articulation of musical thought (Schutz, 1964). This inner time is experienced when

> the consciousness of the beholder is led to refer what he actually hears to what he anticipates will follow and also to what he has just been hearing and what he has heard ever since this piece of music began. The hearer, therefore, listens to the ongoing flux of music, so to speak, not only in the direction from the first to the last bar but simultaneously in a reverse direction back to the first one. (Schutz, 1964, p. 170)

How is this kind of time consciousness in singing a communal song different from getting lost in a book, being engrossed by the flow of words from which we construct the story? Reading a story silently has a different kind of temporal existence. We can close

the book, thereby interrupting the flow of the story, only to open it later and re-enter the world created by our reading. The printed words are still there, unmoved. Singing in community, however, cannot be stopped in the middle of a song by our will. It travels having been given energy by many more than just one person. We can attend to it or not attend to it as it moves around us, through time. It is our choice, but we will be left behind if we ignore the sound experience – it goes on without us. Meaningful convocative coherence is given to singing together by this dependence on the temporal flow. Thus, the singing brings together into convocation those who practice it. Unfortunately, this rather mystical, convocative, musical time-travel is fragile and not always the experience of singers. As we have seen, we often just sing, not being moved by the song; we don't go anywhere. But within this convocation special things sometimes happen to individuals: a heightened awareness, a memorable, temporary mode of being-in-song-in-singing.

"Overwhelmed"

> The church was filled with mostly college-aged youth. I was still in high school at the time. I remember that I was standing in the aisle, jiving a little, singing "We will worship" with my hands raised as if I was reaching up to heaven. At a climactic moment, I went up on my tiptoes, trying to reach as high as I could. I felt so engaged in the worship of the Lord that I wanted to reach higher. I had a feeling of awe; I wanted to see more, know more. I had an incredible peace and comfort but still that wanting of more. I was content with where I was at, but striving for more. It was an indescribably good feeling. The music ushered me into the experience. (Jim)

Here we see how singing seems to transform the experience of language by evoking a prelinguistic, more primal experience. The singer was literally ushered into an experience that transcends everyday reality, or perhaps he was propelled toward a more originary realm from which our everyday experience is transcendent.

> This was an extraordinary experience. I have had nothing like it before or since. I was in a large [youth] gathering and as I was singing over and over, "You are

> holy," I suddenly realized that what I was singing is what the angels are singing in heaven to God, as described in Revelations. It struck me so powerfully; I was taken by the truth of it. I wanted to be one of the angels. I started to cry, not a weeping cry but choking up. Then I lost my voice and I could not move. I was completely out of myself, not worried about anything. I was overcome, awe-struck in the true sense of the word. How I felt was not normal, but not wrong. I wanted to stay there. I didn't want to quit singing that song; I wanted it to go on forever. I had no sense of time. I wanted to go to heaven right then. I had a mental picture of the angels around the throne of God. I was totally thinking of things outside myself. (Sue)

While singing, this singer appears to have been completely captivated by something specific. The experience doesn't seem to be primarily about the musical aspect of song but a transcendental encounter with some aspects of words in the context of song. There is a profound, concentrated awareness of meaning that is outlined by a single phrase. The repetition of these few words seems to evoke a truth, an insight, the realization of which propels the singer through the song and into a place defined by this truth. It is a parallel place where the same words are being timelessly repeated. The singer seems overwhelmed by the presentation of truth and the enactment of it.

How are we to understand this mode of being? Heidegger (1971) suggests that words call things into nearness by naming them, yet they are not present among us. This focused and enriched experience of the words is about some thing, some person, some place. But in repetition, their conceptual associations and their affective possibilities are compressed, amplified and transformed. This vision of truth has a dream-like expression; a truth articulated in such a way that all other ways of seeing are pushed aside. From this other point-of-view, vivid and deep feelings that surround truth form the central significance and meaningfulness of the song, not the immediate sonic environment. In this particular instance, these are notions of intense devotion and worship. Could feelings of human love, peace, joy, or a yearning for a great epic quest be evoked by other songs? Such an encounter with whatever truth is called and named seems to be a consummation, an affect of having sung a particular song, in a particular place, at a particular time.

George tells of his encounter:

I have experienced something special while singing a hymn the choir has also sung: "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross." As this particular choir arrangement builds in crescendo towards the end of the piece, I just feel overwhelmed, almost can hardly sing, it touches me so. To a lesser extent there are times when the words I am singing with the congregation – hymns or gospel songs or choruses – do cause me to remember and reflect on God's love, or mercy, or power; on who God is and what he has done and these do touch me in a special way. I don't expect it happen; it just happens. Tears come to the eyes and I feel like I almost can't sing; my breath is caught – taken from me. And it's not necessarily predictable. I'd be singing along and all of a sudden – wow! It's not just hymns; there are some choruses that move me more than others, for sure. There is a chorus that's in the hymnbook: *There is a Redeemer*. I just love that. Not to a major degree, but it always just sort of moves me and wow, it has such a meaning, such a promise to it. I love that when we sing it. Other times the same piece might not necessarily move me.

If these kinds of things didn't happen on a Sunday morning, I would still feel like I have worshipped. I'm not very emotional…at least I don't think I am…maybe I am more than I think I am…but I'm not expecting emotions to come out. Maybe that's the heritage I was brought up in – boys don't cry sort of thing; don't show emotion – that background. So I'm not expecting it.

Michael tells his story:

Maybe I'm a bit of a strange bird but for me the lyrics of the song are far more important than anything else and so I follow the lyrics of the song and allow what's being stated to draw me into the presence of God. And that's what I experience, whether it's in the more contemporary or the old hymn *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God* or whatever it is. I suppose I take the words of the song as cues and reminders of what I know to be true about God. Take, for instance, *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.* Simply seeing that text on the screen and singing the words reminds me that indeed God is a fortress, a protector and helps me deal with the warfare reality of my life and recognize God's presence in the midst of that. I think that just being reminded that way by the song makes it experiential

then, for me. And I highly value having that cue: "Oh yes. This is true about the situation that I'm facing, that battle that I'm going through. God is with me in that." And as I have that drawn to mind by the song, I experience that: "Yes, God is here. He is with me." I guess it's a pretty awesome thing. It strikes me as incredible that the God of the universe would be with me in what I'm going through. It makes me feel awestruck, just overwhelmed. There have been times when I have simply stood and wept in a song. I'm not an overtly emotional person. On the outward appearance I'm calm and steady and even and what's going on is going on underneath the skin. So it doesn't happen often, but it does happen. It just happens. It has more to do with the text than the music. For example, I probably wouldn't notice that the organ was pumping it out any more than usual. The musical instruments are emotionally neutral to me I guess I'd say. I would simply be drawn in by the text of the song. I suppose what I might notice are my fellow worshippers coming to a crescendo with a statement like "Amazing love, how can it be…" and that would affect me.

These experiences seem to be given primary shape by the sung words; familiar, yet significant and richly textured words that sometimes bring what appears to be a powerful and welcome epiphany to some singers. The text of the song, deeply rooted in the singer, seems to bring to the surface a prior commitment to its truth. As such, the crisis moments that are experienced are not only sudden and important realizations or manifestations, they are epiphanies (Pearsall & Trumble, 1996), fresh glimpses of a Divinity (Hoad, 1996).

Such encounters in the context of Christian worship often seem to include an element of conflict for they constitute a clash; frail, human realities collide with the "otherness" of what is known of the Divine. The power of the impact can arrest and incapacitate the singer as breath is caught in the disturbance as if the life-force of song and singer has been interrupted. In these instances there is a sense of the immanence of the transcendent, a brief reconciliation with the irreconcilable. We seem to be overwhelmed by the vision of the impossible suddenly appearing to be possible.

Perhaps faith has become sight in these unexpected revelations; we catch a glimpse of what is usually veiled and in shadows. In this condition of openness,

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inconsistency is momentarily resolved in a welcome experience of the convergence of the divergent. As this kind of epiphany is an assuring reiteration of accepted truth that we struggle to live by, we may feel as if something new and strong has been infused into the hidden structures that give form to everyday realities.

Often, in these epiphanies, we are jolted from our normal mode of being-in-song-in-singing and we yield to what is more primal, loosed in an unstructured outpouring. Tears, though spontaneous, seem a most appropriate response because, in their ambiguity, they are able to articulate the paradoxical: joy and sorrow, doubt and certainty, frustration and satisfaction.

> Not all feelings can make us cry (as is shown by envy, hate, disdain and contentment, for example) but only those in which we become aware of a superior force against which we can do nothing. This awareness of our own impotence must take the form of feeling; it must take hold of us and grip us in order to trigger the act of inner surrender which causes us to weep. Feelings move us to tears as ways of taking cognizance of and of being addressed by a threatening power, not as mere moods and inner agitations. Thus the superior force lies neither in the intensity nor in the centrality nor yet in the degree of excitation of the feeling, but in the "objective quality" to which it immediately binds us. (Plessner, 1970, p.132)

"Uplifted"

> I start singing, and as I get into the words and I let the words seep into where I'm at, I really feel connected with the Lord. I feel as if he's hearing me and at times I even can hear him say "Keep going. I like this" you know, within myself. Or sometimes it's just a spiritual gelling, where I just feel like we're glued together on this one. "You [God] and I are agreeing on this one and I really just want to give You the praise." And in return he gives me a filling, an ability to push out the crap that you come to church with. Everybody comes somewhere with crap. So, push that out and just fill me with him so that I'm a different person than when I come away than when I go. But that doesn't always happen unless the music…if

there's no music, that won't happen. So that's very important that I need…I know I need music. I'm not somebody who can go with no music.

That being said, the words have to mean something to me and it can't be a dirge. It has to be…not light and fairy and airy. For example, there's nothing light and airy about the words of *Great Is Thy Faithfulness.* So it has to be that kind hymn where I connect with meaningful words. When I'm singing these, I know that parts of me have pushed out; I've pushed out what I have been worrying about, what I would have been struggling with, things like where does God what me to go next? It doesn't matter at that stage of the game. It's been pushed out. It's a sense of abiding. It's a sense of umm…I've got through the frosting to the cake sort of thing and I'm just abiding in him.

It doesn't take me long to get there. Sometimes it matters whether I've prepared myself before I go to church, because I do that. I start in the shower and I kind of…I like nothing better than to wake up with a hymn on my mind; to me, it just kind of sets the day right if I can wake up singing a hymn or praising or…but I prepare before I go to church. Some of it entails talking to God. Some of it entails singing. Some of it entails just listening to a tape, depending on what space I'm in, what time of year it is, what you know… Some of it entails going for a walk, like early in the morning, on a Sunday morning. I'll often take my dog for a walk down by the river where it's quiet and there's nobody there. And I sometimes have a walkman with me and sometimes just sing at the top of my lungs because nobody's around and nobody cares. But it's a way of preparing to worship. So preparing myself...but music is a very important part to me. There'd better be music at my funeral. (Kate)

Another story:

So when I'm feeling down, sometimes those choruses perk me up. Probably more often than not, they do so while I'm singing them. Often I will be thinking about some line, let's say, in the chorus or maybe in the hymn too, which says something that isn't quite right, that hasn't got experience quite right. And at that point my thinking will, I think, if not supersede at least taint the feeling so that I say "I don't feel so good about that", and that particular line or that particular

> chorus may not lift me up as much as it might have, but generally I experience a feeling of uplift when I'm down. That's the wonderful thing about hymns; you can go to church and you can feel like warmed over dog food, but then by singing a hymn or chorus you can be transported, lifted up above your troubles. (Edward)

We bring to our times of communal worship many kinds of life circumstances and it has been demonstrated that these easily spill over into our experience of singing. But here, during singing, there is reported a clear change from an identified negative state to its opposite – from down to up, from bad to good, from junk to jewel. There has been some sort of trade. One thing did not lead to another; instead, a bad, old thing passed away and a good, new thing came in its place. Singing in this transactional mode becomes triumphant, not because it is an accomplishment in itself or that in singing we have earned a reward. This victory is more like the relief of basking in the sun after enduring long days of cloudiness and rain; it is not of our making but in it we are in some way remade. Our spirits are lifted with the clouds and we can see the expanse of our world in a new brightness that brings with it hope.

This gift comes in singing and the song defines the new place where we can stay for a while. But the words of this song must be "true" for us to feast on them. We can savour them and allow them to nourish only if we can recognize their worth. Perhaps this contingency can be likened to the sense of well-being made possible when we put on new clothes. If the clothes are the right size, style, and colour, we can literally get into them with ease and positive expectation. Once adorned, we look in a mirror and assess the effect. If every aspect of the garment is what we had hoped for, then we see our selves in a new way, assured of a good difference given to us. But if, say, the jacket is not quite right, then our pleasure and confidence in the change are somewhat diminished.

While singing a happy, hopeful song, what happens to our troubles? They may seem to be removed from our consciousness, hidden from us, as in song and singing we embody another dimension of living most clearly defined by positive sung words. Being into the musical words and putting on their world, we are offered temporary relief from a confrontation with unpleasantness much like a tailor-made shirt beautifully covers blemished skin.

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How can we account for people insisting on singing the blues? Why do many people lament in song? There must be some benefit to the exercise as not many people purposely create for themselves a deeper state of sadness. This kind of singing gives an aesthetic voice to troubling but true circumstances; they are not being avoided or sidestepped but reconfigured in song and singing. And because the sad song fits, it can be worn; we need clothes that suit every state of our affairs.

Despite the more negative content, this lifting experience might occur perhaps because it is inextricably linked to the act of singing. To sing is not to cry, speak or shout; singing feels, sounds and is produced in unique ways. Singing requires a deliberate change in the way we use our body – a special consciousness and intent. We breathe deeply and expel the air slowly to make melody. This is a transactional motion for we inhale silent air and exhale vibrant air made musical. A singing body changes words in special ways; we open our mouths with exaggeration and deliberateness to shape and deliver whatever the song requires of us. Compared to speech patterns, sung sentences can be elongated or made more compressed by the dictates of the melody. The pitch inflections in the words are not entirely ours but are constrained by that of the song. The moods and meanings evoked by the words are shifted by the music and at the same time given a more permanent yet less defined state. As we sing, the experience of this altered presentation of words is enrichment, an expressive shaping directed by the music, allowing for the possibility of new insights. We can be transported above the mundane, lifted beyond the common language of everyday. In song we must become resonating cavities that create word-sounds larger and richer than speech or shout. This is an obligation given to us by song, and when we take up the transaction, we are changed. The change can be a sense of abiding, and to abide is to endure, remain, continue, dwell, remain faithful (Pearsall & Trumble, 1996). This is a resolve, a firm and hopeful place into which singing can lift us.

"Gesturing"

Singing is the only musical activity that does not require the use of hands or feet, therefore the limbs of the body are free to be used in other expressive activities. And so

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we have the possibility for multiple media such as song and dance routines, musical theatre and opera, or on a smaller scale, singers singing while playing the piano or guitar or other non-wind instruments. It is acceptable and common in the Western world for performing singers, like those in a choir or a congregation, to merely stand and sing, holding inactive the members of their bodies not necessary to the task. However, a good performer, an expressive chanteuse will most certainly be seen to move some parts of the body, at least hands and arms.

> Gesture…is a label for actions that have the features of manifest deliberate expressiveness. They are those actions or those aspects of another's actions that, having these features tend to be directly perceived as being under the guidance of the observed person's voluntary control and being done for the purposes of expression rather than in the service of some practical aim. (Kendon, 2004, p. 15)

Some singing worshippers feel compelled to express themselves beyond the voice by employing their hands.

> I think that the first time I really noticed people gesturing was going to places like camp and retreats and stuff with people my age. People at my church didn't really do it or I didn't notice it until probably high school. A lot of the people at camp were from other places, but I noticed with myself, if I do it at camp I wouldn't necessarily do it in my home church. I felt kind of stupid doing it at home and about how comfortable I felt around other people because people at home weren't doing it.
>
> After some time, I got more comfortable with it just because I saw it more often and it wasn't as weird of a thing and I kind of made myself do it sometimes just because I knew I needed to not worry about what other people were thinking. I was doing it because I was worshipping God. But there have been times when I felt like I was more doing it to show other people that I was worshipping God, but in the beginning it was just because I wanted to worship God myself.
>
> I lift my hands up, sometimes straight up and sometimes open palms in front of me. What I do depends on the song or what's going on in my head. If the song's talking about God as my father or something, then my hands and arms might be straight up. If it's talking about wanting him to give me peace or

blessings or something like that, then I probably have my hands out. I usually do this when the song starts getting more emotional, more intense which occurs most often in the repeated part of the song. Even if the band doesn't crank up the intensity, if I am in that place where I am just worshipping and it's just completely me and him, then I will still raise my hands. But the activity of the band definitely helps sometimes.

One time at the triennial [denominational conference], quite a few years ago – that's when I was really into lifting my hands and that kind of worship – I had this experience where I just knew that God was real and that God was there and I completely trusted him. So, knowing he was real and feeling this in that worship experience – I don't know how to explain how it feels – I had just kind of a sureness that he was listening. Because of that special time, lifting my hands has become more…um…just worshipping God than doing the actions for other people, although I do that too, at different times.

When I look at my friends, singing and raising their arms and stuff, sometimes I wonder what's going on their heads, because I know that some people do it just because they know they just want to look like they're….it's more like showing other people and sometimes it's not really just between them and God. And sometimes it's just because of the feeling with the music and stuff and so sometimes I wonder how much it means to them personally, if they're worshipping God or they're just doing the actions. Sometimes I just see people who look like amazing Christians when they are worshipping. Then, I see them later and they're doing stuff that just doesn't honour God. So it makes me think, I guess. (Shelley)

Gesturing with my hands when I'm singing can mean, to me, surrender in a way. I think that it is important to sing with the congregation and that it is important to sing songs to God all the time, but to me, to raise my hands, things of that nature, is to give a more meaningful gesture than just "here I am, singing like I always do." In doing this I'm almost giving him [God] the words that I'm saying while my hands are raised. It varies when I actually do this. It's mostly when I find

meaning that maybe I didn't realize before. And saying "Yes, God, this is what I've been trying to say." (Chelsea)

I raise my hands because I think that's a way of praising God. I do it palms up usually and I raise them above the shoulders. I believe from reading and doing some studying that it's honouring to him. And my whole purpose in life is to honour him. But I must admit that it's not as comfortable at this church as it has been at some of the other churches I have attended. How many people do you see in this church raising their hands? But I've gotten past that. I don't need to do what other people are doing, because my faith is not what other peoples' faith is – it's my own faith.

I sometimes raise my hand and there are times when I wouldn't. I do it when I really am communicating with God and that's what I want to say to him, or I'm asking him for something. It's kind of a way that I feel he can connect with me. In some ways, raising my hand means that I'm committing to him or in submission, I'm asking for his blessing or that I'm giving him the praise that's due him. So it's openness both ways – not just receiving but giving. It has to be two ways. (Kate)

I find sometimes, watching the congregation, I get a little amused just thinking about how ironic it is, that, for instance, when we are singing a song that maybe was taken from a psalm of David and talking about jumping and raising our hands and shouting and dancing, everybody's standing there with their hands clasped behind their back and solemn looks on their faces and not moving at all. But, I'm not going to judge people for that because worship is a very personal thing, and if that's how you worship, I can't say that it's the wrong way to worship. However, it's not how I usually would like to worship. I like to move a little bit: my arms, move my feet, sway back and forth a little bit. My Mom worships at a church where they really express themselves physically while singing and I enjoy being there. I don't feel drawn to worship that way every Sunday, but I do like to move a little bit. When the song is talking about lifting my hands up or shouting or

> dancing, I feel like doing that and sometimes I do a little bit, but I feel a little funny being one of only one or two or three people in the whole room. But I do…I like to sometimes clap a little bit, or tap on the pew in front of me and wiggle around a little bit while I'm singing. (Laura)

We have already seen that when singing, it is common to feel more vulnerable than when talking; "[singing] draws a different sort of attention to the singer….Singing seems to be self-revealing in a way that speaking is not" (Frith, 1996b, p. 172). And when we gesture while singing, we are exposing ourselves at an additional level, projecting another layer of meaning. Worshipping singers, who choose to use their bodies in this way, know that they are now spatially communicating – materially speaking.

> A gesture is at once an action and a mode of discourse. In the activities of caressing, waving farewell, and shaking the hand of a returning colleague, something is said in its being done. The "speech" of gestures is embedded in action. (Schrag, 1986, p. 37)

In worship, we may sing of a relationship with God; with our mouths we give praise, we adore, we petition. But gesture is a greater incarnation: it is a showing, a demonstration. Word has become flesh. What we sing is now made more real and less abstract, becoming a little more practice than theory. Action and words move the particulars of communication along the continuum from a thought, through a voiced intention to include some sort of doing. Although it may be a small action, gesturing lends credence to purpose, pointing forward to a more full enactment of voiced intention.

The singing voice is easily blended into the aggregate, one sound becoming lost among many. But if we gesture while singing in community, we move out from the anonymity of the crowd. Gestures are silent yet visible and thus reach further than the sound of a voice (Kendon, 2004). They are louder than the singing and comprise a more complete and more powerful proclamation, like underlining, *italicizing* or using UPPER CASE LETTERS. These give emphasis and strong exclamation without changing the vocabulary.

When we add gesture to song in corporate worship, we use more of our body to tell of our vertical relationship with God, but it is expressed within the horizontal connectedness that is the congregation. Perhaps gesturing singers are viewed as different

in some way. Sometimes, if we are one of the few who gesture in a communal setting, we make ourselves a visible minority and we may feel threatened, vulnerable, having moved away from the crowd, not conforming to them but obeying an inner voice. We are willing to allow our body to shout above the song, using another, stronger kind of language. We are willing to act emphatically and risk being seen as ones who must really mean what they say. Now we may also be known as those who seem to have more to say than most and then held accountable for our shouting. It may be that in gesturing, the body speaks a different or unacceptable language compared to that of the song, and those who see it may become confused and distracted.

> Bodily comportments are not simply of expressions of internal feelings but are ways of 'understandingly-being-towards' disclosed entities and events. (Anton, 2001, pp. 43, 44)

This is especially true when one incorporates a gesture that has a commonly recognizable meaning. Tresidder (1997) writes that hands open and raised with palm upward has the universal meaning of blessing, peace and protection. When both hands are raised high, we adore, surrender and are receptive to celestial grace.

"Really worshipping"

> When I'm worshipping, I'm paying attention mostly to the words that I'm singing and the sound of the song itself. I usually close my eyes; it's a way for me to kind of tune out the people and the distractions that are going on around me. And I find that when I've got my eyes closed, I can focus much more on the words and just get to that stage of worship a lot more quickly. Basically, worship is when you get to the point when you're communicating with God rather than just singing for singing. There's a pretty fuzzy line there. But I think it's very possible to sing a lot of worship songs and never really worship. Part of knowing you've really worshipped is the feeling of being emotionally invested in what you are singing. And sometimes it's more cerebral than that; just kind of realizing that what you're singing is applying to yourself and to the way that you feel about God.

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So, a good worship experience for me is when I feel like I've connected with God and when I'm not just singing the songs, but I'm singing the song for a reason. When I feel like I'm connecting with God, part of it is emotional. I may feel a lot of gratefulness. Sometimes there is a lot of guilt. It depends on the particular song and on how I'm approaching God that day. There are days I'm very joyful and there are days when I'm a lot more mellow. It's just like you can read the words and they're just words or you can kind of start to feel the words. It's hard to explain what you're feeling then. If you were to just say the words – I mean you probably could just say them and eventually you would feel like you were worshipping. But when you're singing them, you are allowed to pour so much more emotion into them. At least, for me that's the way I express myself emotionally.

With hymns it is much more about the words. There's a lot of powerful stuff packed in the hymns. I really enjoy singing them and un-compacting them and really seeing what the words mean. And with choruses, it's much more of an emotional reaction. There's a lot of repetition and the first couple of times through…it takes a while to kind of switch from being aware of your surroundings to being aware of communion with God. So the first few times, I'm listening to people around me and listening to myself sing, then after I've had the repetition, I can tune that out and focus on actual worship. I think the repetition of the words play into my focus on worship. By the end I'm able to take the words and use those as my own, whereas at the beginning I'm just singing something that is in front of me. It's different with a hymn, when you've constantly got new things that you're singing about. Sometimes it's more difficult to get past listening to the words and music for itself, to get to the point when you're actually using them as communication. (Ruth)

When Dad used to come to the church I went to in Vancouver, he didn't like the repetition of the choruses at all. When we got to the second or third time through, he had the attitude, "We've sung this already." The point was done for him, while I was still in that feeling-out-the-song stage; maybe still thinking about things that

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were going on at work, thinking about the words themselves – not worshipping yet – and so I don't mind repeating as much. I should say that sometimes when you get to the fifth of sixth time, you're like, ok, it's gone on long enough. But I like it when a song repeats a few times. Part of that is because I really don't have a significant amount of musical talent, and when I can participate in a song more and continue to sing, I enjoy that. I can continue to sing it and continue to be a part of the song and continue thinking instead of just reading some words on a page that I'm not familiar with and trying to figure out the hymns and the harmonies. (Norman)

And when it comes to singing worship songs, just singing them through once, I don't always have a chance to really meditate on the words. I find I can sing with much more feeling if I have a chance to kind of meditate on the words and really think about what they mean to me while I'm singing them. And so I find if we just go through a worship song once, it doesn't give me enough time to do that and if I'm singing out of the hymnal, concentrating too hard on reading the notes and getting the words right, then I find I don't have enough chance to do that either. Twice is good. Three times is better. Any more than that starts to get annoying. I just find that once I've kind of got it and felt it and I've got it out, and then…that's all I'm going to get out of it that day.

With the hymns, I guess the most important thing to me would be to sing for longer. Even the ones I don't like, if we were to sing them for longer, it would be easier for me to really get deeper into them. For some of them, the ones that only have three verses; they would be good to repeat. But the ones that have six verses; that would be a little much to repeat. But maybe even just to sing two or three in a row, that's good; that helps because if we just sing one here and do some other stuff, and then sing one there and do some other stuff, I find I feel very shallow in the hymns. To just sing for longer, I would really like that. (Laura)
There are often times when I feel that this [song] is really saying what I feel. So I guess that's worship isn't it? It's an identification, it's a relating to what is being sung, and I think that can happen even when somebody else is singing and I

> really, really get into… [no words here]…I guess music is the ultimate worship experience in that I can really relate to what is being spoken, and that can take me into a worship experience. But music seems to have within it the elements that transport; even beautiful orchestral music or beautiful piano music can have a similar effect. I suppose it is getting out of myself and getting into a relationship with God. I guess it's more getting out of myself and into a spiritual relationship, another dimension. (Freda)

In these anecdotes the singers contrast "really worshipping" with "just singing." It appears that "just singing" is not merely a type of (dis)engagement with song, but apparently missing a major point or purpose of singing in the worship service. The singer, while just singing, is not experiencing on a satisfactory level what has been interpreted as connecting with God. The recipe for just singing seems to be: not being vulnerable to music, thus not being transported, not relating to the text, and not being able to sense that the song is really saying what I feel. Just singing is a lost opportunity for a central dimension of what has been presented and understood as the experience of worship.

Worship is homage or reverence paid to a deity, especially in a formal service and in its archaic roots, it meant worthiness, merit; recognition given or due; honour and respect (Pearsall & Trumble, 1996). In this modern enactment, worship appears to be a serious endeavour in which personal devotion is proclaimed, and in this act of proclamation, it is invested with individual significance. When worship is sung, it becomes more than a song: it is a confession of a truth, a gathering of as much of self as can be expressed in sincerity and proclaimed in public to God with a sense of privacy appropriate to personal communion. And this conception of worship seems to be contingent, depending on whether or not the song and the act of singing it generates and reflects "how I feel" about God.

Really worshipping singers seem to experience something thoughtful and rich that is centered on and given form primarily by the sung word. This is a mutual investment as words are allowed to trigger a response from the singer, who then pours something of self back into the words as they are sung: sung words give impetus to feelings; feelings are given to sung words.

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> [T]o sing words is to elevate them in some way, to make them special, to give them a new form of intensity. This is obvious in the use of singing to mark off religious expression from the everyday use of words. (Frith, 1996, p. 172)

To feel words, sung or spoken, they have to be drawn near, brought within reach, grasped and admitted inside our various boundaries. When words are held at a distance, they are more likely kept outside, looked at, merely read and sung dispassionately or un-mindedly, not as easily gathered into deep significance. This is just singing in its various manifestations. But when we are able to more fully be-in-song-in-singing, the presentation of words is altered. In melody, word-sounds can be smooth or jagged, lie flat, move up or down or both, and they can change in duration and repeat in ways that would seem ridiculous if spoken. In a myriad of manners, song guarantees the delivery of its lyrics in a diversity of shapes, colours and contours. Transformed, they issue a clear invitation for sensitized singers to come near, to explore, expand and elucidate each syllable, every vowel and consonant. As a result singers can delight in expressive exploration of words' nooks and crannies – feeling them. Singers who are really worshipping are purposefully singing, deliberately mining every word to discover a greater realization of its potential for feelingfulness.

> If we consider only the conceptual and delimiting meaning of words, it is true that the verbal form…appears arbitrary. But it would no longer appear so if we took into account the emotional content of the word, which we have called…its 'gestural' sense, which is all-important in poetry, for example. It would then be found that the words, vowels and phonemes are so many ways of 'singing' the world, and that their function is to represent things not, as the naïve onomatopoeic theory had it, by reason of an objective resemblance, but because they extract, and literally express, their emotional essence. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 217)

But even as the emotional essence of every word is being explored, song constrains the singer within the confines of its larger structural boundaries: phrases and sentences, verses and refrains. These limit meanings and bind the song to the singer, not as a restrictive event but as a recognizable episode about something that may be full of latent journeys into self and of whatever the song sings about. Every song in its totality can then become a portal to a somewhat more definable world of thoughts and sentiments.

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It seems that many worshippers highly value words that speak quickly to them and through them, not demanding explanation or analysis. This is in contrast to a thick vocabulary which, when presented in a melody, becomes time-bound and often frustrating as it is inadequately apprehended and comprehended: it is too much, too fast. But when words in song are perceived to be immediately accessible, hospitable and familiar they can be welcomed as native tongue. In that moment of encounter, sentiments may be more easily aroused by all of what the song is and says, for within many worshippers lie named, recognized feelings that await animation by the singing of song. However, song can also outline un-nameable feelings; possibly it is in this capacity that the music has more power than the word. In both instances, what is sung with feeling may now effortlessly resonate with the substance of one's life and the song becomes my song given.

Reiteration draws attention. For some singers, repeating the whole or part of a song creates unnecessary or unwelcome interest. For example, if, after the first pass, the words are found to be too familiar, trite and shallow, or even immediately satisfying in their eloquence, a second incantation may be a pointless exercise. For others singers, repetition presents an opportunity for further discovery. It draws out a song, offering more time for participants to be in the song. As well, the song can now draw out from each singer new import, extra insight and added awareness. Some worshippers need this time for words to evolve; for ideas to become expressions of self, for voiced feelings about God to be personally felt and then authentically sung to God in and as worship. Actual worship apparently is achieved when the sung words are able to be possessed, felt and offered wholeheartedly to God as a personal communication.

Ricoeur (1991), in analyzing readers' responses to story, describes what he calls appropriation.

> [A]ppropriation is the process by which the revelation of new modes of being…gives the subject new capacities for knowing himself. If the reference of a text is the projection of a world, then it is not…the reader who projects himself. The reader is rather broadened in his capacity to project himself by receiving a new mode of being from the text itself. (p. 97)

Excerpt from: Adnams, G. (2008). *The Experience of Congregational Singing: An Ethno-phenomenological approach.* University of Alberta, Edmonton.

Although worship song is not usually in narrative form, it does project a world of concepts and worshipful sentiment about and towards a Deity and calls the singer to a state of agreement and feelingfulness, a place where one can really worship relying on a sensitive awareness of one's enlarged, in-the-moment mode of being.

It is clear that singing and song provide both the means and the matter for worship. Perhaps an effective worship song can be likened to a church window of stained glass, a casement of multi-shaded expression through which the Divine is sought, adored, celebrated, petitioned. It may contain the substance of worship: the scene, the characters, the gestures, the intentions. Sometimes it may be conceptually vague, abstract, while in its form it furnishes rich layered implications.

A stained glass window has many shapes, textures and hues that are subtly dependent on light seen through and brought toward. Its effectiveness depends on from where we see or our point of view – like knowledge and experience that filters and tints meanings. We are able to worship by virtue of our position and our response. When standing before such a luminous scene, we can bathe in its light; our own bodies bear and absorb its colours, and we may see ourselves as partakers of and participants in the representation. As the transformed and transforming light is splayed upon us, we may be changed for the moment, or perhaps forever. And so it is when singing-in-song-in-worship.

Some worshippers need to feel secluded, alone with God in the crowd. As reported: "I usually close my eyes; it's a way for me to kind of tune out the people and the distractions that are going on around me." Another congregant similarly said:

> I quite often close my eyes, presuming I know the words and the music, because I can block out what's around me. I really don't care who's there. And I sing as if I don't care who's there, because I'm not singing for you or them; I'm really singing for the Lord. (Kate)

There is irony here. Eyes are closed to shut out all of the other singers who are necessary for the occasion of singing in a worship service. But at some point in time, they apparently become a distraction for a really worshipping member whose goal appears to be a private, inner awareness of communicating to God the personalized feelings named in the communally sung words.

Excerpt from: Adnams, G. (2008). *The Experience of Congregational Singing: An Ethno-phenomenological approach.* University of Alberta, Edmonton.

How are we to understand the sense of being alone with God while singing with others? Part of the feelingful response to a song is a product of singing in a group. We have all experienced the effect of communal emotion – we laugh more heartily at a TV comedy when we are watching together with friends than when we are by ourselves. Likewise, the point of the laugh track provided by the producers of the program is to offer the illusion of not being alone in our amusement. Somehow, a group can supply additional inspiration upon which we draw for richer participation in an event. Inspiration is defined as "a supposed force or influence on poets, artists, musicians, etc., stimulating creative activity, exalted thoughts etc." (Pearsall & Trumble, 1996) but we know that this extends far beyond the so-called creative community named. For anyone to really worship, it is evident that the content of the songs sung must be inspiring: able to stimulate exalted thoughts and feelings. As well, the intent of the singer should be to ascribe honour to God: worship. With these in place, even though singers seem to want to ignore other singers, the context of this activity remains communal and thus influential.

But the intentional awareness of the worshipper has been shifted. Like a zoom lens, the focal point excludes all but the subject; everything else is on the periphery, present in the reality outside the lens, but unseen within its bounds. Self and sentiment "about" seem to be all that is of consequence: my words, how I feel. The wonder of us before God, the multi-voiced local community that has been called into being seems to be merely a setting that allows the individual to begin the journey towards communing with God privately. Many singers achieve a state of feeling something that is interpreted as an individual connection with God, a sense of personally communicating, of singing alone to Deity. The link becomes perceptible once the singer has entered this mode of being called really worshipping that appears to depend on the worshippers' ability to respond to the evocative power of a song – words and music. As feelings are felt and expressed, they are turned towards God, each worshipper believing him to be listening, hearing not just my song but the depth of personal significance I have given to the song and my investment of my sentiment. Emotional arousal seems to be the gauge by which each worshipper measures his or her sincerity.

Excerpt from: Adnams, G. (2008). *The Experience of Congregational Singing: An Ethno-phenomenological approach.* University of Alberta, Edmonton.

Conclusion

From the witnesses who have spoken of their experiences as congregational singers, we know that singing is not merely the production of songs by vocalists. Singing involves the singer in multi-layered interactions with and around music and word, content and context, attention and intent. Such interactions may produce in each singer actions and reactions that are subtle, interior, deeply felt, or, perhaps minimally felt or little response other than producing sound. Outward manifestations inspired by song and singing may be a smile, a raised hand, a tapping foot or simple sentience. But all of what is experienced by the singer is not necessarily evidence of purpose, for in a church service, singing is not just singing. Singing and worship seem to be phenomena that are intertwined. For each singer, one challenge appears as a need to know, in some manner, that in the moment of singing, what is inside is the same as what is outside; that what is sung is what is felt to be real and expressed authentically in and as worship. In this sense, each congregational singer is in his or her own reality, alone in the crowd but nonetheless necessary to the union that is the communal voice. How, then, is the desire to be authentic in voiced worship realized by those who participate in congregational song? This question is pursued in the next chapter.

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