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**Sing to the Lord in a
New Style:**
The Use of Jazz in a
Christian Worship Context

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Abstract

One of the central elements in almost all Christian church services is music, the style of which varies greatly from traditional hymnody to gospel influenced rock. However, the use of jazz music is very rare, and there is very little academic work discussing the reasons why. Historically, the Church has restricted the variety of musical styles used in worship, despite theological material suggesting that there is no reason to do so. Historical research reveals that the lack of jazz music is the result of prejudices of the general population, and theological jazz music has a lot to offer the contemporary church as both a metaphor for theological concepts, and as a practical expression of worship. The few practical examples where jazz is being used prove that jazz is both effective and powerful. Despite these merits it is unlikely that jazz will enter the mainstream church, although the gradual increase of jazz in the high-church tradition is likely to continue.

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Chapter One - Introduction

I never liked jazz music because jazz music didn't resolve... I used to not like God because God didn't resolve. But that was before any of this happened.

(Miller, 2003, p. ix)

Introduction

The relationship between jazz music and the Christian faith has often been nothing more than a mysterious idea explored only by a few interested individuals. This dissertation is based on the conviction that much can be gained from exploring this relationship at an academic level.

As a jazz musician and a practicing Christian, I have often struggled to combine jazz music and the Christian faith in both my own thoughts and a practical musical expression. The Christian faith affirms that God is active within all of creation and within all of our lives. If this is the case then God must have something to do with jazz music, and jazz music may have something to teach us about God.

Music has a close connection with Christianity particularly through its use in a worship setting, usually in the form of congregational singing. The purpose of the music is to bring life to the words, and to create a sense of unity among those participating in the music. Interestingly, the term 'language' is often used to describe standard jazz phrases and licks and there is often a strong sense of unity between the players in a band. So why is jazz rarely used in a worship context?

Research question

The primary research question is as follows: 'Can jazz be used in a Christian worship context?' The question is specially referring to a Christian worship context within the United Kingdom because of the limited size and scope of this study. Due to the location of much of the development of jazz, examples and situations beyond the United Kingdom will be discussed, but only as background information. Attempts will be made to represent the spectrum of Christianity across the United Kingdom. This in itself, however, is a challenging aim.

Definitions and assumptions

In order to effectively evaluate the primary research question of this study, a belief in the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith as expressed in the Nicene Creed (Methodist Church, 1999, p. 300) is assumed. More recent developments within Christian theology will be discussed when it is relevant to the research question, or when it arises from part of the research. Discussion concerning musical matters will be within the context of western, tonal music.

Throughout this dissertation the word worship refers only to Christian worship. The word Church will be capitalised when referring to the global movement of believing Christians, whereas it will not be capitalised when referring to an individual local church, a group of churches or when it is used as an adjective. The word jazz refers specially to what many have called 'modern jazz' which can be defined as music within the jazz tradition from bebop onwards. Earlier music falling within the jazz tradition will be mentioned, but more specific names will be used such as big-band, swing or New Orleans jazz.

Methods

The research question concerns a practical situation within the Christian tradition. Therefore, the question will be approached in three ways: theologically, historically and practically. There is a shortage of academic material directly related to the research question and so the bibliography contains a wider spectrum of subjects and some items are internet articles or older publications. In these situations care and attention was taken to objectively evaluate the authenticity of the source and the reliability of the information. All internet articles have a named author and most are academic work. Any information or quotes from the older publications are discussed in the context of the time and culture when the information was published.

Due to the nature of the research question and the nature of jazz music itself, some practical research such as interview material will also be discussed in order to supplement the academic research. The names of the people involved will only be used if they were aware that the interview was in aid of this study. When referring to specific situations I have experienced as part of the research, the names of people involved will not be used. Personal experience and reflection will also be considered if, and when, it is appropriate to the discussion.

The structure of the dissertation will be as follows. Firstly, the research question will be considered in the negative form: ‘Is there any reason why jazz should not be used in a Christian worship context?’ This will be approached firstly from a theological angle, and secondly from an historical angle.¹ The research question will then be asked in a positive form: ‘Does jazz have anything to contribute in a Christian worship context?’ This question will be approached primarily from a theological angle but also from a practical angle.² Finally, conclusions will be drawn taking into account the current situation of churches in the United Kingdom.

¹ The theology is found in chapter one whereas the history is in chapter two.

² The theology is in chapter four whereas the practical angle is explored in chapter five.

Chapter Two - Christian Worship Music

I will be glad and rejoice in You; I will sing praise to Your name, O Most

High. (Psalm 9:2)

Introduction

Ever since the 1st century the relationship between music and Christianity has been a very turbulent one. Many of the greatest classical composers were deeply embedded in the church tradition and wrote large scale works for use in worship. On the other hand, some Christian traditions and churches have choked any musical creativity by either restricting the variety of accepted music, or banning music altogether. Today, music is a fundamental ingredient of worship services in nearly all the major denominations from black Pentecostal to Roman Catholic, and is often enjoyed by Christians in many different social settings.

The terms 'Christian music' and 'worship music' have evolved as an attempt to categorise music which has a connection to Christianity. However, they are often confused with each other and sometimes become rather subjective and essentially meaningless in an objective discussion. The purpose of this chapter is to examine these two terms in order to be able to explore the true nature of the relationship between music and Christianity. The background section sets the scene from a historical angle before a discussion of the two terms from a contemporary perspective.

Background

As an institution, the Church has often exercised excessive control over the style and content of music in an attempt to ensure its appropriateness for a church setting. Throughout history theologians and leaders within the Church have reached different conclusions on what was appropriate for that time, making judgement calls concerning the instrumentation, volume, speed and virtuosity of the music so that it aided, but did not distract from, the focus on God. Until the Protestant Reformation most professional music had some connection with the Church, which was very critical of most music, particularly when considering the music for use in worship.

During the time of the Protestant Reformation a number influential individuals vocalised their opinions. Erik Routley describes Martin Luther's positive attitude towards music in worship by contrasting it with the criticism from earlier generations:

He wants his people to join in the singing, and so he devises a musical form that they can sing as their own part in the service. But he loves music too well to indulge in the kind of moralistic criticism of which we saw much in earlier times. (Routley, 1967, p. 120)

In contrast to Luther, Huldreich Zwingli of Zurich excluded music from worship altogether despite his theological connections with the Reformation. Another reformer named John Calvin developed a doctrine of sacred music which Routley summarises in three points: "(1) Music is for the people, so it must be simple; (2) Music is for God, so it must be modest; (3) These objects are best attained by the music of unaccompanied voice." (Routley, 1967, p. 125). Routley continues by commenting on the abundance of secular music during the 16th century which was not ignored by the reformers but equally did not influence Protestant church music.

The Catholic Church responded by taking a rather different path during the Counter-Reformation; Routley describes it by saying: "The Catholic church 'baptised' the secular musicians into sacred uses" (Routley, 1967, p. 135). He concludes by commenting that both Catholic and Protestant made a "new distinction between sacred and secular" (Routley, 1967, p. 135).

It is clear that during the Reformation a wide spectrum of opinion led to more acceptance of many different styles of music. However, between the Reformation and Routley's book in 1967, some styles, including jazz, were not even considered. Speaking in 1967 Routley concludes his book *The Church & Music* (Routley, 1967) with some thoughts on what direction the church was going. Interestingly he comments that "we will not want anymore to say that all... jazz music is bad". He ends the book with this quote: "Conversation is at the heart of it. This is the age in which it can happen" (Routley, 1967, p. 231). Since 1967 this conversation has been happening and today views and attitudes within the Church are more varied with many taking a more open and accepting approach.

Christian music

The term 'Christian' music, also called 'sacred' or 'holy' music, is the broader of the two terms encompassing all 'worship' music and more besides. There are many different methods through

which people categorise music under this heading: lyrical content, musical style and the spiritual conviction of the composer or performer being the major three ways at both an academic and a popular level. The term has also been used to attack music which is deemed secular, unhelpful or in more extreme cases evil, by grouping it under the heading ‘non-Christian’.

Traditionally the most obvious and widespread method, particularly at a popular level, is by the lyrical content: if the lyrics express a Christian worldview, or ideas associated with Christianity, then it is Christian music. The problem with this method is that there is a very large proportion of music which is written or performed without a vocalist and therefore does not contain any lyrics. It seems very unsatisfactory to categorise all non-vocal music under the non-Christian heading or to label it as impossible to categorise. This problem is even more prevalent in jazz as only a small percentage of jazz is vocal music. However, many jazz standards usually played as instrumental items are based on show tunes which originally contained lyrics.¹ In these situations the lyrics are often ignored and sometimes not even printed. Interestingly, this progression is mirrored in the development of hymnody where secular tunes were sung with Christian words. This is a good example of what Routley was referring to when he talks about baptising secular music (Routley, 1967, p. 135). This method of evaluation by considering the lyrical content also encourages a common problem within the Church when a discussion about music turns in to a discussion about words (Begbie, 2007, p. 24).

For others the term has become the name of an actual genre of music, the exact style of which varies from person to person. Generally this is based on the person’s subjective experience of music from their own church or personal music collection. In some situations the word ‘Christian’ is combined with the name of another genre,² but this then relies on another additional method to separate the Christian and non-Christian music from within the larger genre. It is impossible to use this method alone in an objective discussion.

In the first section of their book *The Heart of Jazz*, Grossman and Farrell (1976) argue that New Orleans jazz music can be accurately labeled as Christian. They build their argument by evaluating the spiritual convictions and beliefs of the musicians who both played and composed most New

¹ A common example being ‘All the Things You Are’.

² The most common example is ‘Christian rock’ which has its own wikipedia page and genre category on real.com.

Orleans jazz music. This is an interesting conclusion. However, it is built on the assumption that music can have “specifically Christian content” (Grossman and Farrell, 1976, p. 51) purely through its performance or composition by musicians with a Christian belief who wish to express a distinctly religious feeling. They claim that music can have both sacred and secular content, a theory which would be very hard to apply when evaluating music itself. Harold Best challenges this theory directly by claiming that it ignores the Christian doctrine of common grace, which he defines by saying “God blesses, refreshes, gifts, and enables the entire race” (Best, 1997, p. 52). He claims that Christians and non-Christians alike can create and perform music which is good in the eyes of God.

None of the methods of evaluation are a satisfactory way of dividing music into Christian and non-Christian, sacred and secular, or as Harold Best concludes:

There is nothing un- or anti-Christian about any kind of music. By the same token there is no such thing as Christian music. If there were what would it be?... There is no scriptural way to answer these questions other than to say, right at the outset, that the doctrine of common grace helps us to understand why all music, flowing out of the creativities of a thousand cultures, subcultures, lifestyles, and belief systems can be good (Best, 1997, p. 52-53).

So what does this mean for the term ‘Christian music’ which is regularly used in conversation?

Church leader and writer Rob Bell makes some interesting comments about the term:

Something can be labeled "Christian" and not be true or good... It is possible for music to be labeled Christian and be terrible music. It could lack creativity and inspiration. The lyrics could be recycled cliches. That "Christian" band could actually be giving Jesus a bad name because they aren't a great band... Christian is a great noun and a poor adjective. (Bell, 2006, p. 84)

When considering the relationship between music and Christianity, not only does Bell agree with Best in affirming the goodness of music created by non-Christians, but he suggests that when getting to the heart of this term there is a search for music which is good in quality and also true.

Worship music

A simple definition of worship music would be: music used in a worship service. The immediate question which follows is the traditional question concerning the appropriateness of the music. This question can only be answered by considering the nature of worship.

Use of the word worship has changed over the years. Evaluating the use of the word ‘worship’ in the Bible is a good place to start as it has been the starting point for most theologians and

churchgoers over the years. The Old Testament presents a much narrower picture of worship than more recent definitions and understandings. This picture is accurately presented in the story of Abraham and Isaac (Genesis 22), which is the first mention of the word ‘worship’ in the Bible.³ In this story God calls Abraham to sacrifice his only son as an act of worship. Words such as offering, sacrifice, reverence and submission describe the attitudes and the act involved. Best appears to be working from this picture of worship when he comments on the use of music by saying “Music is neither an aid to worship nor a tool for producing it. It is an offering, uniquely given over to God” (Best, 1997, p. 9). This conviction would naturally lead to an agreement with Bell who emphasises the quality of the music offered.⁴ According to this definition, the style, instrumentation or volume of the music would seem to be irrelevant unless it is specified by God.

A more modern definition of worship is far broader and the focus is more balanced between the worshipper and the one worshipped:

Worship is a gracious encounter between God and the Church. God speaks to us, especially through scripture read and proclaimed and through symbols and sacraments. We respond chiefly through hymns and prayers and acts of dedication. (Methodist Church, 1999, p. vii)

John Leach uses this idea of response as an act of worship and combines it with God responding to the worshipper by coming in his presence and power, creating what he calls the ‘worship cycle’. “I would have to define worship simply as responding to God in order to have more of God to respond to” (Leach, 1989, p. 32). According to this definition music has a different function; it is used by the worshippers as an act of expression and it is used by God to provoke feelings and emotions. The attitudes of sacrifice and reverence are still evident but they are combined with other feelings and emotions. Reading through one of the standard services outlined in the Methodist Worship Book takes us through this journey travelled by worshippers during a service. The different mindsets, attitudes, emotions and feelings include rejoicing, adoration, confession, thanksgiving, challenge, intercession and sacrifice (Methodist Church, 1999, p. 27-38). Under a more modern definition all these would be considered worship, and music is often used to guide the worshipper through this journey, encouraging and provoking the different emotions. In contrast to the earlier definition, the

³ As the Old Testament of the Bible is written in Hebrew, Genesis 22 is the first mention of the Hebrew word ‘shachah’ (strong’s H7812), the most common word translated ‘worship’ in every book of the Old Testament with the exception of the book of Daniel which is much later in the canon.

⁴ This is in agreement with the sacrificial system in the Old Testament of the Bible which is very concerned about the quality of the animals which are sacrificed.

style and genre of the music used is very important as different rhythms or harmonies can provoke different emotions.

Another Biblical passage which has been very influential in the Church's theology of worship is from the New Testament and are words of Jesus himself: "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24).⁵ The charismatic movement within the Church take this very literally by promoting the role of the Spirit within worship, which results in contributions from all the worshippers dictating the direction of the service.⁶

The essential contribution of Pentecostal spirituality lies in its playful character. This is evident above all from the charismatic celebration which is not characterized by either order or chaos but by the dynamics of play. Through the gifts of grace (charisms), everyone has a contribution to make - regardless of race, gender or status. (Suurmond, 2004, p. 220)

Under this model, style or genre would not seem to be very important. However, the music would have to be structured in such a way that allows for flexibility of direction.

With these contrasting definitions and ideas it is very difficult to know which one to work from. One of the main differences seems to be in the difference in focus. The more the focus is turned towards the worshipper the more the style of music becomes important, because personal preference becomes an issue. Rick Warren discusses this tension in *The Purpose Driven Life* (Warren, 2002) and reaches some interesting conclusions. He defines worship as "bringing pleasure to God" (Warren, 2002, p. 64) which he argues would include all of the worship discussed above, but also goes further into everyday life. This appears to be closer to the first definition but he does acknowledge that there are some benefits for the worshippers, as "most 'worship' services also include elements of fellowship, edification, and evangelism" (Warren, 2002, p. 66).

Conclusion

The term 'Christian music' is almost impossible to define from an objective perspective. However, it is worth noting that many people have built up associations connecting certain styles and genres with their Christian faith in the same way that we might associate the famous chord sequence from the James Bond theme tune with action, adventure and mystery. This often influences the style of

⁵ All Bible references are taken from the 'New King James Version'.

⁶ The charismatic movement consists of the Pentecostal denomination and also the various charismatic strands within almost all other denominations.

music used in worship. This influence is perfectly valid if the music is to be used as a tool to guide the worshipper through a service but this is not the only possible role of music in worship, and, therefore there are many more influences at work. The complex framework constructed in the 'Worship Music' section reflects the diversity in understandings and definitions within the Church. Since the Enlightenment these different understandings have resulted in the formation of many different styles of musical worship from African music to emo-rock but, however, the use of jazz has been very minimal.

Chapter Three - History

While jazz has certainly not been the predominant musical idiom in 20th century Western evangelicalism, there exists a traceable (if sketchy or broad) history of what might be called “sacred jazz.” (Boschman, 2001, p. 2)

Introduction

By visiting a variety of churches, you can experience a wide range of music including traditional hymnody in Anglo-Catholic, Methodist and some Baptist churches; gospel influenced rhythm and blues in black led Pentecostal churches; world music in communities such as Iona; and contemporary gospel influenced rock music in some modern Anglican, Baptist and free churches. However there are very few Christian communities exploring the use of jazz music within a worship context.

Drawing on conclusions from the previous chapter, there is no objective way of categorising Christian from non-Christian music, therefore jazz is no less Christian than hymnody or indeed any other style. After looking at the nature of worship there is no reason why jazz cannot be part of a worship service. A few musicians and Church leaders have attempted to bridge the gap between jazz and Christianity by either bringing jazz into church or bringing church into a jazz context. There have been a number of jazz musicians who claim to believe in the Christian faith, but their belief does not necessarily have an impact on the content, or the use of their music.¹ The two jazz figures most vocal about their faith, who succeeded in breaking down some of the barriers between jazz and Christianity, are arguably two of the greatest and most influential figures throughout all of jazz history. Duke Ellington and John Coltrane differed greatly in their playing, their choice of ensembles, and their approach to the music. However, it seems that they shared some common ground. This chapter is a chronological overview of the relationship between jazz and Christianity with a particular focus on any examples of jazz in a Christian worship context.

The early days

Ted Gioia begins to discuss New Orleans jazz in the 1920s by briefly mentioning some of the Church connections (Gioia, 1997, p. 31). William Grossman and Jack Farrell explore these

¹ See the discussion entitled ‘Christian music’ in chapter two on p. 5-7.

connections in more depth eventually concluding that New Orleans jazz can be labeled as ‘Christian’ (Grossman and Farrell, 1976). Although this label does not fit with the conclusion to the previous chapter, it does highlight the fact that jazz was closely connected with the Church. At the same time another very similar style was in the early stages of development, namely gospel. The common influence of blues music on both jazz and gospel provided the base of a relationship between the two genres. Many players were familiar with both styles and their associated cultures, happily switching between the two on a regular basis. Despite these connections, strong convictions about social spaces kept jazz in dance halls and gospel in churches. New Orleans jazz was culturally accepted by the Church as a valid form of music, but was not permitted in what was known as a sacred space.

The Great Depression of the 1930s had a significant impact on the jazz industry forcing many musicians to change their artistic direction towards a more lucrative music: “Commercial pressures, rather than artistic prerogatives, stand out as the spur that forced many early jazz players (including Armstrong, Beiderbecke, and Hines) to embrace the big band idiom” (Gioia, 1997, p. 106). This shift in focus widened the gap between jazz and Christianity and stripped the reputation of jazz music of most of its artistic integrity:

After all, many people thought then-and now-that jazz didn’t belong in the church. Ellington bassist Aaron Bell recalled an old Webster’s dictionary definition of jazz: “a low type of music that brings out the worst emotions of mankind”. (Steed, 1999, p. 137).

As the music grew and developed into an established genre gradually losing its connections with blues and gospel, jazz moved even further away from the Church.

Duke Ellington

During the age of big band swing, Duke Ellington was one of the few musicians who managed to resist the commercial pressures. This was especially difficult for Ellington because of the financial disadvantages of being a black musician in a deeply racist culture. Janna Tull Steed describes Ellington as a reserved character who “kept a guarded privacy” (Steed, 1999, p. 52). However, we know that he read the Bible on a regular basis and even describes it as one of his “three educations” (Steed, 1999, p. 52). Ellington’s compositions were highly influenced by hymn melodies, and the Christian discipline of meditation was a key part of his creative process.

However, it was not until later in his career when these influences and his personal calling came together into a musical expression.

Duke Ellington challenged the strong convictions of many concerning social spaces by composing and performing three ‘sacred concerts’ in a variety of different churches. He identified these as the most important statement the band had ever made. Steed describes the nature of these groundbreaking and controversial concerts by saying:

These performances were concerts, not liturgies - and certainly not “jazz masses,” as Ellington had to explain repeatedly. But the original concerts were conceived for performance in sacred spaces... Ellington called Sacred Concerts a “form of worship.” The concerts were an offering to God. They contained elements of worship: prayer, musical “fire-and-brimstone sermonette,” and other expositions of scripture. (Steed, 1999, p. 135)

Steed is implying that there was some confusion concerning the nature of the concerts, which was no surprise given the belief that churches were sacred spaces and the understanding of jazz as a commercialised entertainment music.

From a modern perspective it can be concluded that Ellington achieved in bringing jazz into a Christian worship context. The language he used to describe the concerts resonates strongly with some of the definitions of worship described in the previous chapter particularly surrounding the word ‘offering’.² Steed goes on to use phrases such as “a congregation freed to participate” (Steed, 1999, p. 135) to describe the audience, which is remarkably similar to Suurmond’s definition of a charismatic celebration, and the perfect environment to encourage the response central to Leach’s ‘worship cycle’.³ For Ellington, the compositions were an expression of his faith which was “rooted in Christian doctrine but idiosyncratically selected and interpreted” (Steed, 1999, p. 133). The reasons behind his performances was guided by his own sense of calling to be “God’s messenger boy” (Ellington, quoted in Steed, 1999, p. 133).

From a study of the *Second Sacred Concert* (Ellington, 1968), it was noted that the content was primarily musical, with some lyrics, but it also included dance and narrative. Some of the music had a liturgical feel to it with the use of Biblical texts and Ellington’s own words, sometimes in the form of poetry. The focus was undoubtably Ellington’s unique and respected jazz music, which was not

² Thinking particularly of Best’s definition, see p. 7.

³ Both in chapter two on p. 8-9.

compromised despite the ‘sacred’ element to the concerts. It was a fusion of two worlds which for Ellington were one world: his world.

The Sacred Concerts were by no means the height of Ellington’s career but the recordings are still on sale today (Ellington, 1968). The concerts were very well attended, and the presence of 10,000 people at his funeral are testament to his achievement in breaking down some of the barriers concerning the performance of jazz in what was regarded as a sacred space.

Modern jazz

In the 1940s the persecuted black musicians were in search of an artistic, expressive form of music after suffering years of submission to their audiences; Gioia (1997, p. 200) describes the jazz musician as “a restless soul” (Gioia, 1997, p. 200). This resulted in the birth of a new underground music, namely bebop:

The bebop musician was trying to raise the quality of jazz from the level of utilitarian dance music to that of a chamber art form. At the same time, he was trying to raise the status of the jazzman from entertainer to artist. (Tirro, 1979)

This new community of musicians met in clubs in New York and comprised mostly of poor, drug-addicted, angry, alcoholics who often ended up in jail. The culture which surrounded this new music took jazz even further from the Church which promoted an addiction free, morally ethical life. The centre of bebop culture, the small, dark, loud, late-night club was almost the complete opposite to a church. This attitude is illustrated in Routley’s concluding sentence in *The Church & Music* (Routley, 1967) where he suggests that the common opinion within the Church until 1967 was against jazz.

On a musical level, bebop pushed jazz to the extremes with either very fast, or very slow tempos; difficult harmony; and a new model which regularly featured soloists.⁴ Mirroring the freedom from commercialism, bebop centered around freedom for the improviser within the form and structure of the composition. This became the primary model for jazz ever since and is reflected in Finkelstein’s definition of jazz as “collective improvisation” (Finkelstein, 1948, p. 108). Berliner describes this freedom by saying:

⁴ One of the early defining albums of bebop is *The Charlie Parker Story* (Parker, 1945).

Jazz artists commonly perform without musical scores and without a specialized conductor to coordinate their performances. They may never have met before the event nor played together in any other setting. Contributing further to the mystique surrounding jazz is the transient and unique nature of jazz creations: each performance's evolving ideas, sustained momentarily by the air waves, vanish as the developments overtake them, seemingly never to be repeated. (Berliner, 1994, p. 1)

When evaluating this musical model against the framework of worship music constructed in the last chapter, it would seem that jazz is a perfect medium to use in charismatic worship which has a structure but is intentionally left open, allowing direction and guidance from the Holy Spirit. It fits so well that Surrmond uses the term "jazz-factor" (Surrmond, 1994, p. 85) to describe a charismatic celebration. However, this style of worship has not found expression in jazz, but in gospel music.

In other church traditions this freedom of expression could be part of the reason jazz has been sidelined. In his theory entitled 'church-sect theory', Max Weber distinguishes between new church movements, which he labels as sects, and established Christian denominations, through the way they operate.⁵ Weber suggests that when a religious group moves from their early stage as a sect, they lose the charismatic characteristics inherited from their early leader, and become more rule-bound and authoritarian. Attitudes are often reflected in the music used for worship services; for example the use of open form gospel music in charismatic Pentecostal churches. An improvising jazz small band built on the model established by the early bebop players would fit well with a religious group still in stage one as a sect, whereas hymnody, which is much more rigid in structure is often favoured by the more established churches such as those that form part of the Anglican communion. Musicians always have an element of artistic freedom in the way they interpret the written score, but the small group jazz ensemble model encourages the soloist to take the performance wherever the music leads them, improvising for as long as they want, and always being able to rely on the support of the other players. According to this theory, jazz would not fit with any religious group which has developed beyond the initial 'sect' stage.

Another key stylistic element in jazz is the large amount of dissonance in comparison to many other styles, and the emphasis on tension over resolution. This would often be a problem within a church service for a couple of reasons. Firstly, music in church is often played by amateur musicians who have not always reached a high standard in their instrument, and styles of music with simpler, more

⁵ For a more detailed discussion on church-sect-theory see Garnett (2005, p. 73-75).

consonant harmony and less tension are often easier to play. Secondly, congregations often desire instant results and solutions to their life problems which is again reflected in the music:

Much of the music currently employed in Christian worship deploys remarkable little in the way of delayed gratification... could we be witnessing here a musical articulation of the tendency in some quarters of the Church to insist on immediate rewards and not to come to terms with the (potentially positive) realities of frustration and disappointment? (Begbie, 2000, p. 105-106)

Begbie's comment is in criticism to gospel influenced rock music, but it could be relevant to jazz in a positive light due to the abundance of tension and dissonance. A good illustration of this theme is in the medieval name for the tritone: "devil in music" (Begbie, 2007, p. 231) which is a fundamental interval in jazz because of its dissonance and tension. Interestingly, from a mathematical perspective this interval also has a certain mystery about it as the ratio on which it functions is an irrational number: the square root of two.

Bebop is primarily an instrumental form of music. In a church setting this was another barrier because since the enlightenment the Church has been overly concerned about words. This has led to an ignorance about how to use other forms of expression, particularly music. Jeremy Begbie comments in reference to his own experience:

Thinking Christians may be inclined to disregard music simply because they believe, with many others, that it does not concern any objective truth. Appraisals of music seem to be wholly or largely determined by our own preferences or by the prevailing currents of our social group. (Begbie, 2007, p. 14)

Although Begbie is referring to music in general, his comment is particularly relevant to jazz because of the lack of lyrics.

In conclusion, the culture associated with bebop did not fit with Christian morality, and many stylistic elements of modern jazz did not fit in a church worship context. However, there was one musician who appeared to overcome these problems.

John Coltrane

Arguably the greatest tenor saxophone player of jazz history, John Coltrane grew up immersed in the music and culture of bebop. The spiritual beliefs of John Coltrane have never been clear, but the one thing that can be said with confidence is that his beliefs and convictions changed and developed throughout his life and career as he played his music: "Coltrane's quest was primarily a spiritual one, and in this realm, too" (Nisenson, 1993, p. 264). The most significant spiritual experience of

his life came in the spring of 1957 after a time of deep depression, sparked off by his dismissal from Miles Davis' band. Eric Nisenson discusses Coltrane's response to his depression:

He finally decided to free himself from his addictions. He lay down in a room in his mother's house and instructed his wife to bring him only water. By this time alcohol was more of a problem than heroin, and his withdrawal was at first painful and dark. (Nisenson, 1993, p. 40)

The spiritual experience was something that would shape the rest of his career, and influence some of his greatest recordings and performances. Nisenson continues the story by describing the experience from Coltrane's perspective:

He said, he was somehow touched by God, with whom he made a deal of sorts: get him through this torment and he would devote his talent to God, he would make music that would bring people the same kind of revelation he was witnessing. (Nisenson, 1993, p. 40)

After breaking free from the addictions picked up within the culture of bebop, Coltrane, in a similar way to Ellington, had a purpose, a calling, or a vocation which was to communicate or share his spiritual beliefs with his audiences. However, Coltrane's expression of this calling was very different to Ellington's.

It would be naive to instantly label Coltrane's experience as a genuine encounter with God. Based on the little information we have, it seems that Coltrane's theology was fundamentally Christian, but with some other additions. A good example of this is in Nisenson's description of Coltrane's belief about God and his interaction with the world:

To Coltrane, the universe is a place of explosion dynamism, of stars bursting apart and reuniting, of atoms and molecules in a constant state of wild flux, with a God who is not peacefully sitting on his throne under shade trees but constantly in motion, changing the universe and being changed by it. (Nisenson, 1999, p. 186)

The Christian faith affirms that God is indeed active within his creation. However, in contrast to Nisenson's articulation of Coltrane's view, the Christian faith also affirms that God is eternal and therefore unchanging. Interestingly, many of Coltrane's moral convictions following the experience of 1957, fit perfectly with a Christian worldview. He celebrated the goodness of creation (Nisenson, 1993, p. 121); he strongly opposed hatred, violence and racism (Nisenson, 1993, p. 165); and the new music he pioneered centered around freedom both musically and socially (Nisenson, 1993, p. 144).

A Love Supreme (Coltrane, 1964), one of the best selling jazz albums of all time, is regarded as John Coltrane's most profound statement both musically and spiritually. In the liner notes he describes

his spiritual experience of 1957 and also included a poem of thanksgiving written to God. Many have described the album as worship, and around the time of the recording Coltrane himself told his ex-wife that 90% of his playing would be prayer. In the final movement, named 'Psalm', he attempts to articulate the words of his love poem on the saxophone; Lewis Porter describes it as "wordless recitation" (Porter, 1999, p. 244).

In the liner notes, Coltrane describes the album as "a humble offering to Him" (Coltrane, 1964, CD Notes), language which is very similar to the early definitions of worship discussed in the previous chapter. He also describes it as an act of thanksgiving to God, a key element of almost all worship services.⁶ The final movement is almost liturgical in the way that Coltrane plays the words of his poem, and through the use of his language such as the word 'us' instead of 'I', he opens an invitation to the audience to join him. If any jazz performance has brought worship into a jazz context, it is *A Love Supreme*.

Jazz vespers

The major changes in social, political and religious life during the 1960s provided the fertile land for musicians such as Ellington and Coltrane to work with. The Second Vatican Council was an attempt to more fully define the nature of the church and encourage Christian unity. It saw the Catholic Church encourage many new projects such as new translations of the Bible and the translation of Catholic masses into the native languages of the congregations. This was the perfect time to explore music as a new language of communication in church. Steed comments on the situation during the 1960s: "Jazz masses and Protestant jazz services gained a degree of popularity in urban areas, although the practice was still seen as a radical departure from traditional worship" (Steed, 1999, p. 115).

The first, and most significant of all these services was at St Peter's Church in New York City, which soon became the home church of Duke Ellington. St Peter's was the base for the first, full-time pastor to the jazz community, Reverend John Garcia Gensel. Nelson Boschman explains the nature of the jazz vespers services run by Gensel:

⁶ Thanksgiving is one of the sections in a standard service in the Methodist Worship Book (Methodist Church, 1999), see p. 8.

Designed for jazz musicians who were unable to get up for Sunday morning services after late Saturday gigs, Reverend Gensel invited them to perform a worship service by and for jazz musicians . . . the public is invited. (Boschman, 2001, p. 3)

The services were designed so that jazz musicians could “communicate with God in their own words, with music they feel, and in an atmosphere of acceptance” (Pitt, n.d.). The communication between God and the worshipper fits perfectly with Leach’s worship cycle discussed in chapter two. Interestingly, traditional jazz phrases and licks are often referred to as ‘language’. This could have developed because of the way that jazz musicians use the music as a form of communication. Gensel drew both of these ideas together to create a very effective worship service from both a jazz and a Christian point of view.

Both the ministry and the services have stood the test of time. James Pitt comments on the significance in terms of the church’s reputation: “There is today a quiet pride that the Ministry’s unique attraction for all media has helped make St Peter’s ‘The First Church of Jazz’ and one of the best-known Lutheran churches in the world” (Pitt, n.d.). Since the first service in 1965, jazz vespers services have been established at churches all over the world including St Anne’s Lutheran Church in London, and St Andrew’s Wesley Church in Vancouver.

Modern gospel influenced rock

The most recent widespread development in church music is a style which was developed by a band named ‘Delirious?’ in the early 1990s. *Cutting Edge* (Delirious?, 1994) was the beginning of a new musical style which can be accurately described as gospel influenced rock music. *Here I Am to Worship* (Hughes, 2001) is a defining example of this music as it developed after entering widespread use. This style is not particularly similar to jazz, although the standard instrumentation is closer to jazz than the majority of traditional church music. Occasionally a jazz based approach towards the music is taken with the use of open forms and improvisation. In the conclusion to his book *A Short History of English Church Music* (Routley, 1997), Routley is very critical of this music. He comments on it by saying:

A large amount of music continues to be produced with much of it being of poor quality, as grammatically unconvincing as it is lacking in artistic credibility. How much of this will survive in the long run is questionable. (Routley, 1997, p. 141)

With the lack of artistic credibility, this does have resonances with jazz in the 1940s and 1950s, but the musical connections are minimal. This style has now become the primary style of music used within worship in most conservative evangelical and modern charismatic churches.

Conclusion

It is easy to see why jazz has not often found its way into the Church. However, in all the specific examples in this chapter, jazz has been very effective within situations and contexts which can be identified as worship. Duke Ellington brought jazz into church for the first time and John Coltrane turned a jazz performance into a worshipful prayer.

In more recent times, jazz seems to be most welcome in churches from the Lutheran tradition. Interestingly, Lutheran churches are among the most structured, and strict, especially in comparison to the charismatic, Pentecostal tradition. This does not fit with the material on church-sect-theory from earlier on in the chapter. Part of the reason for this is that in recent years jazz has become a more respected form of music. Traditional classical venues such as Birmingham's Symphony Hall are hosting jazz concerts; BBC Radio 3 has a selection of weekly jazz programs; and jazz courses are becoming standard programs of study within British conservatoires. This modern attitude towards jazz sets it in contrast to gospel influenced rock music.

Within the examples in this chapter, almost all the definitions of worship in chapter two have found expression in a musical statement, and there is a massive variety in style reflecting the variety of opinions and attitudes towards worship within the Christian Church.

Chapter Four - Theology

There is more to music than meets the ear. (Begbie, 2000, p. 13)

Introduction

Within the academic world jazz most commonly meets Christianity in the thoughts of theological writers. A handful of theologians have written extensively using jazz music and jazz communities as a metaphor for theological ideas. Many systematic theologians shy away from using metaphors in fear of causing a misunderstanding, but theologian Jeremy Begbie not only accepts that music is central to our world, he also affirms that we can use music to help us learn, explain and discover theology:

Remarkably little had been written about the relationship between the gospel and the down-to-earth business of making and hearing music, about how the vibrant truths of the Christian faith might resonate with the world of Beethoven, Mahler, McCartney, Stravinsky, R.E.M, and Pat Metheny. (Begbie, 2007, p. 25-26)

Even as a classical musician, Begbie gives jazz a lot of attention. The Lutheran, feminist theologian Ann Pederson, unpacks her theological work using the metaphor of jazz (Pederson, 2001) and presents some very interesting and convincing ideas. The concept of using jazz as a metaphor stretches beyond theology with writers like Frank Barrett using jazz as a metaphor when discussing learning within the context of organisational science (Barrett, 1998).

Due to many recent archeological discoveries and a constantly changing culture, the world of theology is going through a time of change (Sarna, 1989, p. xv-xvi). Theologians and historians are suggesting new concepts, ideas and paradigms which often seem to fit with the jazz metaphors. This chapter is not a comprehensive discussion on everything related to this subject, but a short discussion on three of the main themes in light of the writings of two theologians.

Creation, God and us - Ann Pederson

Pederson describes the creation theology of classical theism using the picture of an orchestra where God is both the composer and the conductor and where our role is to follow the score (Pederson, 2001, p. 17). This is similar to the classic watchmaker picture of creation, where God, the watchmaker, creates the watch then leaves it to run without touching or influencing it. Pederson

argues that this theology is out-dated and unbiblical before painting a very different picture using a metaphor of improvisation:

The point of the doctrine of creation is that God continually acts in and through us in new and amazing ways. God's relationship to the world is alive and changing. We are created in God's image, as co-improvisers of the creation. (Pederson, 2001, p. 6)

Pederson likens the freedom and responsibility of humans towards God's creation, to the role of a jazz improviser playing a composition. This theology sits very well with recent discoveries into the background and context into the primary creation passage in the Bible: Genesis 1.¹ This theology is very close to that of John Coltrane who saw the evolution of creation as influenced by both God and mankind.²

Unpacking the concept of jazz improvisation helps to make more sense of Pederson's idea concerning a creative vocation. An improvisers' melodic line is not a random collection of notes; there are a number of different influences at work. Firstly there is the influence of the composition the player is improvising over; secondly the influence of a long history of jazz music, a tradition developed by generations of musicians; and thirdly the influence of the support and contributions from the rest of the ensemble. Pederson uses these points to build a theological model in which we live as improvisers guided by God's Spirit in a number of ways. Firstly through our gifts and calling as created beings: "Creativity is our evolutionary calling" (Pederson, 2001, p. 41). Secondly through our history: "The creative process builds on the great work of past epochs and can never entirely ignore or lose the past from which it came" (Pederson, 2001, p. 120). Thirdly we are influenced and guided by the Spirit through the people around us: "the individual's freedom to improvise is grounded in the support of the ensemble" (Pederson, 2001, p. 67).

Pederson's high view of creativity and human freedom is quite a controversial suggestion to the Church which has so often stifled creativity in fear of causing rebellion. However many contemporary Churches and Christian communities would fully agree with Pederson as they encourage use of music, art, dance and many other forms of expression.³

¹ Particularly thinking about the phrase 'image of God', and the Hebrew language in verse 1, see Sarna (1987, p. 4-13).

² The theology of Coltrane is discussed in chapter three on p. 17.

³ Not least churches and communities associated with the 'Emerging Church' movement.

Time and God's plan - Jeremy Begbie

Related to the previous discussion is a range of question and topics which have plagued the minds of theologians and the general public alike such as freewill, suffering, prayer and God's plan. The root of all these questions is the problem of an eternal God interacting with a temporal world. In his book *Theology, Music and Time* (Begbie, 2000) suggests that music, often jazz in particular, can help us understand these concepts on a deeper level.

Begbie begins with something fundamental to music, namely tension and release. As discussed in chapter three, in jazz we find more tension and less release, more dissonance and less consonance. This happens not only in a harmonic, but also a rhythmic, context where layers of rhythmic patterns including phrases, the form and the structure, all have their own tension and release. Begbie attempts to explain the effect that is caused: "Through its layered patterns of tension and resolution, music relies for much of its effect on generating a sense of the incompleteness of the present, that not all is now given" (Begbie, 2000, p. 99). Begbie argues that contrary to suggestions from our culture, we can learn to live with a sense of incompleteness, because it reflects our place in the grand narrative of the Bible, and encourages the development of virtues such as patience and waiting. This is not only challenging to our culture but also to a Church which desires to do everything, and provide an answer to every question.

Without getting too deep into a very complex subject which is beyond the scope of the present study, it is worth considering Begbie's thoughts on eternity as it provides the foundation for an another idea in which he does use a jazz metaphor. Begbie makes some remarkable comments about how a temporal musical tone functions within the wider context of a melody:

The tone must give way to the next tone in order to be complete, it does not simply add the next tone to itself, it ceases to sound. Yet, this tone is not thereby gone for ever, for the second tone is precisely the completion of the first, internally connected to the first. The same applies to its future orientation. (Begbie, 2000, p. 62)

From an eternal perspective, the past, present and future exist in the eternal now. In a similar way the different notes in a melody all influence and are almost present, even if they are in the past or the future. This is a very powerful and helpful insight into how God experiences time and how he interacts with his creation. The Christian faith affirms that God is eternal and outside of time. However, through Jesus of Nazareth God became flesh and blood, experiencing time as both fully God and fully man. This appears to be a contradiction, but Begbie's thoughts on the integration of

the past, present and future in a melody helps us to, not fully understand, but gain a basic appreciation of this truth about God.

Begbie builds upon this foundation later in his book when he tackles the question of freedom, or freewill, which is closely connected with the creative freedom explored by Pederson. Again Begbie uses the metaphor of improvisation:

People themselves are bundles of constraint and contingency, determinacy and openness. Likewise the physical world we inhabit. Nevertheless the particularising of the past for the present and the future, enabled by the interplay of contingency and constraint, appears to lie somewhere near the heart of what is involved in improvising traditional jazz. (Begbie, 2000, p. 202)

Coupled with Begbie's thoughts on eternity this is a very articulate way of describing how human freedom works in a Christian worldview, which could be challenging for a church that has so often struggled to maintain the balance between God's sovereignty and the doctrine of freewill. In the jazz metaphor, the 'constraints' of the composition with its harmonic and rhythmic structure often form the basis of a creatively improvised idea. The pre-determined factors fuel the improviser by facilitating freedom. To return to the Christian doctrine of freewill, the freedom of a human being is facilitated, not restricted, by God's sovereignty.

This metaphor is very useful because words sometimes fail to fully express such a deep and complex concept. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Church has often focused on using abstract words to express doctrines and faith. However, newer branches of Christianity are beginning to embrace pictures, metaphors and concrete communication methods to start exploring and explaining some of the more mysterious questions about life. In these situations the use of jazz as a metaphor to help make sense of time and God's plan would be very helpful indeed.

Community

The third concept is not specific to one particular theologian but is mentioned a few times by both Pederson and Begbie. Issues concerning church community are very relevant for the 21st century church. A report by the Church of England entitled *Mission Shaped Church* (Archbishops' Council, 2004) highlights many of these issues including the possibility of churches not meeting in a traditional church building and churches which are network rather than geographically based.

St. Paul describes the Christian community, or the Church, as the “body of Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:27). Begbie unpacks this using the metaphor of jazz improvisation concluding that using this model for community would help “promote reciprocal ‘undistorted communication’” (Begbie, 2000, p. 206) before describing how this would work in real life. Later in his book he returns again to this theme by describing the Church as: “The improvising community, living out of the expanding and limitless movement of gracious exchange which God has set in motion” (Begbie, 2000, p. 265).

This metaphor is very valuable because often in a church community it is difficult to strike the balance between the freedom of the person, and their responsibility to the larger group. Unlike most models of community, in the jazz metaphor these are not in competition with each other. In an improvising jazz group each player has a certain role, the bass player grounds the ensemble by outlining the harmony and providing the rhythm, the drummer works with the bass player and also responds to the soloist, the pianist or guitarist builds upon the harmonic foundation from the bass and also reacts to the soloist. These roles allow the soloist to be free in what they are improvising. Without the backing there would be no foundation, and without the response from the other players it would be much harder for the soloist to develop their ideas. In this model of community there should indeed be roles and responsibilities, but these should not restrict the members, rather the system should support and facilitate freedom.

Pederson comments on this theme but from a slightly different angle, using a practical jazz metaphor: “The jam session cuts across gender, race, age, and class to bind people together for the love of music, Paul tells us in Philippians to be of the same mind in Jesus Christ” (Pederson, 2001, p. 82). This comment also has overtones of Galatians 3:28 and 1 Corinthians 12 where, for Paul, the common uniting factor is either Jesus or the Spirit. It is very interesting to observe the unity amongst a group of jazz musicians often from very different backgrounds. This is partly because jazz communities are often small, underground groups of people but it is also because of the shared respect and excitement for the music in general and also the music of the individual musicians. However, it is important to note that Pederson’s comment could be a little optimistic as jam sessions are often very male-dominated. As a metaphor for the Church, this idea falls down when considering the nature of the uniting factor. Paul’s point of being united in Christ, or in the Spirit, is that the uniting factor is not something that can be earned or worked towards, it is simply a free gift.

To return to the jam session scenario, musical taste and ability both require a certain amount of work and commitment. Despite its flaws this is a helpful metaphor as, unlike Paul's pictures, it is something very tangible, it is something that many people have actually experienced and it is grounded in the everyday life of a jazz musician.

Conclusion

From a musicological, cultural or practical angle, jazz has much to teach the world of theology. In light of some of the more recent theological developments, it seems that jazz is often a very helpful metaphor when expressing Biblical ideas and concepts. For this reason it is no surprise that theologians such as Ann Pederson and Jeremy Begbie so often make use of it. Many of the key themes, ideas and concepts are particularly relevant to the 21st century post-modern culture and to the Church which is often stuck in modernism. No longer can the Church just use written doctrines, statements of faith and creeds to neatly answer hard theological questions. So perhaps the world of music, jazz in particular, could play a key role for the Church in presenting Christianity to the world.

Chapter Five - Jazz in Practice

Jazz reasserts the truth that the creation of art is a social function; that music should be made for people to use (Finkelstein, 1964, p. 27)

Introduction

Jazz has always been a very practical form of music. It is no surprise that most jazz courses, at all levels, are predominately practical. This is also reflected in the subject of this study: jazz in a real-life Christian worship context. In addition to the academic reading, some of the research has been practically based.

Between January and April 2009 I conducted a number of semi-structured interviews with professional musicians working in a church environment to hear their thoughts on jazz in a Christian worship context.¹ I attempted to interview a range of musicians from a variety of different denominations and traditions contacting Anglican, Methodist, Baptist and free churches. I had responses from two churches, one Methodist and one Anglican both of which fall broadly within the conservative evangelical tradition. This has resulted in a set of results specific to this tradition.

In recent years some composers have written jazz works specially designed for use in worship, often in the form of a mass. As this is directly related to the research question, a study of one example of these compositions was part of the research. A similar real-life example is the monthly jazz vespers service at St. Anne's Lutheran church, London. As part of the research for this study I attended and engaged with one of these services. Both of these two examples fit into the high church Protestant tradition, which finds its most pure expression in cathedrals.

This chapter is a summary of the findings from these interviews and studies, focussing on particular issues which relate to material in the previous chapters. Firstly the two interviews with professional musicians working within a church will be considered before moving on to the two specific examples of jazz in worship, the first being a church service and the second being a compositional work.

¹ See Appendix A for the list of questions used to direct and shape the interviews.

Eileen Shipton - St John's, Harborne

St. John's church is described as a 'lively charismatic church' which provides 'modern worship'. The main style of music used on a weekly basis is contemporary gospel influenced rock music.² After an interview with the director of worship Eileen Shipton, it was clear that they did not use jazz in any of their services.

Shipton explained that through connections with Birmingham Conservatoire, a number of jazz musicians do attend the church and play in the worship bands. She commented that these musicians were the most useful musicians to have in a band because of their ability to improvise. Their aural skills were an additional bonus, enabling them to pick up new songs without needing music and to be able to transpose songs at will. This point is particularly interesting in reference to the discussion in chapter three concerning unexperienced musicians restricting the styles of music used. At St John's it seems that talented and trained jazz musicians are not being given the freedom to express themselves through the music in which they specialise, but instead they are forced to make the best of an established, but simpler, musical style.³

When questioned about the choice of music used in services, Shipton responded with information about the demographic of their parish and the music listening habits of the church congregation. There was a focus on the musical preference of the worshippers rather than any of the theological issues discussed in chapters two and four. The information was discussed in very general terms and did not account for the diversity of the congregation. The jazz musicians we discussed earlier in the interview, who are also part of their congregation, are a good example of this. When pushed for a theological explanation of the chosen styles of music Shipton admitted that this was not part of the decision. I suspect that the emotional associations built up by the congregation with the main style of music they use is a large influence in the decision.⁴ As part of the Church of England, St John's would have strong connections with other local churches and also other larger ones around the United Kingdom. It seems that the style of worship in general is based on a model developed elsewhere, and therefore detailed explanations were not possible from within the church.

² This style is discussed in chapter three on p. 19.

³ The simplicity of this style is discussed in chapter three on p. 15-16.

⁴ The idea of emotional attachments is discussed in the conclusion to chapter two on p. 9.

Jonathan Green - The Sanctuary, Methodist Central Hall, Westminster

Described by Jonathan Green as “a church within a church”, The Sanctuary is a congregation of approximately 80 young adults who meet on a Thursday evening at Methodist Central Hall, Westminster. The group is part of the Methodist church and therefore has a strong heritage of hymnody. However, they are very open to trying all sort of other styles of music. As a musician himself, Green, the leader of the church, commented that music was central to the life of the church, and they were very keen to encourage song-writing and compositions that could be used in their services.

Green acknowledged that he did not have much experience playing jazz music. He also noted that they had not used jazz in any of their services but this was because of the lack of jazz players in the congregation. However, Green also commented that some of the musicians often liked to take a jazz based approach by having open-form structures and space for re-harmonisation, but this was often difficult due to the players of lesser ability. One possible solution we discussed was to have smaller bands with only one chord based instrument; Green commented that sometimes he preferred to just play piano and sing solo when leading. This is much more of a modern jazz based model which favours small groups.⁵

The Sanctuary encouraged creativity in the way described by Pederson. It was clear that Green would have been very sympathetic to Pederson’s theology, especially as he is a deep thinker and interested theologian. If a jazz musician started attending the church and was willing to serve, it would not be long before jazz was introduced on a Thursday evening. I was impressed and encouraged by Green’s thoughts and attitudes, perhaps they now need to consider how to encourage some jazz players to get involved.

Jazz vespers - St Anne’s Lutheran Church, London

Based on the model first developed by Gensel at St. Peter’s Lutheran Church,⁶ St. Anne’s hold a monthly service in which all the music is jazz. The services include both congregational hymns, and items performed by the musicians and the jazz choir.

⁵ The model of a modern jazz group is discussed in detail in chapter three on p. 14-15.

⁶ See the discussion in chapter three on p. 18-19.

My first observation was that they valued the contribution of the musicians and celebrated their skills; it was the first time I had ever been paid for playing a church worship service. Consequently the quality of the band, consisting of piano, bass and drums, was very high. In addition to the band there was a jazz choir which was open to anyone who wanted to sing. There were opportunities for members of the choir to do solos, and there was a good mixture of people involved. Operating in this way worked very well because no-one was excluded from using music to express their worship, but the quality of the music produced was not compromised. The choir functioned in a similar way to a gospel choir with very simple, easy to sing harmonies sitting on top of a more complex foundation.

Most of the congregational items were traditional hymns with a jazz backing and a couple of improvised solos either in the introduction, the ending, or in between verses. This was interesting because often churches do not encourage musicians to play solos fearing this would remove the focus from God, a concern inherited from before the Protestant Reformation. However, in this context the solos were very sensitively played and added to the worship service. All of the non-congregational items were vocal numbers and again celebrated the musicianship of the players with improvised solos and featured sections.

This service managed to overcome many of the barriers discussed in chapter three and the results were very effective. The congregation of predominantly non-musicians were led worshipfully through a powerful and moving service.

Scott Stroman - Jazz Mass

Based at the Guildhall School of Music since 1983, Scott Stroman is one of the UK's leading jazz educators. As a composer one of his greatest works is entitled *Jazz Mass* (Stroman, 2007) which was written for use in a worship service.

Traditionally, a 'mass' is a liturgical structure designed to guide a worshiper through a worship service often with the same structure of six distinct sections. The first, entitled 'Kyria' is essentially a plea for mercy, a statement which implies with it an act of confession. Stroman uses a very slow tempo and an ambiguous key centre as the bass moves from one key to another in order to musically express the plea for mercy, essentially recognising that the matter is out of our hands and

down to God. The second movement, 'Gloria' is a time of praise and adoration which Stroman expresses through a faster tempo and a very solid riff cycling through a few note centres. The 'Credo', or 'creed', a statement of belief, is sometimes sung, or, as in the case of Stroman's mass, just read aloud without musical accompaniment. The 'Sanctus' is an echo of the heavenly song recorded in Isaiah 6, "Holy, Holy, Holy", which Stroman accompanies with a predominately major, almost gospel riff. For the first time the riff remains grounded in the same key throughout the movement, drawing on the gospel tradition. It posses a very powerfully uplifting nature, particularly with the contrast of the first few movements. The 'Benedictus' is essentially a continuation of the Sanctus, but slightly more reflective. In the new riff, Stroman beautifully expresses this mood by maintaining a similar rhythmic idea to the Sanctus riff, but in slower tempo with different harmony. The closing section entitled 'Agnus Dei' returns to a similar theme from the first section but this time focussing on Jesus' work on the cross as the lamb of God, essentially God's answer to the plea for mercy. Stroman returns to a slower more sombre mood, but unlike the first movement it is grounded in a very strong and clear bass line.

All of these sections map onto the framework of worship outlined in chapter three, particularly in reference to a standard service in the Methodist Worship Book, confession in the Kyrie, adoration in the Gloria, thanksgiving in the Sanctus and the Benedictus, then intercession in the Agnus Dei. In addition to its success as a mass, the composition retains many jazz elements such as improvised solos and has an authentic jazz sound. Listening to the entire composition is a very powerful and moving experience.

Conclusion

It has been an interesting experience to consider the research question from both sides by observing the situations where jazz meets worship, and also finding out why jazz does not appear in situations where the resources are available. When jazz music is used, it seems to be very effective for both musicians and non-musicians alike. One reason for this could be that in all the situations and churches where jazz is used, music is generously resourced and is therefore of a higher standard. Jazz seems to work very well in conjunction with traditional hymnody and other strong classical traditions, whereas integration with modern gospel rock is much harder. Finally, jazz models and ways of working can be utilised without the presence of jazz itself, and these can often be very helpful. Although the examples in this chapter do not represent the entire spectrum of Christianity,

sociologist Grace David identifies these two traditions as the areas of growth within the church of the United Kingdom (Davie, 2009, p. 28-29) so this information is useful when considering the future of jazz in the church.

Chapter Six - Conclusion

Praise the LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song, and His praise in the assembly of saints. (Psalm 149:1)

Questions

The initial research question was: ‘Can jazz be used in a Christian worship context?’ As a result of this research a further two questions have emerged. Firstly, ‘Does jazz have anything to offer the mainstream church?’ Secondly: ‘Is it likely that jazz will begin to enter the mainstream church?’ To conclude this study these three questions will all be considered.

Can jazz be used in a Christian worship context?

It is clear from the content of the study that the initial research question of ‘Can jazz be used in a Christian worship context?’ has been answered, and from a contemporary perspective the answer is yes.

Drawing on the conclusions from chapter two, there is no theological reason why jazz cannot be used in a worship service. From the observations on the jazz vespers service in chapter five, and the study of Scott Stroman’s jazz mass, it is clear that jazz can be very effective in a worship service. Between these two examples, every aspect and definition of worship discussed in chapter two has been covered, with the exception of charismatic or pentecostal worship.

From the historical study in chapter three it is clear that one of the largest barriers between jazz and the Church were the opinions, prejudices and mindsets of the general population. The conclusion of chapter one highlights the significance of the associations connecting a musical style with a certain emotion or feeling. The study of the birth of bebop in chapter three demonstrates the cultural issues associated with jazz, and Routley’s concluding words in *The Church and Music* (Routley, 1967) prove that this mindset continued until at least 1967.¹ These negative associations were supported and encouraged by the general mindset of social spaces. From New Orleans jazz through to bebop,

¹ A detailed discussion surrounding this quote is in chapter two on p. 14.

jazz was associated with secular, commercial spaces, the last places you would find Christian worship.²

As predicted by Routley, jazz today has lost many of the negative associations, and is often categorised alongside classical music as a respected, intelligent and artistic form of music. Despite Ellington's achievements, the only barrier that still remains is the idea of social spaces; for many people it would still seem strange to have jazz music in a cathedral. However, many new church plants are working on a model which is not based in a particular building.

Not only is it now possible for jazz to be used in a Christian worship context, but almost all of the mindsets which caused barriers in the past now no longer exist.

Does jazz have anything to offer the mainstream church?

The examples in chapters three and five where jazz and Christian worship come together are unique and rare. Drawing on the conclusion from the previous question, jazz could be used in mainstream churches, but would it be effective?

Chapter four examines three theological issues using the metaphor of jazz which are very relevant to the church today. The conclusion of chapter four demonstrates that jazz has a lot to offer the world of theology, which directly impacts the theology and teaching in many mainstream churches. From the section on community it is also clear that jazz can be helpful in the area of church management and church planting. However, confirming the usefulness of jazz as a metaphor does not automatically confirm that it would be effective for use within a worship context.

The brief discussion in chapter three concerning church-sect-theory suggests that a church's theology can be linked to the music which is encouraged and utilised in worship. For theologian and musician Jeremy Begbie, there is no split between using music as a metaphor to learn about theology, and experiencing or using music in any context including worship. Many of his points, such as the development of patience and waiting discussed in chapter three, involve actively listening to music itself. In chapter four the section on 'Time and God's plan' uses the active model

² See the discussion entitled 'Modern jazz' in chapter three on p. 14-15.

of improvisation when considering freedom. Perhaps the use of jazz music could challenge the theology of a church, or help a congregation to start understanding some of the issues discussed in chapter four. Many church-goers would not have experienced the situation of an improvising jazz small group. If this was modelled by the band in a worship context it may help the congregation to grasp some of these ideas.

As discussed in chapter three, music, but jazz in particular, can be used like language to communicate a message. Both Ellington and Coltrane had a deep understanding of this concept as it formed the basis of their calling. The Church has often focused on words as the only form of communication, but now with the foundation laid down by Vatican II and the recent developments in the world of theology, the Church is in the right place to embrace new ideas concerning the use of music.

Without a doubt jazz has something very unique to offer mainstream churches. The theological metaphors are abundant, and, through use in worship, congregations could be challenged and even taught through the music itself. Jazz is a fantastic form of expression for those who play it on a regular basis even to the extent of it becoming a language. If the model of worship includes response, then it is important to allow people to express that however they wish, in whatever language they can.³

Is it likely that jazz will begin to enter the mainstream church?

Over the past 40 years there has been a very gradual increase in the amount of jazz music in churches, but it is still very rare. As discussed in the conclusion to chapter five, major growth is happening in conservative evangelical churches and cathedrals. From the examples in chapter five, jazz is appearing in the high-church, cathedral style settings, but not in conservative evangelical churches. St John's is a fairly large church with many resources, and a congregation containing jazz musicians. However, from the interview it seemed very unlikely that jazz would be included in a service within the near future. The Sanctuary is open to trying new styles and genres of music, including jazz, but as a smaller congregation they do not currently possess the necessary skills.

³ Thinking particular about Leach's worship cycle discussed in chapter two on p. 8.

It is always difficult to predict what is going to happen in the future, but because of the reasons discussed in the previous question we can expect the gradual increase to continue, predominantly in the high-church tradition. It is highly unlikely that the percentage use of jazz in church will exceed the percentage music sales for jazz as a genre.

Final thought

At an academic level, jazz is very welcome both as a metaphor and as a practical form of music. On the other hand, modern gospel influenced rock music is spoken of very critically by professional academics and professional musicians alike.⁴ Despite these criticisms modern gospel rock is the main musical style used in worship services in almost all conservative evangelical churches.⁵ More traditional styles that have rich historical connections with worship, such as hymnody, are tolerated but used sparingly. In the conservative evangelical tradition there appears to be a lack of communication between the academic theologians or professional musicians, and the church leaders or congregations. In the high-church tradition this is not the case, and this is reflected by the music used in worship services: classical, hymnody, and occasionally, jazz. The lack of communication between academics and regular congregations in conservative evangelical churches is unhealthy, especially as much of the theology discussed in chapter four is not being embraced. Until this issue is addressed, it will be unlikely for the merits and advantages of jazz music to filter through to the church leaders and congregations.

Having said that, we are in a time of great change for both the the world of theology and our culture. As congregations begin to start thinking more deeply about questions of theology, and how that impacts the music they worship with, perhaps it will be not only time to sing a new song to the Lord, but in a new style as well.

⁴ See Begbie's quote on p. 16 and Routley's quote on p. 19.

⁵ St John's Harborne is the primary example within this study, see p. 28.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview questions

- What does your role as ‘...’ involve?
- How would you define the role of music in worship?
- How do different styles of music fit in with your definition?
- How does improvisation fit in with your definition?
- What different styles do you use at ...?
- Do you see jazz having a place within Christian worship?
- Do you see a place for improvisation within Christian worship?