

~ Spirosomy ~
Music and Spirituality
The Practice of Presence

*A Case Study in Gregorian Chant and
Human Manifestations of
Spirituality through Music*

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Music: Spirituality of the Present

It is my lifelong dream to write music, which will make those who listen forget to clap and those who perform forget to play – music that will make them all silent.

A Note to the Writer and Reader

Before we enter fully into our subject at hand, there is a piece of humble advice that I have been given myself and which I should like to give again to myself and to the reader in turn, the result of personal experience. If the reader, as well as the writer, does not wish to go astray and lose his way down misguided paths, perhaps for years, and if he desires to circumvent error and avoid a waste of time, he must guard against preconceived notions stemming either from our Western dispositions, languages or modern music. He must, at all times, keep in mind and, most importantly to the point of necessity, genuinely appreciate the vast divergences existing among languages and between the various musical forms which have reigned during the course of centuries. Subjectivity must be taken hand-in-hand with objectivity, neither the superior of the other, and empirical and mundane fact must be taken with theoretical and super-mundane truths. Belief can make any truth as strong as any other proven by ordained and empirical methods, and so a sense of impartial belief must be taken at times, for the sake of better understanding, on the part of those who pursue this study. I cannot too strongly recommend this attitude of reverence, impartiality, openness, and independence in the study of spirituality in any form.

Foreword

“Music is so much a part of our nature that we cannot do without it even if we wish to do so.” (Boethius in his Fundamentals of Music)

“Who more than the composers among us should take up the task of differentiating the sacred from the profane? Of course, we are living in a secular society, yet people, young and old, yearn for a more meaningful spiritual experience. Concerned musicians must seize the moment and formulate a sacred sound that is at once rooted in the several genuine traditions that constitute our religious past and fashioned, not for some other time and place, but for the contexts in which we ourselves live.” (Adler 299)

The hum of the heater. Footsteps stealing down the hall outside the door. Geese squawking far above in the winter sky outside the window. Snow gently settling upon the windowsill with steady padded whispers. The sound of silence in the Abbey as the bells for Vigils are attentively waited upon in the cold darkness of the early morning.

It is 3:00 am, and the bed is hard and the air is chill around the soft blankets. The sun will not be rising for another four hours, but people are beginning to rise for the start of the day. They have been rising for centuries, without stop, into the night, waiting and watching for the coming of each day, thanking God for the blessing of it.

The sound of the ringing bells rises clearly and crisply through the brittle morning air. The day has begun before the day is even aware. Quietly and fervently people creep through the dark across the frosted ground and through the silent halls to the dim lights of the sanctuary. The sound of earth crunches beneath many quite feet. All gather into the little point of light surrounded by the peaceful calm of the night, and tenderly, out of the stillness and silence, grows

the chanting of the monks as they recite the Psalms of David, waiting and celebrating the coming morning. Back and forth, across the sanctuary the choirs of monks sing to each other in their somber recitations, enveloping the world in vibrating sound, seeking contemplation in word and song. An hour passes as they chant the world awake. The rising sun begins to bedeck the walls of the sanctuary through the high, stain glass windows as the monks continue their sacred and ancient ritual of prayer. They give thanks for the blessing of a new day.

. . .

Nearly three hundred years ago, off in the countryside of England, in a friend's house, a well-to-do and pious man worked on what would come to be perhaps the most well-known musical piece ever written. He worked without stop from the dawn of the day and into the depths of the night.

Much mystery surrounded this man. Not only an English citizen born in Germany, but an ardent English nationalist and Christian Protestant. His fame was great not only around the country, but around the continent. People flocked like never before to hear the next note that fell from the mind of this pious man. Nearly on his own, he had begun and fully fostered the first nationalist movement in English music, a musical culture that, before this man, had remained in the cultural shadows of its neighbors, Germany, France, and Italy.

His great oratorios, operas, anthems, and cantatas resounded in all the opera halls, cathedrals, and churches of the land. Yet, given all the popularity and fame of this man, little was known about his personal life. Rumors circulated about his insatiable gluttony, fiery temper, and perhaps his homosexual relationships with other artistic and well-to-do members of upper society. The little flat that he rented in the heart of the greatest Empire on earth invited few guests but had many friends.

This is the man that now works so fervently in the upstairs room on his greatest work yet – a great history behind him and an even grander future awaiting his fame. Indeed, he works so fervently during these days in the country that he only leaves his studio to take meals.

One day, however, when the house servant calls him down for dinner, he does not come. Repeatedly the servant calls for the master, but still he does not come. After many hours, becoming concerned, the servant, against the master's wishes that he not be disturbed at his work, decides to go check and make sure that something grave has not happened. Upon climbing the stairs and reaching the door he hears a sound that makes his heart race. He rushes to the door of his master's studio and flings it open to find the man at his writing desk, weeping uncontrollably. Aghast and bewildered the servant asks, "My master, what is wrong?"

Red eyed with tears flooding his face, the man answers, "I have seen the face of God." Upon the desk the servant could see scattered papers lined with uncountable bars of music. He walked over to the desk and picked up one of the pages. It read, "*The Messiah.*"

. . .

Bent as we are upon seeing the divine, seeing God, it is important to note that with the eyes one can gather only approximate data. Naturally, this is true of all the senses; the ear, however, is the most precise and accurate of all the senses. When distinguishing between shades of color with the eyes, one cannot be as exact as with the ears when distinguishing between the pitch of two related tones and the subtlety of timbre in sound. Furthermore, the spectrum of sound that one can hear far exceeds that of the eye. If the eyes were regularly exposed to a similar intensity of light as the ear is exposed to in regards to sound, then one would soon go blind. While the ears can withstand the pulsing sounds of a rock concert and yet hear the quiet

falling of snow on a winter night, the eyes are much more limited in their ability, confined only to a small spectrum of light.

Incongruously, there has for centuries, if not millennia, been an obsession in Western thought on vision as the noblest means to truth and most exacting method to communicate knowledge. John Locke wrote to this end: “the perception of the mind is most aptly explained by works relating to the sight.” It would seem then that the empiricists of the West would be of the disposition that knowledge is ultimately based upon, and validated by, pure observation. The West has, as it would thus appear, become an overly visually-oriented culture, with the sometimes consequent devaluation of the sonic and verbal dimension of our existence.

Religion is permeated not only with potent imagery but also with salient sound. Contrary to the notion that many religious traditions propound the exclusive ideal of silence, most religious traditions are founded on the importance of sound, word, and song. As such, the ambiance one would experience when immersed into many traditional religious practices is consistently saturated with a cacophony of various sounds. Organs, drums, bells, gongs, flutes, stringed instruments, and extensive vocalizations are often heard in concert in various combinations and styles across the globe, blending together to create a vast palate of sound in any temple, sacred place, or home. The vast array of sounds that one can encounter in any religious tradition, discordant or concordant, complex or simple, is essential to the religious ritual being performed and the spiritual growth of those participating within the soundscape of the ritual. The relocation of the study of theology and religion from the eye to the ear to better understand the manifestation of spirituality within sound is essential in the further study of the spiritual experience. A full appreciation of the religious culture and the rituals therein cannot be had without an equal representation of both the visual and aural aspects of religious practice,

particularly since sound plays an essential part in worship and spiritualism across the religious human experience.

So then, what is it about music that makes it such a “human experience” that it finds its way so often into the quest of spirituality? How is it that music can speak across space and time, across cultural and social barriers, that not even our highly sophisticated systems of linguistic communication can match its understanding? People today have written volumes and volumes of books trying to define such concepts as sin, dharma, love, evil, dao, dukkha, and countless more, but even after all these extensive efforts – thousands of pages, thousands of hours – there are still things about these concepts that still are unable to be communicated across languages. Words, as humanity uses them today, seem to be, at some point, limiters on inter- and cross-cultural understanding; they seem to lack a means of expression that can carry them beyond their definitions and point at their intrinsic meaning. There is something within our words, something beyond our words; they are only a shadow of their true meaning. A Christian can practice their whole life and say “Amen” at the end of their prayers every day, and yet many people don’t even understand the meaning and implications of such a word. On its own, *amen* can seem like a meaningless sound, and bland word like a silent period at the end of a sentence, but one cannot doubt that there is something greater about this word when one hears it shouted in a heated Christian worship service. But what if one is not Christian, what if one thinks these acts of worship and fervent worshipers are just a bunch of nonsense? Does the more powerful meaning of this word fall on closed ears? Perhaps, but it would be much more difficult to doubt the power of such a word while listening to the final movement of George Friedrich Handel’s *Messiah*, a fantastic three minute choral and orchestral bombast of counterpoint, fugue, canon, rapid rhythm, and grand harmony all on one word, *Amen*. When given to music, the power of the word, the

greater depth of the word, can be truly experienced, even to those who do not know Latin or have any connection to Christian tradition whatsoever. There is something within music that is universal to the human experience. It has the ability to communicate our deepest feelings and emotions and reach beyond the words we use to touch their and our greater meanings.

Even more so, music has not only taken upon itself to serve as a means of communication, but has, in many cases, been given to that which may be considered “sacred” or “spiritual”. It is interesting that around the world and in so many various cultures, music has been placed as something to be worshiped and revered both within the secular and non-secular realms. People today continuously and increasingly define themselves by the music they listen to, such as with younger generations, particularly with advances in technology as the iPod and other mp3 players that allow one to carry and be in connection with their musical personas wherever they go. Humanity, throughout its course, has invested in the musical experience and used it to enhance and define their lives, cultures, countries, religions, and spiritualities. It has a power over us that we have yet to fully understand or appreciate.

Ancient Greek writers perceived music as a reflection of the order of the universe. Music could affect ethos, one’s ethical character or way of being or behaving. Philosophers thought of music as an orderly system interlocked with the system of nature and as a force of human thought and conduct. As far back as historians can trace music, humanity has given it a power over itself. It can bring out every human feeling from the most animalistic instincts, such as one might feel in the pulsating techno and pop music of night clubs, to piety and reverence, such as one might feel when listening to a Lutheran choral from the Protestant Reformation.

Exactly *why* music has such a powerful influence over human emotions and actions is, however, beyond the scope of this paper and probably should remain beyond the scope of any

paper. What is important here, what shall be analyzed, is the “spiritual” aspect of music, or *how* music forms itself around human emotions and actions in a personally spiritual way. How do people experience their own spirituality through music? How is the spiritual manifested in one’s aural experience? What within the music, the listener, and the practitioner makes certain music a “spiritual” experience? How do people manifest their spirituality within the music they experience?

Of course, this all depends on one’s definitions of “sacred,” “spiritual,” and “religious.” While these words can be defined in many ways to suit the needs of many different people, there needs to be a clearly *exclusively inclusive* definition if we are to come to any meaningful conclusions. What is religious? What is sacred? What is spiritual? These words, like discussed above, are ultimately limiters on our understanding. It is through musical experience, however, that a definition can perhaps become clear. There is something within music that clearly defines something innately human and yet something beyond humanity. The important question to ask and understand is, “what within music gives it potential to manifest the “spiritual” and what about the listener manifests the “spiritual” within musical experience?”

While this study is clearly expansive and cannot be limited with good conscious to one culture, it is the purpose of this paper to be limited in its study. For this reason, specific case examinations will be confined to spiritual expression in Gregorian Chant music of the Christian West. While limited, this is a good place to begin a study of “spirituality in music” for it is commonly considered the origin of Western Music, which is the most widely selling and practiced form of music in the world today. Furthermore, it is a form of spiritual music that has endured for over a millennium, influenced countless musical forms across cultures and centuries, is still practiced today, and is generally and widely considered to be a spiritually enhancing

music by people of many Christian denominations, people of non-Christian faith, and people of no religious affiliation. Furthermore, chant, in general, is a musical form that is present, in some manner, in most, if not all, religious traditions around the globe. Chant seems to have an innate religious and spiritual efficacy that makes it pertinent and primary to examine in this study. Thus, given its endurance, power, multiplicity, and influence it is deemed appropriate to begin an examination with this musical form, particularly focused on “traditional” Gregorian Chant as defined by the Solesmes School (acknowledging the multiplicity of other practiced theories), with hopes of further inter- and cross-cultural examination.

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one another due to my deficiencies in French language, you still did all you could to help me. Furthermore, you were the first person I met at the monastery upon arriving from my personal odyssey across the globe. You were friendly and welcoming, and I thank you for these valuable yet simple things. Last, I deeply thank the entire abbey for the privilege and immense honor of asking me to play the Grand Organ for the Vespers and Mass of the Feast of St. Benedict. It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience that I will never forget. As just a relative fledgling in my organ studies, this was unexpected and greatly appreciated. It is a beautiful and magnificent instrument, and I hope that I may one day play there again with even greater skill and grandiloquence. All of you have indeed treated me as Christ himself.

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both Solesmes and Gethsemani. Having access to these practitioners and this musical prayer has enhanced my understanding of this worship, music, and spirituality invaluable. This study would not be the same without this experience. Your generous funds have gone to teach me much more than books could ever. The opportunities that this money has offered me have been enlightening and special in so many ways. Thank you.

Introduction

“Without going into great detail, we must emphasize at the outset that the essential worth of Gregorian Chant lies in its profound spirituality. This is the foundation, the orientation and the full justification of our study.” (Cardine 1)

“But when our heart is fully awakened in love, or in other great emotions, our personality is in its flood-tide. Then it feels the longing to express itself for the very sake of expression. Then comes art, and we forget the claims of necessity, the thrift of usefulness; the spires of our temples try to kiss the stars and the notes of our music to fathom the depth of the ineffable.” (Chakravarty 228)

In a universe thrilling with every myriad atom and vibration, in a vast expanse of darkness pinpricked by distant lights so far asunder that numbers cannot fully express the meaning of this vastness filled with the greatest depths of emptiness, swirls an immense cluster of unfathomably bright and burning hot lights. On the outer edge of this cluster of uncountable stars lies a small and relatively unnoticeable ball of light, commonly called Sol. Around this small and unnoticeable pinpoint of light, swirling in the enormity of countless others, orbits an even smaller body, which is sometimes called Earth, more than one thousand times smaller than Sol. On this small sphere of densely packed rock are billions of smaller things called people, sometimes labeled as sentient or intelligent; they, apart from everything else around them, are able to fathom these aforementioned unfathomable things (or at least they think they can).

Interestingly enough, these beings along with other living (and some non-living) things have a mechanism so constituted as to perceive, process, and possibly combine and enjoy the vibrations of atoms and molecules in the fluid atmosphere around them, constituted primarily of

hydrogen, nitrogen, and oxygen, along with some other gasses. Furthermore, and even more interestingly, without this particular atmosphere and its composition, not only would they be unable to perform the process of respiration, which sustains their lives, but they would not be able to experience these gaseous vibrations which they enjoy so much. Just a few miles up from their planet and these vibrations would not even happen. Even more, on any other planet of all the countless planets in the universe, these vibrations would not work in the same ways as they do in the atmosphere of Earth.

These vibrations that they so enjoy are called by some “music” some of the time, though the opinion seems to vary as to what “music” exactly is. Though whatever this “music” might be (let us just say for now “any atmospheric vibration” for the means of simplicity), these beings are able to reproduce it by various methods in more elaborate or simpler forms depending on where and when this reproduction occurs, and by whom and what it is reproduced. Often these people seem to express themselves through this music. They tie their cultural, political, religious, and social institutions to this music. Put more plainly, these people find some unidentifiable deep purpose and meaning in these atmospheric vibrations determined by the strict and mostly unyielding rules of the universe. How interesting indeed. Given these factors, what must we infer?

If we choose to do as we are commonly taught, reducing such observations to empirical laws of nature through means of pure rationality, what inference would be yielded? Perhaps we would see how one organism has adapted to its environment and manipulated it to its advantage. Just as the human species has used the same atmosphere to communicate by means of verbal language for their better ease in understanding one another, perhaps this development of sound reproduction in general is in all ways a facilitator of communication. Is music just as much a part

of language as the phonetic sounds they combine to form meanings. But then why this variety of communicative methods. The human species has a multiplicity of languages, denotations to particular words within those languages, and methods to produce and convey those words. There is both a spoken and written language, and in each there are various methods to communicate (e.g through telephone, television, radio, and computer-generated messages of all kinds). Why then does there seem to be a need for music to communicate meaning?

If I may make a conjecture, perhaps there is something lacking in these various forms of communication that music compensates for. Given the various meanings that words can take and their obvious shortcomings as cross-cultural and inter-language communicators, it seems possible that music is an operator between languages that works both with and beyond words.

And yet, I do not believe that this is a full explanation for the existence and importance of music in human society. Humans do more than attach meaning to musical gestures. They go as far as attaching their own personalities and personal meanings to music. People now carry thousands of musical patterns on their person in little electronic memory banks and plastic disks. From person to person, the music on these memory banks and disks varies significantly, but many people seem to have these things and use them constantly. Furthermore, nation-states form themselves around particular music patterns and call these patterns “national anthems.” These anthems are often highly emblematic of a nation’s history or values. People use particular kinds of music to pay homage to supernatural entities. Armies march to war with these atmospheric vibrations at the forefront of their army. People identify with particular music idioms and cultures and flock to centers of musical activity during particular times of day to participate in activities and rituals varying from religious, calendric, theatrical, cultural, mating, and some I have yet to identify.

There is something highly personal about music that I have yet to identify. It permeates and penetrates the human existence in a very esoteric manner. People place high value on music, spending vast resources on it every day. Some have even gained higher social or economic status based on their ability to create music. This is a highly valued skill and is used in all kinds of rituals and experiences through all means of communication. What is it about these atmospheric vibrations, which humans have the ability to process and manipulate, that give them meaning in such a personal way? Further research must be done on this subject if we are to ever fully understand this very unusual species.

. . .

I use this narrative to show the point that this whole study works to demonstrate: there is something highly personal and even esoterically spiritual about music in the human experience. Simply, if an alien were to observe human culture, I believe that it would be very difficult to miss the musical part of human existence. I even point out that our “music” is not present in the same way in any of the known universe. Only in our earthly atmosphere will you experience music as you do. If an alien were to come along, music, as we know it and have formed it, would quite possibly be very foreign and unknown to such a being.

This reminds me of science fiction movies where aliens use music and sound to communicate to human beings, but really, if that alien’s atmosphere is not exactly like earth’s and if they do not have the same sound processing centers of the brain that humans do, the sounds they might generate could mean little or nothing to us. Even the physical frequencies, the most mathematically quantitative part of sound, vary according to the atmosphere. Listen to your favorite musical number under water. It won’t sound quite the same as if were in air. The same would be true if you were to play it on Mars or any other planet. Music, as we experience it, is

very much an earthly and human thing. Sometimes people take this fact for granted. The laws of music are not like the laws of gravity; they are unique to every location in the universe and even to every culture (earthling and alien).

Observing music from an outsider's perspective helps us to begin to appreciate the very human and personal quality that music possesses and the vast importance it has been given as a communicative and cultural tool throughout human history. People find deep meaning and attachment to the music they listen to. They identify their personality and social groups with their music. They express and feel their emotions in and through music. Music is seen widely as an enricher to life.

Imagine a movie without music. How less epic would a movie like *Star Wars* be without the theme at the beginning? Indeed, there are modern movies without music. I would contend that this is usually intentional on the part of the director. To coincidentally leave out music in a movie intended for a highly aural culture would be a sign of an immensely careless director. Even the absence of music in a movie creates a feeling, sets a mood. Music, whether present or not, constantly has an effect on our lives. How many commercial product jingles get stuck in people's heads? A catchy melody can oftentimes make more profits than an informative message.

Music has the power to make people sing, laugh, cry, dance, clap, shout, battle, kill, smile, and love. Can music even have the power to show a man "The Face of God?" Perhaps. Can music create communion with supernatural entities? Can music bring man enlightenment, salvation, or redemption? Perhaps. People find power in and grant power to music all across the globe. There is truly something greatly spiritual and deeply personal in man's experience of music.

These chapters are but little trial shafts sunk into a vast mine of rich truth, profound belief, empirical fact, and subjective meaning. Out from such shafts have surfaced tempting specimens. Herein, are these specimens that will perhaps begin to give an answer to our alien's questions and give us a better understanding to the more esoteric side of the musical experience: how people experience and manifest their own personal spirituality in the music they hear, play, and create. There is yet a boundless wealth of research and understanding to gain that relates to the artistic, theistic, and spiritual nature of humanity and its music.

What has led to this research and why is it important?

“There is a many-sided possibility of spiritual intercourse by means of music as yet little known, but which will doubtless be the possession of a riper culture.”
(Edwards 81)

“Of the sacred office and the incalculable value of music in the religious life of man, volumes would be needed even to sketch the story.” (Edwards 153)

In so much of our Western culture, academic researchers in the fields of religious studies have been primarily and overly occupied with the visual aspects of religious culture, often forgetting that there are four other senses by which humans perceive the environment around them. While some has been written about the sonic experience of religion (not to even mention the relatively non-existent literature on the smell, taste, and feel of religious experience), it pales in comparison with what has been written about sight. As a musical composer and religious studies scholar by training, I have taken notice of this serious lack, given that music, and sound in general, permeates vast quantities of religious experiences around the world, from commercial

Christmas music played in the intercom at any department store to the chanting of Islamic Sufis in Southern India to a performance of *The Messiah* at Christmas in numerous concert halls from England to China. Any and all spaces, secular or sacred, are susceptible to the sound of religion.

It is time that scholars of religious studies begin more widely to consider more than the visual experience of religion, particularly because many religious experiences are *not* in fact *seen*. While I believe that studies should be made in all the human senses as they pertain to religion, as a musician and composer, deeply concerned with the perception of music by others, I am particularly interested in the experience of sound and music.

As has been pointed at in most of this introductory narrative, music is highly influential in individual's lives. The effect that Handel's music supposedly had on himself (referring to the anecdote in the Introduction,) is not really that outrageous. There have been people inspired to lives of monasticism and asceticism by music. People have been cured of clinical depression, anxiety, and numerous other mental illnesses by music. People have traveled around the world to hear concerts by artists ranging from the latest Pop Music star to well-known monastic chant choirs. Billions of dollars are spent yearly on music. People are constantly and endlessly being inspired by all kinds of music, often making spiritual claims to such sonic experiences.

Many find that the making and hearing of music places one in a deeper experience of existence, putting one "in touch with the whole of the cosmos as well as with each other." (Palmer 155) Indeed, so powerful is the appeal of music in human culture to the sentiment of religious and spiritual awe that many claim to have been touched by it to the very depths of their being. Take for example the historical and theologically famous figure St. Augustine: a man living a life of sin and debauchery suddenly converted to a life of pious ministry that would

eventually lead to his canonization as a saint of the church after hearing the singing of Gregorian chant over a millennium ago.

Music is immensely powerful in its impact on human feeling, thinking, and experience of physical events. Again, think of a movie for example. The audience is significantly affected by the presence or absence of a soundtrack and how the movie makes them feel. Even the particular sound of a musical number at a particular moment in a film can create vast and significant meanings and can even make or break the feeling of the film. I once viewed an old German film with a large group of college students. The film title in English was *The Blue Light (Blaue Licht)*. The film was from the age before voice and color in movies. The soundtrack for nearly all the movie was a rather sober guitar accompaniment. The strangeness occurred when, at the end of the film, the heroin fell off a mountain and died. At this point the soundtrack changed from guitar and played Vivaldi's first and widely well-known movement from *The Seasons*. The final camera shot on the heroin's dead body as the lively and festive music from *Spring* played was completely offsetting for the entire audience, who all negatively commented on it immediately after the close of the film. The consensus was that the film was average, but the ending was awful. I would argue that most thought that the ending was awful on account of the odd and perhaps inappropriate music choice. The ultimate reception of this film was probably determined by how the audience received this musical folly.

People are intrinsically connected to their emotions and music has a great effect on these emotions when it is employed. Music is extraordinarily complex in the neural circuits it employs, eliciting emotional reactions in at least six different mechanisms of the brain (Wilson n. pag.). When music creates undesirable or counterintuitive emotions in the listener, the effects can

obviously be detrimental to the reception of the art. Music has great potential to create and manipulate how people experience their self and their surroundings.

Music, as most commonly accept it, is constructed by humans to be responded to by humans. Although people experience a vast variety of vibrations in the environment, music is concentrated and consciously constructed sound that is perceived in a special way, and thus it merits our attention.

Furthermore, it has been argued that the creation and performance of music is a human instinct. While music takes many dialects in its manifestation, it is possible that it is a common language among all people, both aurally and non-aurally conscious. To take an extreme example, the neuroscientist Aniruddh D. Patel points to the Piraha, a small tribe in the Brazilian Amazon:

“Members of this culture speak a language without numbers or a concept of counting. Their language has no fixed terms for colors. They have no creation myths, and they do not draw, aside from simple stick figures. Yet they have music in abundance, in the form of songs.” (Wilson n. pag.)

While there are always some minor exceptions, it would seem that the vast majority of human experience contains some form of musical expression for various purposes, including concrete and abstract forms of communication.

As a tool of communication, music is as much a transformative technology as literacy and spoken language in its potential to change the way people perceive the world. Just as music can influence how one views a fabricated reality, such as a movie, so too can music shape one’s perception of their immediate reality. Even more, music has the means to lift people out and beyond the ordinary experience of reality into the extraordinary and into the spiritual. Indeed, it

is the purpose of this study to show how music and even sound in its most rudimentary form can be for people an effluence of the transcendent, a bridge to the unknown, and a link to the self and the divine.

Given all these thoughts on music – how we as humans interact and experience these “atmospheric vibrations” and for what purpose we choose to create and listen to them – in what way can this research into the spiritual experience in music be useful? It is difficult, when dealing with such personal and sometimes esoteric topics, to give any empirical answer.

Though not absolutely empirical, it can be seen across the globe how music has remarkable powers to allow a direct experience of the super-mundane and the divine. Listen to praise music and observe the singers at an enthusiastic Christian worship service with their hands raised and their faces upturned, joy alive in their whole being. Go to a rock concert and gaze at the thousands of flaming stars from upheld lighters as the band plays their most popular piece and the whole world erupts in shouts and cheers. Follow any monastic community through the week of worship, comprehending that the music you hear has been sounding around the world in the same way, non-stop, for over a millennium, for the single purpose of praise and prayer to the divine. Listen to the joyous and fervent cry of a chanting Islamic Sufi and feel the chills run down your spine as he calls with passion and praise to God. Speak to all the great conductors of orchestras around the world and ask them how music makes them feel. Ask a world-class performer of any music why he loves to play. Any answer will be either passionate or undecipherable to one who has not felt music in such a way.

Music can bypass the constructs of unspoken feelings and spoken or written words. It imbues life with a nuanced dimension of meaning. Through the immersion of people into music, either as performers, listeners, or composers, people nurture their spirituality and gain new

modes of expression in understanding their self and their reality. Through music, people can gain a new skill and facility in communication by understanding and using this spiritual language.

Ultimately, through an essentialist and pragmatic point of view, music is a useless activity, it doesn't accomplish anything substantial. Music does not feed hungry people; music does not provide people with shelter, clothes, or protection; music does not heal people by any of our Western notions of medicine. Music is not science, business, law, or medicine. This unfortunate view has been a detriment to human expression and experience in many ways and for many generations. Schools cut music and art programs all across America for the sake of mathematics, science, history, and language programs, forgetting the physically, mentally, emotionally, and intellectually enriching ability of such needless programs. The Ancient Greeks believed that music was essential to any true education and was an essential component of mathematical, scientific, and lingual study. Art is often taken for granted under a pragmatic light, but within the spheres of religious, personal, and spiritual expression, common and significant to cultures, societies, and individuals by the billions, it becomes highly valued and utilized.

We are so geared to what is useful and profitable that we forget the meaningful, what gives our life depth and value. To experience music is to do something that has no practical purpose; it is just celebration and expression; it is feeling; it is finding unquantifiable joy and beauty in existence. Experiencing it whenever and wherever reminds us to create new dimensions to our life and our self – the dimension of meaning that makes it all worthwhile.

Part One

What is Spirituality?

What is Music?

What is Spiritual Music?

*E*ars have no door or walls like the eyes have eyelids. We spend nearly one third of our life with our eyes closed, but our ears are almost always open, even when we sleep. Our sense of hearing is omnidirectional, hearing above, below, behind, before, and beside all at the same time. Our eyes are, at best, confined to hemispheroid of 180 degrees. We can hear through surfaces of all kinds and over relatively long distances without much assistance. For the eyes, this is simply not so. We are a hearing creatures, too long self-deprived of our nature by our excessive fixation on the inaccurate and inadequate tools of sight.

Chapter One

Music: Spirituality of the Present

“Music is the manifestation of the inner essential nature of all that is.” (Ludwig van Beethoven)

“... musical training is a more potent instrument than any other, because rhythm and harmony find their way into the secret places of the soul, on which they tightly fasten, imparting grace....” (Plato)

The arts are more than materials and cognitions brought into being by the use of brushes, batons, ink, saxophones, pianos, voices, or what have you. Art, and more specifically music, is more than the expression of mental, physical, emotional, or social states through the production or reproduction of ordered sounds. Certainly the body and mind, at all times, are possibly implicated, but, despite centuries of practice, performance, theory, and philosophical debate, we have not yet been able to fully articulate that “something more” that we intuitively feel is there, in a significant way, in all of our musical endeavors. I want to show that which cannot be easily expressed or defined in words still can be expressed, perhaps by means of another medium - music. People endeavor to express what they cannot comprehend. We have created religious institutions to explain a vast array of cosmic mysteries and concerns; scientific institutions to research and observe in an attempt to explain things once unknown or not understood by man; artistic institutions to foster spaces of self-expression for people to better understand the entropy within themselves and others. All of these institutions, while employing words at all levels, recognize at some point that either there are a dearth of words for adequate explanations or that

any explanations lie outside the limits of our language. We have a chance at understanding, but our words must begin to be placed outside their normal context of mental denotation and connotation.

We must begin to understand things more actively through how they look, sound, feel, taste, and smell. Why, for example, is religion limited in its faculty to fully explain? It is limited because we do not bother to actively engage ourselves in understanding how we experience religion through sight, sound, feel, taste, or smell. We often limit ourselves to a few, one, or none of these spheres of experience, relying primarily on the prescribed meanings of the words and rituals that our particular religions give us. I could believe that a Christian during Communion actively thinks of the theological meaning of the sacrament of the bread and wine – all the symbolism, metaphor, consequence, blessing, transubstantiation, etc. – but I would wager that they seldom think of the meaning behind the taste. How would Communion be different if Jesus had sliced cheese and poured whisky?

The color of the wine, the taste of the wine, the smell of the wine are all significant to the meaning of the ritual. Whisky, having a very different character from wine, would have totally different meaning in its taste, smell, and appearance. The nature of cheese – the taste, smell, and how it is served – are all vastly different from a loaf of bread. The bread and wine were chosen for a reason and cannot be lightly changed without changing the whole meaning and feeling of the ritual. Really, such a change would not be significant practically if one did not possess the faculty of taste, sight, smell, feel, or hearing, but the majority of perceptive senses is so widely and naturally present in all living creatures that to conceive of an animal or a human without any senses is nearly or wholly impossible. Thus, the sight, smell, taste, feel, and sound of communion are all essential because people, to varying degrees, are all susceptible and greatly

influenced in their interpretation of meaning by these senses. The message cannot be placed in a senseless vacuum and still possess the same meaning. Indeed, one must literally “O, taste and see.” One cannot “O comprehend a theological treatise on the meaning of Communion and see” or even “O see and see.” One must essentially “taste” to fully comprehend the meaning of the sacrament of Communion.

Aristotle classified the senses in a hierarchical order. Vision he values most highly, praising it for its clarity and ability to discern difference. Second, he ranked hearing, recognizing its great inferiority to sight, though admitting its greater conduciveness to learning than the “animalistic” senses of taste and touch. With some exceptions, Christian and Western philosophers have generally embraced Aristotle’s system over the past number of centuries. Let us begin to say “no” and question this perhaps flawed hierarchical system, beginning to recognize the independence and ability of all the senses as a means for understanding.

It is on this very argument that this study must begin. The meanings that we create in any circumstance are all influenced by our senses, and so due attention must be paid to those senses to fully understand how we create our meanings and reality. To understand how people understand their self and their spirituality, we must begin to understand how these things are manifested through the sensation of the body, the vessel of the self. Here, we will examine how people understand and manifest their spirituality through the music they hear, produce, reproduce, and construct – the aural of spirituality.

Much inquiry into the topic of spirituality in music has been just that, spirituality *in* music. People often search for specific kinds of music that are “spiritual” in themselves, often ranking certain forms more spiritual than others. What needs to happen in the present state of this inquiry is to begin with the premise that spirituality does not reside in the music. Rather,

spirituality resides in the person and is manifested and experienced through the making of or listening to music. Indeed, it could be possible that spirituality has its own languages and means of manifestation and music is simply one means among others, such as sight, smell, taste, and feel.

Thus, the question is principally not “How can we talk about spiritual music” – a question that has been circulating and discussed rather fruitlessly for far too long. Instead, the better question is “how do people foster, express, and/or elicit the spirituality already present in themselves through music?” Talking about what “spiritual music” is and is not comes as a second order activity. The first order is discussing how music speaks for the spirit.

Why is any argument about “what spiritual music is” pointless? First, it is attempting to make an objective claim to something that is rather subjective. Second, when people argue this point, they often confuse spiritual for religious and are rather arguing about what is “religious music,” which is a whole other problem. Sound constantly crosses boundaries, blurring distinctions between subject and object, public and private, religious and spiritual, religious and secular, self and other. Attempting to adopt “religious music” or “spiritual music” as central categories of discussion and analysis requires defining clearly both what is “religious” and “spiritual” (a rather subjective definition) and differentiating these forms of music from the broader sonic world by defining what makes certain musical forms distinctly religious or spiritual, which again is a rather subjective endeavor. People’s experiences of religion and spirituality are so vastly different that to make claims as to a definitive religious or spiritual form of music is problematic. For someone, a rock concert can be just as religious or spiritual as a Protestant hymn. Rather, to avoid this problem, it is more pertinent and useful to discuss music not as religious or spiritual in itself but as a means for people to express their own individualized

spirituality or religious inclinations. Thus we are examining, analyzing, and appreciating subjective claims to better understand people and how they experience their identity rather than making objective claims about subjective matters in an attempt to force people and their experiences into or out of constructed boxes.

How does music create identity?

Dan Campbell, author of *The Mozart Effect*, says North Americans “spend more money, time and energy on music than on books, movies and sports.” Why do people spend more money on music than these other forms of media? I would guess that it is because books and movies, more often than music, actively espouse particular meanings and messages. While music can be explicitly programmatic at times, movies and books are, for the vast majority, always so. Most movies in popular circulation today have plots, characters, symbolism, morals, messages, and are intrinsically invested in representations of ideals to some extent. A symphony, for the majority of examples, does not have explicit characters, plots, morals, or messages that are essentially representation of some social ideal.

A symphony is a collection of sounds that have been ordained by some to be of cultural or entertainment value. The only meaning that these sounds have is personal, created independently in each listener, performer, and composer. Granted, some musical pieces have programs, characters, and messages, but, in observing the collect of world music and comparing it to film and literature, it can be easily argued that most music is not explicitly programmatic. Furthermore, even if a piece of music did have a program, one does not necessarily know by listening to the piece. One must either understand the language (if there is voice) or have heard

the program from some outside source. Music does not actively reveal its meanings; it is passive, while the audience must be active in creating meaning. Film and literature, on the other hand, more commonly are active in revealing meaning while the viewer or reader passively assimilates the message for further evaluation.

This high level of programaticism in popular film and literature leaves little room for the self to be experienced or expressed. Music, on the other hand, does not tell or show one what to think. Most, if not all, is left to the dispositions, feelings, and imagination of the listener. Of course the writers of books, makers of movies, and players of sports all have an infinite opportunity to experience and express themselves, but these people are few and possess privileged skills. The faculty to hear is common and easily available for a vastly greater majority of people. Thus, personal experience becomes more inclusive with music because it allows for a richer experience for the passive participant – the audience – which, in all cases musical, literary, theatrical, and athletic, comprises the vast majority of participants.

Music can provide people, both actively and passively involved, with many ways of discovering, interpreting, and understanding their sense of identity. It can be a medium through which people can express emotional states that are sometime difficult to fully express and are intimately associated with self. Music acts as a personal mirror. In such a mirror, people may interpret, reinterpret, transfigure, disfigure, construct, or deconstruct the meaning of their self as they so choose by the mere creation of a mix tape, CD, or playlist; the addition or subtraction of songs from an electronic or physical library; the placement of a particular note or chord in a particular way on a particular page. In this way, music can be just as identifying as the clothes one wears, the style of hair one chooses, the people one associates with, or the institutions that one attends.

In many ways, music does not prescribe particular meaning to its sounds. It provides everybody, from the composer, performer, and listener, with the opportunity to have one's own ideas about it and experience it very personally. Music creates space for personal feeling and independent meaning because it does not prescribe any explicit meaning with respect to content.

. . .

Thus far in the framing of this discussion, the idea of what music is in relation to sound and noise has been neglected. Furthermore, the idea of what spirituality is in relation to religion and religions in particular has been neglected. Both of these have been done intentionally. First, this study is not ultimately a discussion of what is music and what is religion in relation to other things. Thus, such a discussion is secondary to the main argument, which does not hinge upon such definitions. Second, these definitions have not been essential to the framing, since, as I have been arguing, spirituality and aurality are common to the majority of human experience, and so the reader probably already has some personal notion of what these things are for themselves, which can act as a perfectly adequate definition at this point. It is at this point, however, that these definitions must begin to be examined, for the sake moving away from the frame and to the meat of the discussion.

We as a species immersed continuously, almost since birth (and some before birth), in the world of unordered and ordered sound, often take for granted what we mean by words such as music, sound, and noise. We think we know exactly what these mean, but, in a single room of individuals, what is considered musical and non-musical can vary greatly.

I once led a discussion group in a seminar for middle and high school aged students on diversity and acceptance. In particular, I led the discussion on diversity in music. In trying to get the students to recognize diversity in things beyond race and religious creed, I wanted to show

them how much they varied in their musical tastes and opinions. To begin, I asked the class, “I want each of you to shout out your favorite and least favorite genre of music.” To my pleasant surprise, they did not yell out specifics like rock, pop, or country. Rather, instead of making a distinction, most shouted out that they liked “everything” or all kinds of music. Sarcastically taking them literally, knowing their probable limited experience with “all” music, I made a list of all the musical genres they then must like.

“So then, I take it you all like Rock?”

“Yes,” many replied with enthusiasm.

“And Rap?”

“Yeah!”

“And Country and Pop?”

“Yeah!”

“And South Indian Raga, Islamic Sufi Music, Gregorian Chant, Scottish Highland Bagpipe, Ancient Chinese Court Music, and Renaissance Polyphony?”

“What?”

The point that I then made was that there is a lot more music out there than most people think. Musical form and taste vary so greatly across the globe that to make a narrow definition of what “music” is would be problematic. The music you listen to might not necessarily be considered music by someone of different taste or culture. Thus, when we consider music as a medium by which people may better experience or understand their self or identity, we must keep in mind the broadness of what music is. What one might consider noise can be music to another. What one might hear as sound could be heard by another as a symphony. We will broach into a discussion of music, sound, and noise in chapter three, but it is necessary, in laying

the foundations of this argument, that the reader begin now to consider the broader implications of this thing called “music,” which our curious alien anthropologist thought best to call “atmospheric vibrations.” Indeed, thinking of music as “atmospheric vibrations” is not a useless exercise, because, not only is music exactly that in its most physical conception, but also that it is the most broad and perhaps safest definition we can give it.

It is important however to recognize the flaw in this extremely broad definition. While it allows for more variance in a categorization that is rather subjective, it does leave out the very human aspect of music. Not merely is it atmospheric vibrations ordered into what one might consider to be pleasing sound-patterns. It is also, and most importantly, an utterance, an expression and experience of the self. Music is a powerful medium through which emotion, feeling, meaning, spirituality, and the self can be transmitted and understood.

Chapter Two

Music, Sound, and Noise: How We Classify Atmospheric Vibrations

“... sound does lead a life of its own, which shades into music gradually and naturally. In order to empower the inadequate word, it is repeated, recited, and subsequently sung.” (Heeswijk 62)

“...music is not merely something that happens when a number of people get up on a platform. In those circumstances it may happen or it may not; to find out one must listen. But music is something that should happen whenever people feel a need to speak through sounds, to thank God they are on the earth or to curse him for what they are suffering.” (Mellers 18)

What is “music” in relation to those things we call sounds and noise? Is there a difference or is there not? The decision we make here is important but is often not consciously or intentionally made. Recall the dialogue in chapter one with the middle and high school students. What do we mean when we say, “I like all music.” Music is a very broad word when it is considered outside a particular cultural context. It can be very broad even within a particular cultural context, from a Beethoven symphony to John Cage’s 4’33’’ of silence. Music, as a form of human expression, is highly varying in its manifestations, just as people are highly varying in their own personalities.

Music serves various functions in a person’s life depending on their needs and social, cultural, or environmental circumstances of their life. Furthermore, music can be a way of endowing meaning to people’s life experiences: e.g. relational, familial, emotional, religious, and

spiritual. Think of weddings. How many weddings don't have music of any form? The vast majority of weddings are rife with musical gestures and rituals in all cultures. This is simply one way in which people use music to endow meaning to their experiences. Religiously, music often plays a significant role in many forms of worship or veneration. For example, Christian liturgies often use music in all forms of services from simple Sunday worships to those associated with rites of passage such as baptisms, confirmations, weddings, and funerals. Music and various forms of sound encompass our life from the major milestones of existence to the simple tune on the radio during the morning commute to work.

What exactly is this thing called "music," however? Often, when music is referred to, people mean the conscious and intentional production of organized sounds, typically vocal or instrumental in some capacity, as well as silence. It is commonly considered a uniquely human behavior, though many have taken the "sounds" of nature and made them into forms of music, either reordered from their natural state to create structure or kept in their original form and simply labeled "music." Very importantly, music includes both the acts of making and receiving.

Plato defined music, or *melos*, as having three essential components: the text, the *harmonia* (translated as harmony), and the rhythm (Plato 10). This, however, is a very culturally specific definition. While it is broad, it does create some distinct limitations as to what music can be. We also must ask, "what is 'text,' 'harmonia,' and 'rhythm?'" Must rhythm be quantitatively understandable, or can it be an abstract concept of emphasis on particular sounds. Must it be a time signature? Must it be something that we are able to tap our feet to? The theories and practices of musical rhythm vary more than one, particularly a Westerner, might think, even just within Western Music. The "rhythm" of Gregorian Chant is not the same as the rhythm of organum of the Notre Dame School from the late Middle Ages, nor are these similar to the

rhythm of a Mozart symphony, which is certainly not the same as the rhythm of piece by the foremost composer of New Complexity music, Brian Ferneyhough. These are all examples of Western Music, and hear what variety there is in rhythmic design and conceptualization! Imagine how broad the concept of “rhythm” becomes once we include cross-cultural discourses in music. Thus, while our venerated Plato, coming from the historical period often credited with the origin of Western Music, has provided us with a comprehensive definition of music, it is far from perfect.

Here, our alien anthropologist might have been on the right track to understanding a truly comprehensive definition of music. Scientifically, all sound originates from waves of compression and decompression in the air – atmospheric vibrations – caused by an object vibrating, such as a string, larynx, reed, animal hide, or air itself. With what is commonly in the West called “musical sound”, the vibrations have a constant rate of frequency, creating a distinguishable pitch of sound, whereas with what most consider to be called “noise” the vibrations are uneven and irregular. This however, does not take into account the physical acoustics of non-pitched percussion instruments and ensembles, such as a drum corps in a marching band. These ensembles contain instruments that make what most consider to be “music,” but many of these instruments do not make simple harmonic frequencies that create an easily distinguishable pitch of sound. It would seem, then, that at every turn any attempt to create a definition is thwarted. How can we come to an exclusively inclusive definition of music that allows for a broad spectrum of experiences while still keeping a concrete concept of the topic at hand? It seems true that people, in general, have a capacity to conceptualize what music is to themselves; they have the ability to distinguish between a muffin and music, but is this a capacity that we take for granted?

The Spectrum of Sounds

“Sound” can be placed onto a conceptual spectrum, ranging from intentionally organized, artistic expressions to random, natural sounds not intended for a particular listener. This spectrum is outlined by music, sound, and noise. Again, we might already have notions and opinions as to what these things are, but it is our purpose here to deconstruct these notions so as to have a more comprehensive and unbiased definition, at least as much as possible.

Again, recall the conversation outlined in chapter 1 with the middle and high school students. The point of this conversation was to illuminate the vastness that “music” encompasses. Often, when asking people what is music, one will get a highly, culturally contextual opinion, if one is able to get a comprehensible answer at all. Some people generalize it simply as “pleasant sounds,” but this is rather vague and very opinionated. Some people generalize it as “organized sounds,” but this is again rather vague and rather opinionated. It is important that any definition of music leaves room for people’s dispositions and yet puts limiters on it as well. What one might consider music can differ greatly from another, thus opinion in this definition is essential, but not universal.

Someone disposed to concert styles of music, such as Bach, Mozart, or Beethoven, might not consider much of the concert work Krzysztof Penderecki, a modern concert composer, legitimate music. Someone who likes Pop musical genres might not consider all forms of Pop music – rap, country, rock, pop, hip-hop, techno, etc. – legitimate music. Someone who likes African drum music might not like Pacific gamelan music. Someone who likes Protestant hymnody might not like traditional Catholic Gregorian Chant or modern Christian Rock. Even within musical genres, one cannot generalize the taste of a person. Music, within any genre –

Pop, Concert, World, Classical, Religious, etc. – varies greatly, not to mention the variance between genres.

There are musical artists that have used harsh and dissonant sounds, the sounds of nature, computerized sounds, and even the sounds of silence to create the cultural artifact we call “music.” Often, people try to define music as something that is organized, but silence and natural sounds are not naturally organized, though they can become so. John Cage’s 4’33’’ of silence, a cultural monolith questioning what we call music, is a prime example. In this piece, a pianist, dressed in full concert attire before an anticipating audience, approaches and sits on a bench before a beautiful and pristinely tuned concert grand piano. He lifts his hands and places his trained and curved fingers upon the keys, the audience ready to hear a masterful work of “music” like the Beethoven and Brahms with which they are familiar. Waiting with anticipation, the audience watches the pianist poised, ready to begin, but nothing happens. For four minutes and thirty-three seconds this goes on until the pianist gets up from the bench and bows affirmatively to the audience, having completed his virtuosic performance. This is music.

This piece is arguably music. It is music because the composer says it is so. It is music because the performer says it is so. It is music because the listener says it is so. In the same manner, it is not music if any of these say it is *not* so. Either way, this performance of silence, whether considered music or not, has the potential to exist in one’s mind as music, and thus it is imperative that any understanding of what “music” is must include the possibility of such dispositions.

So how can we possibly differentiate everything that can possibly be music from what is called sound and noise? We differentiate these things rather passively every day. We take for granted our classifications of the things we hear. How can we begin to define the parameters of

sound classification, when it is such a subjective matter? Ultimately, what classifications that arise here are subjective and can never be absolute in all contexts for all people, but for the sake of fully understanding the argument at hand, it is essential that some limiters are created along this spectrum so that a consensus of understanding can exist between all involved.

What is Noise?

Noise is the easiest term to approach first. It would seem to have the most absolute understanding of all. While what is considered noise can vary from person to person, it does seem consistent that whatever is considered to be noise by the listener is something that is unpleasant for whatever reason. In the modern English language, “noise” carries with it a negative connotation. People complain about noise and form “noise codes,” “noise laws,” and “noise regulations” to limit the amount of noise one is exposed to. While noise can have positive connotations, it seems that, for the vast majority of time, noise is considered intrusive and is unwanted. When classifying something as noise, people are passively making a claim that whatever they are hearing is not of value and merits no attention or serious consideration in a social, cultural, or artistic light. It is more than “not valuable;” it is undesirable. Furthermore, people often conceptualize what they are hearing, when calling it noise, as something that lacks serious organization. This organization can be subjectively heard or a physical phenomenon of erratic atmospheric vibrations, such as the sound of a jackhammer or a waterfall.

Whether subjectively formed or physically observable, “noise” is still ultimately a subjective decision. Jackhammers and waterfalls both create erratic sound frequencies, what quantitatively can be called noise, but there is clearly a popular disposition for people to listen to

running water rather than industrial construction. There is still the possibility that someone might prefer the construction. If a person spends their whole life living in a city, the sound of construction could perhaps be comforting and reminiscent, while a waterfall could be foreign and disorienting. This same phenomenon exists in “music.” One might not consider African Sufi Chant to be music, but if one grew up in an environment where this “music” was commonly heard, it would be natural to find this familiar and consider it music to the ears. One not familiar to this music could easily find it foreign, unpleasant and difficult to listen to.

Ultimately, the only conclusive thing that can be said as to the nature of “noise” is that it is some sound that is often considered undesirable or unpleasant. Essentially a subjective disposition, noise can be music to some and pain to others. Noise, when considered pleasant, is no longer technically considered noise, however, according to our definitions here. It has rather moved into the realm of sound or music. As we have defined noise based upon its desirability, it would be natural to define the other markers along our spectrum according to the same measurement.

What is Sound?

A little further along our spectrum is “sound.” While noise seems to be commonly and actively considered undesirable, people seem to be more ambivalent to “sound.” Sound is much more a neutral term to classify the things we hear. Sound is not undesirable; it is simply there. It is the background to life. These background sounds can be more “noisy” than others depending on who is hearing and classifying them, from the sound of rain to the sound of a passing car. What is discernible about this phenomenon is that, whatever the sound, when the listener

classifies it as “sound” rather than “noise,” they are making a statement of ambivalence, not a statement of displeasure. Think of “white noise” in this example. This is not something people use to necessarily make a cultural, personal, or emotive statement. It is sound that fills a sonic space.

There is not a distinct line between those sounds that are really noise and simply sound. This is an essentially subjective spectrum, based almost completely of the dispositions of the listener. There are discernible and quantifiable reasons as to the cause of certain classifications, such as the particular, physical nature of the produced sound waves. Yet, even though there are reasons for people’s possible classification, such as a jackhammer being commonly considered a source of “noise,” there are always exceptions. There could be and certainly are people who could consider a Mozart opera noise and a New York traffic jam music, and there are justifiable reasons for this classification. Again, ultimately this spectrum is a system of personal measurement. It is meant for the individual reader and listener to understand the classification that they both actively and passively make every day.

What is Music?

In our common understanding, music is a more distinct entity from sound and noise. While the line between sound and noise seems rather vague, there is a large consensus that “what music *is*” is quite distinct from these other two classifications of sound. This is essentially flawed. Listen to the music of Varese, Penderecki, John Cage, Poul Ruders, and Brian Ferneyhough. These modern composers have a very different concept of what music is in relation to popular notions.

People often seem comfortable with their understandings of the words they use. This is true with music. Having listened to relatively conservative Pop, Classical, and World music forms, most people believe they have a solid idea of what music is and is not. An often cited definition of music by Varese is, “music is organized sound.” The question to be asked then is, “what is organized and unorganized.” Certainly, this opinion can vary greatly from person to person.

The music of Brian Ferneyhough is highly organized, but to an untrained listener without a musical score to see, this music can sound like nonsensical randomness. The organization of W. A. Mozart, Britney Spears, Brian Ferneyhough, Wagner, Varese, and Aerosmith are all, in a small way, similar yet they are also vastly different. My sense of organization is probably different from yours. How can we then expect to simply say that music is “organized sound” when our definitions of organization are greatly differing and sometimes abstract? Furthermore, what happens when people wish to classify those sounds that are truly “disorganized,” like our construction site down the street, as “music” with the understanding that these sounds are unordered and because of this are, by virtue, “musical?” This happens all the time, so it is not a phenomenon that can be ruled out as an outlier. Here, as demonstrated above with sound and noise, the line between what is music and sound/noise is also quite blurred, despite many people’s comfortable notions otherwise.

What is distinctive about the classifications of particular sounds as “music” is that these sounds are commonly, in some respect, perceived as pleasant or engaging in a desirable way to the listener. Not all music has to be sweet, melodic, or pleasant in conventional meaning. What is understood is that music is a desired kind of sound. When it is classified as such, it is not passively perceived or undesired. Music can, however, be passively perceived or undesired given

certain circumstances or musical tastes. I am sure people do not actively engage themselves with the music they hear over the grocery store or elevator intercom, though they could. Music can, and often does, operate as background sound in commercials, movies, stores, and other commercial venues. Music can as well be perceived as noise, either due to personal tastes or by design of the artist. It is important to recognize, however, that when something is truly considered “music,” it is actively engaged by the listener due to its sensory desirability. Music could be a Beethoven symphony, a ACDC rock concert, a waterfall, or a jackhammer; it is only necessary that the people experiencing it desire and actively engage with these sounds in some way.

As has been demonstrated, what is music, sound, or noise is a highly personal matter. There is no absolute classification system as to what is empirically noise and empirically music. Anything heard could be perceived anywhere along this spectrum depending on the dispositions of the listener. Ultimately this discussion has not been for the purpose of creating a rigid classification system by designing limited definitions of these terms. The purpose here was to begin creating a dialogue where there is an *intentional* use of these words. When one classifies something as music, sound, or noise, there should be an active understanding of why these classifications are as they are. They are not absolute in any way. All classifications are subjective. It is important to begin understanding why and how we and others classify the things the way we do. Without this consideration, there can never be an adequate discussion of sounds and how people use these sounds to shape and express themselves. Without understanding that sound perception is a very personal, not objective, physical phenomenon, the spirituality of this topic can never be fully comprehended.

Chapter Three

Religion vs. Spirituality: What Exactly are We Talking About?

*“It makes little sense to let spirituality and religion be mere synonyms, but it also makes no sense to set them up as opposites with one superior to the other.”
(Grimes 25)*

“Because spirituality pervades everything that is human, its study is central to investigations of the essence of human nature.” (Moberg 99)

Many are familiar with the famous quotation by Albert Einstein: “Science without religion is lame. Religion without science is blind.” To mirror this often cited remark, I would like to claim that, “spirituality without religion is untamed; religion without spirituality is uninspired.” The concepts of religion and spirituality are intimately entwined, always in dialogue, one seldom without the other. The problem with these terms is that they are often used, but infrequently are they defined and understood by the people who use them, both professionally and unprofessionally. Since these two terms are essential in this study we are now undertaking, it is essential that they be defined, at least within the scope of this research. To begin with attempting a definition, let us return to our alien anthropologist and see what he might observe about our “religious” institutions.

. . .

With further research into the human species and their fascination with and institutionalization of atmospheric vibrations, I have found another interesting social pattern, which they, in some places, call “religion.”

What first brought my attention to this interesting pattern were various instances of mass migration of peoples to certain locations on the globe, which seem to hold some sort of significance. The first instance I noticed was at the convergence of the European, Asian, and African Continents, which they call the Middle East. In a nation there, called Saudi Arabia, is a place called Mecca, approximately 70 Earth kilometers from the Red Sea. To this place, multiple millions of people journey each year from all corners of the globe. In this city is a cuboid building, which I ascertain as highly significant to a large number of humans. I am at this time, not quite sure why this cuboid structure is of such significance and why the strange rituals connected to it are performed, but, given how many people visit this site from such far distances and how reverently this structure is treated, it must have some sort of significance. From my research, I have been able to ascertain that this interesting social pattern is classified by humans as “religion.”

Given this knowledge of massive religious activity, I have done further observation into other mass migrations of humans to partake in or observe some sort of ritual at a location that would seem significant. The second occurrence of this kind of activity I noticed was on the first Earth-day of the first Earth-week during the solar revolution period designated “February”. This migration was observed in the Northern Hemisphere on what is designated the “North American Continent” in the nation-state called the “United States of America.” Through interceptions of television and radio broadcast networks, I ascertained that this event is called “Super Bowl Sunday.” On this day many thousands of people migrated to a large bowl shaped structure and

watch a significantly smaller number of people perform some ritual in the center of the bowl involving the movement of a spheroid object. I can only guess as to the significance of this ritual, but I can ascertain that it is indeed significant, for while much less people are in attendance at the bowl as compared to the aforementioned cuboid structure, many more watch and listen to the event on television and radio. Furthermore, I am interested in how this event relates to other food centered American rituals such as Thanksgiving. I once believed that food consumption in this nation reached its peak during this giving of thanks ritual, but I am now shown to be incorrect, for, according to my calculations and observations, food consumption on this “Super Bowl Sunday” comes close to rivaling if not exceeding that during Thanksgiving. Even more, this most recent “Super Bowl” event, as far as my calculations show, was the most viewed American television broadcast in both the United States and the world since humans first invented the technology, approximating 110 million viewers. Given the similarity with the events observed in Saudi Arabia, this “Super Bowl Sunday” must be classified as “religious.” If it is not religious, I cannot imagine what else it might be.

A third observation of mass migration I made was like the previous two in many ways. It differed, however, in one significant way. Not only was there mass migration to one site of significance, but there was mass migration to a number of sites of significance, all very similar in character. Due to their apparent similarity in character, I have reasoned that these sites must all be connected in some way to the same “religious” event. At these sites, which are dispersed numerously across the globe, people gather at all times of year to pay homage to a humanoid mouse, who has the power to grant wishes and make dreams a reality. People spend much money and travel long distances simply to stand in long lines for hours so as to sit and watch this mouse perform various rituals, the nature of which I have yet to understand. Furthermore, this

“religious” experience is not only contained to these various sites, but is widely broadcast over television and plays a central role in many live and prerecorded theatrical locations. It also seems common to indoctrinate children into these rituals at an early age. Given the breath of influence that this mouse exercises – crossing social, cultural, national, and lingual borders – and given the amount of resources and time invested in the rituals of this mouse, this is undoubtedly another manifestation of human religiosity. Furthermore, given both the temporal and spatial breadth of influence and popularity that ranges from human children to adults around the globe, I would say that this is the most prominent form of religion that I have observed on Earth. Though I need further research to test my theory, I hypothesize that the other religions that I have observed might find their origins in this form of mouse veneration.

Upon continued observation of movement on the planet, I noticed yet more occurrences like these, both on macro and micro levels. Clearly, further research must be conducted to gain a better appreciation of the obviously nuanced meaning of what the humans call “religion” and how mice fit into it.

. . .

As members of the human species, having encountered forms of religion since a young age – at home, in school, around your neighborhood, on television, and in religious institutions themselves – we are conditioned to understand exactly what religion is. We have no problem differentiating the “sacredness” or “religiosity” of a grocery store from a church, just like we have no problem doing the same for the Hajj to Mecca and the Super Bowl. Most people, if you bothered to ask, would probably not identify the Super Bowl as religion or religious. Granted, people might identify Disney World or the Super Bowl as religious. In the same way, people

might identify a crucifix just as religiously poignant as a traffic cone. Given the right experiences and dispositions, anything can be labeled as religions.

This, I believe, is a flaw in people's use of a word. Here, I have identified people's feeling of religiosity with experience and personal dispositions. When people "feel" religion, it is a feeling of "spirituality." This is the point where the term religion and spirituality become distinct and a clear and inclusively exclusive definition is needed.

Religion and Religions

Why can religion not be about "feeling"? Well, it certainly can be, if you want to define it in that way. For the purpose of this study, however, I must take liberties in defining religion on particular terms so no one is confused and nothing is miscommunicated. To do this, I must make essentially personal claims. In a field so personal as religion and spirituality, it is impossible to come to a definition that will fit with everyone and everything. Thus, these definitions are only purposed for the confines of this discussion. There is no claim as to the universality of the definitions. Ultimately, anyone may define anything as they see fit. Definitions are arbitrary to each individual. We often forget that definitions are not set in stone and are quite fluid.

So, again, why can religion not be about "feeling"? This is because, as has been described by Emil Durkheim, religion is an institution. It is not personal. Take for example schools and education. Schools did not exist in order that we may be educated. We first had the desire to be educated, and thus we built schools. The same is for religion. Religion does not exist in a vacuum. Religion did not exist until people wanted it to exist. People were first sized by their sense of otherness, beyondness, smallness, vastness, or whatever that manifested what we might

call spirituality, and then created particular religious institutions to fit their particular sense of spirituality influenced by very particular and personal experiences and dispositions. People felt spirituality and thus created religion in order to understand and foster that spirituality. Thus, one can claim to find the Super Bowl or Disney World a “spiritual” experience, but cannot claim it to be religion, because we, as a social entity, have not created the Super Bowl for the sake of fostering or understanding spiritual dispositions. In the same manner, one can claim that a traffic cone creates a feeling of spirituality within themselves, probably due to some very personal and particular experience with traffic cones at some point in their life. One cannot claim, however, that a traffic cone is religious (unless they have created a religious institution in which traffic cones hold a religious symbolism). This happens all the time though. Crucifixes were not religious before Jesus of Nazareth. For an ancient Roman, a crucifix was a symbol of pain, fear, and torture. It was only when, due to a sense of spirituality after hearing a message from a strange man who chose to die on a crucifix for the sake of others, that people decided to create a religious institution around this image and thus “religify” it. This is not a definition of religion or of spirituality; this is only the differentiation between them. Now that a distinction can be seen, it is appropriate to ask what each is distinctly.

The word “religion,” and various versions of it, are still often misused and incorrectly defined outside the context of spirituality. Think of the phrase, “I religiously brush my teeth every morning.” Is the act of brushing your teeth actually a manifestation of religion? It could be if a religious institution prescribed that its followers brush their teeth every morning. But commonly, it is not considered a manifestation of religion in the same way that the phrase, “I religiously check my oil every one thousand miles” is not considered a religious commentary. Here, we have substituted the word “religion” for “regularly,” “habitually,” or “faithfully.”

Religion is often defined through faith, particularly in a Christian context, but it is important to note that not all institutionalized religious beliefs around the globe incorporate the concept of faith. Faith can be a part of religion, but it is not religion exclusively. A church is not synonymous with faith. One does not “churchly brush their teeth every morning.” This really does not make much sense with the original meaning. Neither is a serpent synonymous with faith, but it is a religious symbol with vast meanings across religious institutions. Religion cannot be summed up by “faith.” Religion has vast meanings and cannot accurately be pinned down by one or two words.

The first and most essential step in coming to a good definition of religion is understanding the distinction of religion and religions. Just as religion and spirituality are related yet distinct, religion and religions are related yet distinct ideas. These three concepts (religions, religion, and spirituality) create a spectrum of concrete, objective ideas to abstract, personal feelings respectively.

The relationship between religions and religion is the same as to sport and sports. We do not watch *sport*; we watch *sports*. Sport is a much more abstract concept and must be considered and interpreted in a highly subjective way with objective bits. In the most basic way and yet complete way, “religions” is easy. When one says religions, this can be pared down to some variety of Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, or what have you. The same is with sports. When one says sports, this can be pared down to some variety of Basketball, Soccer, Swimming or what have you. *Religion*, on the other hand, is not outside your window – it’s not a concrete, necessarily observable quality. Religion straddles the line between a category of culture and personal experience that requires loose and abstract definitions. Religion is both concrete and

subjective. Further along this spectrum is spirituality which comprises a wholly personal a subjective category and thus must be defined quite abstractly.

While it is sometimes difficult for one to pin down a concise and inclusively exclusive definition of religion, it is easier to describe that which we see in what we call “religions” and religious practices and thus make some conclusions from such evidence to formulate a concept of religion. I say “inclusively-exclusive” because it is important – at least to narrow the scope of what one has to observe in religious studies – to place limitations on what we call religious while still allowing some flexibility for traditions that exist outside what we might “normally” call religious, knowing however that “normal” is not an objective means of measurement per se.

As it would seem, the term religion is nearly impossible to wholly define with all manner of inclusiveness and without bias to one’s cultural lens. It is not something that exists independent of other things; it is an integral part of all facets of society from what we might call “cultural” to the political, economic, and even sexual. Religion is “in culture” because it basically is created by people, informed by people, and is part of people’s identities.

One cannot hope to find an all-inclusive and airtight definition of religion if one asks a Roman Catholic Priest in Italy or a Brahmanical Vedic Priest in India and then takes either one of those definitions as absolute. Each definition might work well respective to each culture from which it originates, but one cannot realistically expect one to work for the other, let alone all the various other things in this world which we designate as religion or religious, let alone still all those even further distant things that we might consider spiritual. Definitions serve particular purposes within particular societies – rules for one game cannot be taken for another. One cannot play Monopoly using the rules for Scrabble. If one were to try, one would find a serious lack of letter tiles and a whole lot of money with no idea for what use it serves. Unfortunately, this

happens all too often in cultural exchanges, and ultimately results in miscommunication, misunderstanding, confusion, anger, and disaster.

Religion is “in culture” because it is not independent of society. To understand what “religion” is, one must also understand from where, when, whom it is coming. For an inclusive definition of religion, one cannot necessarily accept one definition, or, if one hopes to, one must accept an immensely broad definition of religion that might include things that are outside the realm of what we usually consider “religious” such as the Super Bowl or a traffic cone.

Using a crafted, broad definition of religion, one can see how culture has an influence on religion, while religion also has an equal impact on one’s cultural interactions. Religion could be broadly considered:

an integrated system of beliefs that forms one’s more-or-less habitual interactions with society and the natural world, which are adopted for the sake of an ultimate concern or highest value/ideal, to which one orients himself to give direction or meaning to his life. Often these systems of belief, interactions, and orientations are formulated as part of an institutionalized religion, though much of this is often personalized on an individual level according to “spiritual” dispositions.

Those “habitual interactions” inform how one influences and participates in the world and society around them, and, of course, depending on the “society and natural world” that one exists in, one could ultimately be influenced in their habitual interactions in turn. If one lives in a thriving metropolis, they probably will not interact with their environment in the same way as

one who lives in the heart of a tropical rainforest. Environment, society, culture – personal experience – all impact how one forms values, morals, worldviews, and religious dispositions.

Functional or simulative definitions both have their means and ends. One can focus on inclusiveness while the other, being more specific perhaps, is more exclusive while concurrently being clear and succinct. The definition above, while describing functionality of religion in its most essential form, is inclusive to the extent that it might include things that generally would not be considered religious. This, however, is why this definition is useful, because religion is not the same as “religions.” Religions are rather objective and quantifiable. While somewhat so, “religion” can be more esoteric as it approaches the spiritual end of the spectrum. Thus, having a definition for religion that is both specific to possible institutionalized forms of religions and freeform to personal experiences of religiosity is appropriate and advantageous.

Spirituality

Psychologist Helminiak: “... simply to be human is already to be spiritual. So underlying all expressions of spirituality is a core that is universal, a core that is simply human.” (Helminiak 272)

The critical point of differentiation between spirituality and religion is that the former is a prior condition of personal experience and the latter is a possible path through which to foster spiritual growth. In much of the current rhetoric on spirituality, it is often viewed as a “meta-religion” – both a part of and separate from religion. One cannot take up membership in spirituality as one can a church. While this is partly true, it is also partly flawed. Spirituality is not any form of religion. It is not meta-religion. It is the precondition for religion, in dialogue

with religion, but not subsumed or an intrinsic part of religion. Rather, religion is a part of spirituality. Religion is a particular way in which to foster spiritual feelings and understanding. Anything can be automatically and unquestionably spiritual if one claims it to be, since it is personal. Not everything can be religious though, since it is, in part, codified and institutionalized. Many people must claim something religion before it can definitively become religion, because religion is a social institution. Spirituality, on the other hand, is the broader concept. Out of this rather esoteric concept has emerged the vast array of “religions” we encounter today. These institutions, with their rituals, ideologies, and belief systems developed out of the original *spiritual* incentive to awaken, understand, stimulate, and express those desires and drives that originate in the essence of every individual.

There are complications in researching spirituality and asking questions about the concept itself. Thousands, if not over seven billion, definitions are available. Ultimately, how a researcher must interpret it must interact with the beliefs and definitions held by research subjects. Henry Thoreau in his book, *Walden*, writes, “Every man is the builder of a temple, called his body, to the god he worships, after a style purely his own.” This quotation encapsulates this broad view of spirituality well. We need not be so confined in spirituality by the concept of transcendent reality. Spirituality is different for different people and cannot be pinned down so precisely. Man orients himself to that which he finds of highest value and derives his self from that orientation ultimately determining his existence or way of being as a result.

Recognizing the vastness of what spirituality can mean to people, what are some of the characteristics of spirituality that we can perhaps begin to define to gain a better understanding for our own purposes here? When talking about “spiritual experiences” there is a belief that some

aspect of life, whether mundane or super-mundane, is “sacred.” This is a personal belief, and is thus subjective, and cannot be objectively defined apart from personal feeling. When we think of what is believed to be “sacred,” it is easiest to think about that which is “not sacred” or profane. Often the profane is that which one experiences daily and is routine. The sacred, on the other hand is that which one experiences apart from the normal.

In moments of feeling one’s spirituality, people often claim a sense of “connectedness.” Being fully engaged in a moment or being fully connected has been claimed to produce this experience, operating as an opposition to normative alienation. The creation of a sense of “connection” can be claimed to be essential to the spiritual experience. This can be a connection to people, the natural world, or supernatural entities, or the self. There is also sometimes a claim to feel that there is something greater than the individual self, achieved through this sense of interconnectedness. This can create in the individual a sense of awe or humility in the face of the insignificance of the self in relation to the vastness of existence. These feelings can create a further sense of dependency over independency within a person and can cause them to reassess their values in relation to others. Often, one can begin to feel that their existence is unimportant or insignificant. People could claim to lose their sense of time during a spiritual moment. People spend their lives measuring their existence in time increments. This can reorient our sense of being in time or a lack of time. Again, a spiritual experience is often equaled with an experience that puts one outside of their normal experience of reality.

Spirituality goes back to the experience or the emotive response in which one feels that they have been reoriented or redirected. This is more experiential rather than systematic. Ultimately and very broadly, a spiritual approach looks to create an experience, not a system.

Often things are equated with spiritual experiences, such as a song, place, or person. Set aside places or specifically “sacred” places that are often described as a wilderness are places that often inspire spiritual experiences. Counter to wilderness, the home or places of familiarity are often seen as inspirational to one with a spiritual disposition. One could even believe that the entirety of creation and everything that is is sacred simply because it has come into being and deserves some kind of sacred respect, feeling that the whole is, in fact, greater than the sum of its individual parts. People might find that a song or music that is familiar to them from a particular or poignant time in their lives to be spiritual. Communal experiences of music, such as a congregation hymn, choral singing, or rock concerts can often inspire spiritual experiences of interconnectedness in a musical experience. It is important, and a part of this study, to understand that these things are not in themselves spiritual. It is ultimately the person that is spiritual. These things simply facilitate spiritual experiences. They are the catalysts that help us to better experience ourselves in relation to “the other.”

To gain a better and perhaps more quantitative grasp on what spiritual can be to different people, these are the themes of spirituality identified by Hay and Nye, who highlighted the following five dimensions of spiritual awareness:

1. The here-and-now experience: This is a complete immersion into the experience of the present moment, intensely committed to the immediacy of the “now” in its full concreteness. Rather than a loose of temporal sense, this is a complete awareness of time in the moment.

2. Tuning: This is a complete “resonance” or “being in tune” with something this is outside of oneself. This can be metaphorical, such as with nature and the natural order, or more literal, such as in a musical performance.
3. Flow: This can be the total absorption in the performance of a single task. This is absorption to that point that there is a feeling that the activity being done is doing itself, rather than being done by the performer.
4. Focusing: This is different from flow in that it is not absorption to the point of losing self-awareness. Rather, it is an intense awareness of the self and what it is doing.
5. Relational Consciousness: This can be described as a deep-felt sense of connectedness with others and within oneself. Many forms of relational consciousness can be made here, including person-God consciousness, person-people consciousness, person-world consciousness, and person-self consciousness. (Hay & Nye)

Clearly, spirituality is an esoterically difficult phenomenon to definitively understand, running an abstract spectrum from deep silence to ecstatic sounds, from abject isolation to great communion. While it is a dangerous thing to say, spirituality could essentially be accessed through anything given the right dispositions of the person is ultimately a part of the person, not a part of the thing encountered. To truly understand, modern definitions of spirituality must focus on the intrinsically personal meaning of the experience. The term spirituality can abstractly be conceived as the extra-dimensional reality of one’s life that both informs and grows from the

values at one's core. Even more esoterically, it is a vehicle for meeting what a person believes to be sacred.

Ultimately, all research on spirituality is incomplete and imperfect. Spirituality is so comprehensive, personal, and universally all-inclusive in its possibilities that we can apprehend and study only miniscule pieces. There is an amazing totality to this phenomenon that can only be seen and studied in the tiniest fractions. Spirituality is at the core of the human experience, trying to understand the self and its place and meaning in the world. Pragmatically, it is impossible to fully understand, appreciate, and comprehend it and all of its complex connections, considering every belief, desire, value, and motivation being reflected positively or negatively in it in some way.

While we must understand that spirituality is in dialogue with religion, we must also begin to free spirituality from the domain of religion in order to make allowance for other, possibly non-religious, spiritual manifestations. It is essential that researchers and those wishing to study religion and spirituality begin to view spirituality as a characteristic in the capacity of humanity, that is personal and vast in its variety of expressions, rather than viewing the expressions of spirituality, those vehicles that people use to understand and communicate their self and their reality, as if they are the embodiment of spirituality itself. People are spiritual, not things. Such a view both allows and requires us to give priority to the capability of the human spirit to be the source of such fascinating and powerful manifestations that have shaped the very fabric of our cultural and social world history. This directs our attention away from institutions and gives it to human beings as having the power to feel, create, express, understand, comprehend, and wonder.

Spirituality and Sound: The Ritual of “Music”

“The same human force that gives rise to bountiful religious expressions may also give rise to just as bountiful artistic expressions.” (Yob 148)

Spirituality and religion, both together and independently, provide meaning to many people’s lives. Often this meaning is found through the enacting and encoding of rituals, such as pilgrimages, a Eucharist, a symphony, singing hymns, chanting psalms, dancing, and even football games. Through its vast resources of music, holy texts, myths, stories, parables, costumes, vestments, gesture, actions, spaces, smells, feels, sights, and sounds that are spiritual or religious, rituals conjure a meaning beyond normal definitions, allowing a glimpse into what cannot be easily and objectively observed – the invisible, inaudible, untouchable, unperceivable secrets of why we are here and what it means to be alive and to be self-aware.

Ritual plays a central role in human experience, and thus it plays a central role in the human experience, understanding, and expression of spirituality. From the small daily patterns we follow and create for ourselves to the major social, economic, political, cultural, and religious ceremonies that mark lives and form our realities, we often ritualize what we choose to value and to remember. Sometimes, however, the rituals we “value” and mold to ourselves ceases to impact us because we have forgotten their personal meaning and significance. Sometimes ritual becomes little more than a tired pageant. This, I believe, is what music has gradually become to many in social and cultural circles today. We have become so desensitized to music, having the ability to carry and access our musical identity any time in our pockets, hearing it played constantly on the television and radio, in malls and department stores, on video games and in films, and while walking down the streets of a city or country road.

Music is a ritual that permeates people's lives, but it is often a ritual that has become undervalued or taken for granted. There are countless examples, however, of how this ritual, in various places, times, and circumstances, has touched the inner depth of people's being. Volumes could be filled with accounts of people being moved by sounds of various forms. It is not the purpose of this discussion to make an account of millions of people, however. If the reader is at any point in doubt of these claims, please, go and ask for yourself. You will find people in proliferation that "love," "are moved by," "are inspired by," "are enriched by," "are fulfilled by" music. Music provides many people with ways of experiencing and expressing their self – the spirituality in their life – that otherwise might be difficult to access and express in other tangible ways.

Why is it so difficult for our alien anthropologist to understand what we call religion and spirituality? The more complex any cultural expression is, the more difficult it will be for outsiders to understand its essence and the more difficult it will be for insiders to separate themselves from it to better understand its nature in an objective way. Spirituality is to man what man makes of himself. A spiritual experience is conceivably anything to man and everything to man, for without man, it is hard to believe that spirituality, let alone religion, would exist. When defining something as broad as spirituality, it is better to say nothing at all than to try and say what is right and wrong, for these limitations eventually blind one to the vastness and mystery of the human consciousness and experience. Ultimately, definitions destroy more than they try to save, for they can never fully encompass the whole and only work to divide the primal, yet sometimes incomprehensible, simplicity that is really present from the beginning.

Chapter Four

Bringing It Together: What is “Spiritual Music?”

“To sum up the effect of sacred music in the history of the world’s religions, and that of myriads of human souls that have been by its agency transformed, purified, refined, elevated and cheered on their way heavenward, would require a spiritual mathematics beyond human reach.” (Edwards 155)

Ludwig van Beethoven: “Music is the mediation between the spiritual and sensual life.”

“Spiritual in essence, [music] utilizes the senses for the higher education of the soul. Born in the sphere of pure spirit, it touches the lower level of matter only to spring upward, and, if true to its origin, to rise on the pulsating wings of the ether to loftier regions. The home of music is in the bosom of the Eternal. It is the only known language indigenous to heaven and heard in all inhabited worlds. Music is the lingua franca of the universe.” (Edwards 20)

It is now time to bring the ideas laid out in the past two chapters together. Why have I taken such extents to discuss, deconstruct, and define the terms religions, religion, spirituality, music, sound, and noise? Far too often in discussion of the topics of “music and spirituality,” “spiritual music,” and “the spirituality of music,” these terms are left ambiguous. As a result, mistakes are made, miscommunications abound, and few conclusions can be found. Spirituality often becomes synonymous with religion; music becomes identified as the source of spirituality; and music is placed in a cultural and ultimately personal context that excludes many experiences of this atmospheric phenomenon. These are the many limitations in previous research and

writing on this topic, which I hope to circumvent and alleviate. Religion is not the same thing as spirituality; people, not music, are the source of spirituality; and music is not always pretty harmonies and lovely or sweet melodies.

Music is an expression of the individual; it can be rough, coarse, terrifying, inspiring, beautiful, ugly, insipid, exciting, organized, disorganized, or anything, so long as whoever is listening desires the experience. Furthermore, music is an expression; it has no agency or feeling of its own. The feeling that is within music is ultimately within the listener. If music is labeled as spiritual, it is only because the person experiencing that music labels it as such, not because the music is in some inherent possession of spirit. A church hymn can be just as spiritual as the sound of a traffic jam depending on the dispositions of the listener. Furthermore, religious music is not the same as spiritual music. Religious music is much more easily identifiable. It is part of an institution of belief, ritual, practice, and orientation. It carries the labels, symbols, and meaning of those institutions. There is no institution for spirituality. These words must be consciously understood and implemented in order to accurately begin understanding and discussing this part of the human experience.

Iris Yob, in her article “Why Is Music a Language of Spirituality?” from the *Philosophy of Music Education Review*, gives such a relevant example of the perceivable difference between “religious music” and “spiritual, non-religious, experiences through music” that it is necessary to quote the passage in whole:

“In conversation with a vocal ensemble director from the former USSR, I was struck with his description of the effects of performing religious music which his group did from time to time. This man, a card-carrying member of the Communist Party with no religious affiliation, was definite about describing the experience as a spiritual one. A couple of things are interesting about his description. First, he

makes a quite clear distinction between the religious and the spiritual; in his mind these two are different kinds of experience; through the medium of religious music he and his ensemble members enjoyed a spiritual and not a religious experience. This distinction is significant.” (Yob 145-146)

Yes, this distinction is very significant! Just because something, such as music, is labeled as religious, does not mean that it is spiritual, just as something that is not labeled as religious can be spiritual. Spirituality and religion, while in dialogue, are not synonymous or part of the same, overarching concept. They are very distinct concepts and experiences.

Rather than understanding spirituality as a byproduct of religion and the arts, the arts and religion might be seen as a byproduct of spirituality. In this same way, we should begin to understand and distinguish the difference between those things labeled “spiritual music” and the “spiritual musical experience.” This has been one of the great problems in much of the modern research into spirituality and music. To cite a specific and significant example of research that points in perhaps a more accurate direction, let us consider briefly the study conducted by Lowis and Hughes, “A Comparison of the Effects of Sacred and Secular Music on Elderly People.” From *The Journal Of Psychology*.

In this study, Lowis and Hughes demonstrated that enjoyment of the various musical selections, all either instrumental or non-English vocal media, were “positively and significantly lined to familiarity with [the music pieces]” (Lowis 51). This observation is in line with the understanding that spiritual experiences of music are innately personal. If one is disposed to particular genres due to circumstances of their environment, upbringing, or professional training, naturally they will probably gravitate towards such music and find personal meaning in it. What is of greater significance is that this study attempted to show the “inherent spiritual component in music” and came out with no conclusive results. Rather than show the inherent spiritual

component in man expressed through music, this study tried to quantify the spirituality *in* music through observing people reactions to that music. To quote the study at length:

“The results of the statistical analyses showed that the music believed to be spiritually inspired did not lead to an increase in scores on the Inspirit or Ego-Integrity scales; nor did it evoke feelings of reverence or spirituality in the listeners any more than did the secular music.... Specifically pertinent to the theoretical perspective of this study of this study is the possibility that there simply is no inherent spirituality in music.... Claims for an inherent spiritual component in music remain unproven.” (Lowis 52)

The results of this experiment perhaps seem obvious at this point in this discourse. It has been claimed thus far that there is no inherent spirituality in music. Rather, the spirituality resides in those experiencing the music and manifests itself through that music. Here, Lowis and Houghs show that simply because a piece was of sacred or secular intent, or spiritually inspired within the reality of a singular composer, does not reflect its comprehensive or universal spiritual character. What determined the listener’s reaction was foremost his or her understanding of and dispositions towards the piece. They removed as much perceivable religious symbolism from the music samples as possible, such as by selecting pieces without English text or without words entirely so that the listeners would not have any information as to the purpose of the piece. Granted, the claim that there is an “inherent spiritual component in music” remains unproven, but could this be simply because there simply is no spiritual component in music?

A similar observation can be made through a similar study done by Terrence Hays and Victor Minichiello in their article “Older People’s Experience of Spirituality Through Music” in the *Journal of Religion, Spirituality and Aging*. In this study nearly all participants, according to Hays and Minichiello, indicated that they were more “spiritually aware” when they listened to

music. Music, for many participants, facilitated a “meditative state and was used as a way of connecting and expressing spirituality.” (Hays 88) The quotations of a few of the interviews illustrate the finds of Hays and Minichiello:

Interviewee Jane: “I think the music is a lifting experience. It’s a spiritual experience, which does take you out onto another level.” (Hays 89)

Interviewee Bob: “Music can add that extra dimension because we lie in a world of reality and I think at times we need music to lift us out of the ‘mundaneity’ of reality to realize of course there is a spiritual life beyond what is the mere physical and the mere visible.” (Hays 89)

It is clear that people have *personal experiences* through music that open them to their *personal spirituality*. People *themselves* become “spiritually aware” while the music *facilitates* this experience. The music itself is not spiritually aware.

In this and further research, let us begin to consider the possibility that spirituality is an intrinsic part of humanity rather than an intrinsic part of human inventions.

“Religious Music” and “Sacred Music:” Not the Topics at Hand

“Like religious ritual, music is often the voice and expression of the incomprehensible at the root of existence. Like all forms of spirituality, it attempts the impossible but necessary encounter between creation and creator through the only possible voice recognizable to both: the soundings of creativity.” (Phelan, “Introduction” 12-13)

“In religion and wisdom traditions, whether it be Eastern or Western, people tend to sing more prayers than speak them. Thus, it could be assumed that sacred song and chants might intensify the religious experience for the individual.” (Hays 84)

Manfred Josuttis, in her book *Der Weg in das Leben*, claims that “Religion ist unmöglich ohne Musik,” which literally translated from the German means, “Religion is impossible without music” (Josuttis 179). Are the institutions of ritual, belief, morality, and spirituality that we have created really impossible without music? It is quite evident that music can and often does play a role in religious practice, but is religion impossible without music? I would have to say that realistically this is not true, though it is a beautiful and interesting thought. Why might Manfred believe that religion is impossible without music? What about religion or what about music makes these desired sounds so essential to religious practice?

To perhaps begin to shed some light on a possible answer to these questions, let me refer back to an earlier remark: “spirituality without religion is untamed; religion without spirituality it uninspired.” Religion can exist without spirituality, but such a practice would no doubt be unrewarding and quite insipid. Why go to church every Sunday to sit and stand repeatedly to recite prayers and sing silly hymns, just then to be fed a meager snack of one dry wafer and a sip of wine? These things, removed from a sense of personal significance – spirituality – have little meaning and only seem to be obligatory and a waste of time, perhaps something simply done to secure social, economic, political, or afterlife status. Imbued with a sense of spirit, however, these rituals can become highly meaningful on a personal and esoteric level.

Music, as has been mentioned previously, has this power to create meaning in people’s lives. While music is not the only method by which to foster or manifest spiritual experience, it is certainly a prominent and popular method. Thus, music can be important in religious ritual to

imbue that ritual with more personal meaning. So while music is not essential in religious practice, it can be instrumental (if you excuse the pun) in enhancing the experience and making it appealing to more people. Just as going to a silent movie is not everyone's cup of tea, going to a quiet worship service with quiet rituals is not everyone's cup of tea. Movies with words are better and more engaging, just as a worship that employs spoken liturgies and prayers is probably more engaging. Movies with dramatic sound tracks, however, on top of spoken words and good actions are highly appealing to popular audiences, thus, would it not be the same in a church, mosque, monastery, or temple?

Religion is not impossible without music; it is simply more personal and thus more marketable. This is an important distinction to make because it is phrases like "religion is impossible without music" that begin to blur the line between music for religion and music that creates spiritual experience. It is important to discuss briefly what religious music is and how music and religion interact on the most basic level to begin distinguishing "music and religion" from "music and spirituality." Music can manifest spiritual experiences, which can enhance religion experiences, but music is not the source of these experiences, nor is music essential to either experience, nor are these experiences synonymous.

Having made this point, another important matter to address in the topic of religion and music is the difference between what "sacred music" is and what "secular music" is (or sometimes called "profane music"). Again, just as the distinction between what is exclusively "religious music" and what is comprehensively "spiritual music" is an easy classification, understood by the use of institutionalized symbols, sounds, words, and rituals, so too is the distinction between sacred and secular music simple.

By definition, secular identifies something that is not controlled by a religious institution or concerned with spiritual or religious matters. Sacred is simply the inverse of this definition. The interesting thing about this definition is that it includes both things that are identified as religious and things that are possibly spiritual. Taken under our understanding of “spiritual” and “spirituality,” anything could be spiritual, depending on the person who is making these labels.

In much of the literature on this topic of “sacred music,” religious institutions ignore the spiritual implications of the sacred and only identify things as sacred as they pertain to particular or various religious institutions. This is problematic. Something in one religion can be sacred, while in another it is not. Something could be sacred to a particular individual, due to personal dispositions to and understandings of the thing that is sacred, but a religious institution might not find this thing to be institutionally sacred. Here is another instance of cultural lensing. Just as the concept of what is music can vary from person to person and culture to culture, so too can the concept of what is sacred. Thus, it is pointless and futile to attempt to identify what is sacred and not sacred (secular, profane, etc.) except in acknowledging that the attempt is within and for the purposes of a particular lens. It is appropriate to discuss and identify what music is sacred or secular within a Christian framework for the purposes of that framework, but it is not appropriate to discuss and identify what music is sacred or secular within a framework for the purposes of every frame and every individual. The latter of these scenarios is too often the case.

The question to be addressed here is whether the distinction between the sacred and profane in anything is valid or even useful outside the context of particular religious frameworks. For example, many today are concerned about the poor quality of much Christian church music, particularly Catholic liturgical music. Who can really determine what is good, sacred, appropriate, spiritual, or Godly? Can the Pope, a priest, a pastor, or a church music director

decide these for the whole of the church community? They certainly can, but is this the best way? Ultimately, whether or not the Pope, a priest, a pastor, an imam, a monk, a chorister, or the Dalai Lama says that something is sacred or not does not mean a thing unless the people following such a leader believe it themselves on a personal level. Just because we or someone else says something is sacred, does not mean that it inherently is. To distinguish qualitatively between what is sacred and secular in music or anything is hardly sustainable. The perception that there is a distinction of styles is apparent and common, but what one person says cannot ever speak completely for the whole. Yes, there is such a thing as sacred music and secular music, but no one can ever adequately define them comprehensively.

To better understand the spiritual possibilities of music, notions of sacred and secular must be put aside. They are not helpful in the slightest because secular music can be just as spiritual as sacred music, and sacred music does not have to be religious music. What can be considered sacred or non-sacred (secular, profane, etc.), just as what can be considered spiritual, is ultimately personal and subjective. The point of this discussion is *not* to classify music as sacred, secular, religious, or spiritual. How music is ultimately classified can only be determined by the individual, and such classifications are only applicable to that individual. The purpose here is to show how music is important in people's lives in their understanding of their self, their reality, and the meaning of both.

From Theosonance...

Noirin Riain in her chapter entitled "The Sound of God" from *Anáil Dé: The Breath of God*, proposes a new concept in the study of sound and spirituality, which she calls *theosonance*.

According to Riain, theosonance is “the condition or quality of being spiritually sonant... the religious dimension of human hearing.”

The first part of this word is derived from the Greek *Θεός* (“theós”), meaning God. In the English language, this word can operate as a prefix, *theo-*, to a word, imbuing the attached word with the connotation of the divine or God. An easy example is “theology,” combining both the prefix *theo-* with the suffix *-logy*. The suffix “*-logy*” is a combining suffix often used in the names for bodies of knowledge such as the various sciences. It comes from the Latin *logia*, loosely meaning something that is debated. Thus, theology means the study of the nature of God. The second part of this word, *sonance*, can be defined as the condition or quality of something being sonant, sounding or having sound. This word is derived from a form of the Latin word *sonāre*, which means to sound. Thus, a literal meaning of the word *theosonance* could be, “the sounding of God.” This word is often exchanged with “Sonic Theology,” which means the study of God and religion through sound.

As Riain describes, the meaning of her concept is “a way of understanding self and reality through sound in relation to the divine.” Through all kinds of sounds, particularly those that are human, one can remain “present to religious experience.” *Theosony*, as such, is then the “somehow deniable sacred and transcendent sound that is accessible to human beings in their historical, concrete existence” It is the study of sound in religion. (Riain 180).

While this is a fantastic concept to use in our dialogue here, I would like to expand on the concept and take it outside its necessarily religious framework. While the concept is noble and rich with significant meaning as pertaining to our topic at hand, it makes three flaws: equating religious experience with spiritual experience, making the “divine” a necessary part of spiritual experience, and using the word “sacred” – with its unstated but suggested dualism with that

which is not sacred – as an “undeniable” part of the spiritual experience of sound. Granted, this concept is used within a particular Christian framework. Yet, to fully and adequately grasp the universality of people’s expression of spirit through music, this framework is hindering and narrow.

To better understand *spirituality* with music, sound, or noise, outside the context of religious frameworks, let us move to a study of *sound in spirituality*. Though this, we may better understand how these unincorporated sounds are then incorporated within those religious frameworks to consequently enhance those frameworks.

...to Spirosonance

Spirosonance is the word that I believe best fits our goals here. The English prefix *sprio-* comes from the Latin word, *spiritus*, for breath or living spirit. The prefix is usually used in English in the formation of compound words concerning respiration. *Sonance*, again, is the quality of being sonant, sounding, or having sound. The literal definition could be thought of as “the sounding of the spirit,” it could also parallel Sonic Theology as “Sonic Spirituality.” It is the study of human spirituality and self-understanding and expression through sound.

If we remember back to chapter three when defining religion and spirituality, it was proposed that religion is a result of spirituality. Rather than seeing spirituality as a cause of religious practice, religious practice is a result of the human desire to understand, manifest, and foster their sense of what we call “spirituality.” Recalls similarly how schools did not exist prior to the human desire for education. There was a need and desire to educate and be educated, thus schools and other institutionalized forms of education were formed. Then, if one wants to create

a comprehensive understanding of institutions and forms of education, one should necessarily begin with the desire of the human species to be educated, not with the particular school code of one particular school district within one particular culture. One should, for the sake of comprehensive understanding, begin with the larger picture so to better understand the smaller pictures creating it.

Religion is the same in this respect. One should not attempt to gain an understanding of human spirituality by first looking at Christian, Buddhist, or Daoist religion and then trying to meld these particular beliefs to spirituality of all other forms. This is the purpose of Spirosomy in relation to Theosomy. Rather than attempt to understand the large picture of music and spirituality through the particular lens of a particular theology and its uses and expressions of music, Spirosomy attempts to begin with the larger picture that Theosomy points towards. Spirosomy attempts to understand the bigger picture of religion, spirituality, and music to create better tools to understand the smaller pictures of particular theosonic practices and experiences. Rather than attempting to move from the small to the large, Spirosomy seeks to move from the large to the small. Here, we are fashioning our broader understanding to create better tool to understand the smaller picture later.

Different cultures and societies embody many various sounds, sound structures, and religious institutions through which people experience and express their being. There cannot be one thing called “music” or one expression called “religion.” While these things are vastly variant around the world, they point to a similar root beyond these differences: spirituality. As our alien anthropologist has indicated, there are elusive qualities within music, beyond the pitches, rhythms, dynamics, words, and timbres. Many, who live within these experiences throughout their lives, take these elusive qualities for granted, but to an outsider, the humanness

of music and spirituality could be very strange and difficult to identify and discuss. Spirosomy, or Spirosonance, is a beginning point to seek a comprehensive understanding of this elusive character of humanity, void of particular frames, institutions, or dispositions, that can make itself present in and through music.

So What's This About Gregorian Chant?

This study clearly intends to use Gregorian Chant as a particular musical practice of a particular religious institution within a particular cultural context to demonstrate this concept of Spirosomy, or how people understand, manifest, and foster their spirituality through sounds. How is the selection of such a particular example, excluding so many others, in line with what Spirosomy attempts to do, namely a movement from the large comprehensive, unparticular picture to the small and particular? Simply, the selection of this particular form is the movement from the large to the small itself. During the first part of this discourse, the large picture has been framed. Religion and spirituality have been deconstructed and reconstructed to create a perhaps more comprehensive understanding of what these words can mean. Music has been deconstructed and cast in a more inclusive and personal mold to create, again, a more comprehensive understanding of the concept. Through these two exercises of deconstruction, we have attempted to reconstruct a clearer understanding of what “spirituality in music” can possibly mean and create better tools by which we can begin discussing and understanding the particular manifestations of “spirituality in music” from person to person and culture to culture and how these manifestations create personal, social, and cultural identity.

Thus, a case study in Gregorian Chant does not go against the goals of Spirosomy by focusing exclusively on particular experiences in an attempt to impose these experiences on all others. The purpose of this case study is to demonstrate how the principles and tools of Spirosomy can be used to better understand this particular experience and expression both within and outside of its cultural and institutional contexts, and how it works to foster and create people's understandings of their reality, their self and the interrelations between the two.

Another question perhaps appropriate to ask is "why is Gregorian Chant the particular 'musical form' that has been chosen?" Why not Hindu sacred mantra, or Buddhist chant, or Protestant hymnody? Truly, there is no reason why these other examples would not make equally valid examples.

The first reason why this particular form was selected is the simple fact that Gregorian Chant has become, in recent years, a widely popular form of music, deemed by many performers and listeners to be "spiritual." Increasingly, the popular music industry has been exploring different sounds of world cultures, targeting unfamiliar and exotic sounds, as they seem to be found by those unfamiliar with them to be "spiritual" in nature (Matsunobu 275). While very familiar music can create intimate experiences within the performer or listener, being placed in an outlandish sound environment can displace one from their comfortable sense of self and reality and get them to better see and actively reconstruct their notions of the self. Just as a trip to a foreign land can be quite romantic, self-exploratory, self-discovering, and eye-opening, a trip to a foreign soundscape can create similar experiences. Gregorian Chant is but one of these "world musical forms" that people have gravitated towards in recent years. Furthermore, it is an extremely popular genre. In the past decade, Gregorian Chant albums have not only reached the top of the Classical Music charts, but also the Pop Music charts as well.

Second, this form of music has made a spiritual impact in both sacred and secular realms, while also being popular across religious practices. Some Buddhists and Protestant meditation groups have in recent years used this chant as part of centering practices. People from cultures the world apart, not associated with Christian practice, have found and reported inspiration in this form of music. While I am not claiming this music to be “the most spiritual” as many have attempted to do, I am claiming that this music shows a disposition to inspire many people of varying dispositions. Granted, this music has had a better opportunity than other forms to spread its sounds around the world due to Western influence and the support of the popular music industry. This fact, however, does not diminish the fact that this music has affected many people.

Third, not only has this music affected many varying people in our present day, it has affected many people over a vast expanse of time, at least within the West. While this is certainly not the oldest form of music existing today, it is a musical tradition finding its oldest origins over two thousand years ago. This music, in various evolutionary forms, was the primary form of religious music for the Christian Church for nearly the first 1500 years of its history. Furthermore, due to its large presence in the early Christian Church and the widespread power and influence of the Church in the West during the past two millennia, this form of music is often cited as the origin form of all our Western music today, the point from which most music in the West evolved. It has had a prominent and lasting influence in a particular musical and religious culture, which itself has been vastly influential around the globe.

Fourth, this music is an active and daily agent in the spiritual practices and cultivations of a number of communities around the globe, namely Catholic monastics. These groups, which are more present and alive today than many might think, use this form of music regularly – seven times a day in many cases – to create spiritual experiences in which they may better understand

their self in relation to their perception of reality – particularly their personal relationship with God and God’s relationship with humanity. This music is essential in this particular and historical religious practice, which holds spiritual cultivation at its center.

Conclusions and Beginnings: Spirituality of the Present

“The spiritual function of music is not an arbitrary office imposed upon it or upon man by omnipotent authority. It results from the necessity in all spiritual beings for self-utterance.” (Edwards 79-80)

“The soul of music is a spiritual content of mind, with a meaning and force which cannot possibly be the product of mere vibrations in the atmosphere.” (Edwards 28)

Homo Laudens, Latin for “man at play,” is at the core of the human experience. There is a deep desire within humanity to understand and create the world we inhabit in relation to ourselves. The spirit of creativity drives us to mold ourselves to the world and mold the world to ourselves. There is no single existing form of art that can be said to have contributed to the personal and spiritual growth of every person everywhere. Sound, and more particularly music, is but one medium by which people seek to create and understand their self and their reality. The ability of our minds to interpret atmospheric vibrations of various natures to create soundscapes that can touch the soul of a being, infiltrating the darkest and deepest recesses of emotion, reflects not the power of music, but the power of the human spirit to create, play, and listen to sound in a profound way. The power of music lies not in the music, but in those who experience the music.

In my opinion, there is no such thing as “spiritual music” comprehensively, let alone “sacred music.” Often, these terms are used to designate particular musical forms, series of notes, or harmonies that particular institutions or particular people find to be sacred or spiritual. Particular institutions and cultures, indeed, have tied themselves to particular sounds, forms, series, and harmonies, often through the juxtapositions of religious semiotics and linguistics, but these attachments vary from institution to institution and from culture to culture. What is “spiritual music” and what is “sacred music” are not absolute. These ideas do not exist in a vacuum; they are not static. They are not “religious music.” They are personal expressions, understandings, experiences, manifestations, and realities, not absolute, quantifiable, institutionalized forms.

This is an attempt to put to words how some people experience what to some is the deepest meaning of existence – the knowing of the self. In the search for this meaning, words often fail. This is why artistic expression and religion exist; they are an attempt to create new languages by which we may communicate and understand this meaning. When our words fail there are only two options: falling silent or moving beyond these words to new forms of self-expression. When we are faced with spiritual experiences, a glimpse into the true self, we often do not know what to think, or what to say, or what to do. Religion and art offer new words, sounds, acts, and gestures to understand these moments. These forms of performative, ritual, aural, and visual language, rather than spoken language, cannot be reduced so simply to defined, generalized meanings. They speak to the individual on an individual level. These forms of language speak between the words we speak, evoking an image, act, sound, or melody that leads to more than that which is justified by the text.

Art speaks its meaning in the moment to the individual. It speaks across cultures and across time, but it speaks *meaning* only when experienced. The meaning of a symphony can be told, but it cannot be fully appreciated until the symphony is heard. The meaning of a painting can be told, but the true feeling of the textures, colors, hues, and shadings cannot be fully comprehended until the painting is seen. Art is temporal, coming into existence at the moment you open your eyes, strike a key, or sing a pitch. Once the music no longer plays, the painting is no longer visible, or the play is over, they still can exist as notation on paper, words in a book, or artifacts hanging in a museum, but they cannot be *experienced* until heard or seen again. These things are about a spirituality of the present. Indeed, spirituality exists wholly in the present. Once the feeling is gone, it can be remembered and it can return again, but it is not directly experienced until the moment when it somehow does return. Spirituality, just like music or any art, is an event, not an object; it is more a verb than a noun. It is not a characteristic of things, but an active, perceptive, individualized experience existing in the present.

To understand spirituality and how art manifests this experience, it is essential that art is seen not as an artifact or an object, but as a living expression not apart from those experiencing and expressing it. From rock stars to monks and concert pianists to casual listeners, music is a part of this search for meaning and self-discovery. We must not continue to create static objectifications of what spirituality is, for doing so ignores the fact that spirituality is constantly manifesting itself in many different people through many different ways existing only in the moment. To quantify it is to limit the power and the possibilities of the human spirit.

Part Two

Spirosomy and Gregorian Chant: The Practitioner, The Listener, and The Sound Between Them

*M*usic is a universal language. It is a language with many voices and dialects, but there is one mother in this form of communication: self-expression.

Communicating messages beyond words, music can help us to express, experience, and understand the meanings of our self. Music can traverse the barriers of words between cultures to reveal the truths amongst and between us. Music is the tool by which we can dismantle the walls built with words and labels and begin to understand the meanings behind and beyond our words. It is an experience that brings us together – the creator and the listener – that allows us to speak without speaking.

Chapter Five

Gregorian Chant:

What It is and What It Means

“What is this magical effect – the placebo effect – of Gregorian chant? It is a music with words that are understood by only a few.” (Heeswijk 63)

“As prosperity grew, as Catholicism spread, as new countries were born and old countries died, as revolutions came and went, as the world population doubled and doubled again and increased a thousand and ten thousand fold, as technological miracles dazzled every generation, this song was there, a song that moved from place to place, sung age after age – a song as peaceful, beautiful, and stable as the faith itself.” (Tucker “The Chant Experience” 85)

What is Gregorian Chant? Simply, it is a form of music that has been a part of the liturgy of the Christian Church, particularly the Catholic Church, for over one thousand years that served to embellish or enhance the deliverance or performance of the liturgy. It is unaccompanied monophony in its most pure form and finds its origins most probably in Jewish chant almost two thousand years ago. This, however, is a huge oversimplification. This would be like defining the Theory of Gravity as “the nature of something to be attracted to something else by virtue of their related masses.” While this is somewhat true, it certainly leaves out a lot of nuanced details that have led to many of our modern scientific discoveries. Or similarly, defining Gregorian Chant so simply could be compared to defining the institution of Christianity as “a group of people who have chosen to follow the stories and sayings of a man named Jesus, who was a convicted criminal of the Roman Empire around two thousand years ago.” While this is for

all intents and purposes true, it is a grand oversimplification for those who are at all familiar with the institution of Christianity.

Many people – Catholics and Protestants, Christians and non-Christians, religious and non-religious – have found this music to be inspiring and moving in its simplicity. The Dutch poet Adriaan Roland Holst calls Gregorian chant “monotonous and intoxicating.” Through this chant, Holst claims, all boundaries are dissolved. Time and space are dissolved as we become incorporated within a forgotten time. The world becomes still and silent with the sounding of this music in his poem *Gregorian Chant*:

Gregorian Chant

*Voices of people who passed away aeons ago
Sang the songs of their devout faith
monotonously and intoxicatingly: all boundaries
were now dissolved; and extinguished
were the red high fires of fighting.*

*We were incorporated within prehistoric times,
the world became dead silent and gave up the ghost. (Holst)*

While this music has been popular in many different cultural and social circles, it has been particularly important in much of the history of the Catholic Church. It has been the mold that has formed the liturgy of the Church up until the past century. It was also immensely important in the development of Western musical culture, which was largely an institution of the Church during the Middle Ages and Early Renaissance, due to the Church’s role as an

educational institution. Hear how Pope John Paul II underscored the vital role that Gregorian chant must play in the Church's public acts of worship from his *Jubilare Feliciter*:

“To the extent that the new sacred music is to serve the liturgical celebrations of the various churches, it can and must draw from earlier forms – especially from Gregorian chant – a higher inspiration, a unique sacred quality, a genuine sense of what is religious.” (Jubilare Feliciter, Apostolic Breve 71, 1980)

While this music is often seen as something to “look back to”, an artifact of musical and cultural history, it is also a form that is still alive today. There are religious and spiritual communities, not just churches and monasteries, which currently use this chant to enhance religious ritual and spiritual experience. There are groups who have written their own form of Gregorian Chant for the purposes of their own rituals, which might not fit perfectly into the form of the traditional chants. Examples include groups that need chants in vernacular languages rather than the traditional Latin, or groups that need simpler melodies to sing rather than the traditional florid style due to aesthetic or performance concerns. While what is commonly considered Gregorian Chant was codified during the Middle Ages, the chant has been modified and transformed over the centuries to meet the needs of various groups and people. It is not a static form or an unchanging, dead artifact of history. What “Gregorian Chant” means can be as varying as what “religion,” “spirituality,” or “music” mean. There is a repertory that is largely accepted as Gregorian Chant by musical historians and students of the form in general, but it must be recognized that this form can at times be loose and very much alive.

Thus, while we shall attempt to limit our understanding of what “Gregorian Chant” is, we cannot limit it too much. It is not simply an artifact, monody, liturgy, sacred, secular, religious,

spiritual, alive, dead, simple, complex, arrhythmic, rhythmic, Latin, German, English, or even music. It can be none, some, or all of these at particular times for particular people.

Chanting across cultures is a rich and diverse experience, whose features are as difficult to identify individually as to comprehend in their totality. Almost every religious tradition that has existed shows evidence of using chanting as part of ritual practice. While the forms and sounds of the chanting differ greatly, these simple tones in simple lines and recitations have molded themselves to religious and spiritual understanding. How can one begin to approach these forms of socially and culturally situated sounds? When music from another culture is studied by ethnomusicologists, there is often a debate between whether it is better to study such phenomenon from the outside or through immersion within the culture. Some believe that it is best to enter the culture as deeply as possible in order to perform the music as authentically as possible. Some, on the other hand, doubt that this method can be successful because the outsider who immerses himself into the culture loses the ability to objectively observe the practice and can no longer perceive the musical or culture accurately. While both of these claims have valid points, neither can be taken exclusively. A middle ground in approaching cultural institutions allows for both a more intimate experience while holding on to more objective means.

Thus, this study attempts not to immerse or to observe objectively. A variety of experiential points are taken to better understand this music called Gregorian Chant. Since this chant, and all music, is so subjectively experienced, it is essential to understand the subjective experiencers of this form. It is also important however to be able to objectively approach their viewpoints to perhaps better understand why they think the way they do. It is the purpose of this part of the discourse to understand, in all its aspects, what this music really is to those who

experience it. By understanding the nature of this music, we may better come to understand how this music, and perhaps other musical forms, informs and enriches people's spirituality.

Beginnings: Gregorian Chant Historical Contexts

Even the briefest discussion of Gregorian Chant must include its historical context. It is such a part of Western cultural history – musically, socially, and religiously – that to exclude such an overview would be detrimental to our understanding of what this music is and what it perhaps means to those who experience it. In this historical approach, it becomes necessary to create some limiters as to what we are considering when we speak of Gregorian Chant. While its definition can be very different on a personal level, on a cultural, historical, and musicological level, the definition is rather absolute and understood. Without going into great detail, however, we will still attempt to employ a rather broad definition under musicological terms as to the meaning and structure of this form, acknowledging the drawbacks of such a definition for musicological understandings. This study, however, does not make any attempt to be musicological in nature. Here, we need both an exclusive and inclusive definition, placing enough limiters, but not too many.

For the leaders of the early Christian church, music was the servant of religion, and only music that opened the mind to Christian teachings and holy thoughts was worthy of hearing in church. Believing that music without words could not do this, most church fathers condemned instrumental music. For this reason, the entire tradition of Christian music for over a thousand years was one of unaccompanied singing. As Christianity diversified, each branch or region evolved its own rite, consisting of a church calendar, commemorations for special events, a

liturgy or body of texts and ritual actions assigned to each service, and a repertory of plainchant. Gregorian Chant, named for Pope Gregory I (St. Gregory the Great), is one of the still surviving traditions of chant today and has had an immeasurable influence on music development through Western culture.

When we speak of Gregorian Chant we will essentially be speaking of every musical genre related to, but not necessarily similar to, Latin liturgical monody. In other words, we are looking at Christian monody, in which Latin, sacredness, liturgy, or religion is a possibility but not a necessity. This can include chants from the simplest recitatives to the richest melismatic chants, as well as the various historical stages of the repertory, such as prose sequences, hymns, tropes, and modern vernacular renditions. In addition, the distinction between what is referred to as “Gregorian” Chant and the other Latin liturgical repertories – Ambrosian, Mozarabic, Gallican, Old Roman, etc. will not be essential or necessary. For our intents and purposes, all these chants apply to our discussion here. We are not looking at particular nuances of form, construction, history, or theory. We are observing how chant, in whatever form, is being used by particular groups to enhance, experience, and understand personal and communal spirituality.

In a stricter sense, however, Gregorian chant historically denotes the Roman form of early plain chant as distinguished from the other liturgical chants at the time: Ambrosian, Gallican, and Mozarabic, Old Roman, and Beneventine. These chants, while akin to Gregorian Chant, were gradually molded to and supplanted by it from the eighth to the eleventh century. (*The Catholic Encyclopedia* 779) The mixing of these forms of chant during the time of the Holy Roman Empire and the rule of Charlemagne, worked to create a rich hybrid form. The Old Roman and Beneventine characterized the more sober and sparing chants, while the Milanese, Gallican, an Ambrosian characterized the more elaborate and colorful melodies. Gregorian chant

came into existence as a consequence of the encounter between these two stylistic repertoires. Imported by imperial decree into the Carolingian Empire during the eighth century, the liturgy used in Rome along with the melodies of the Old Roman Chant became quickly transformed by the Frankish cantors to fit the Gallican chant dialect in practice there at the time. (Abbey of St Peter of Solesmes, *Reflections* 29) This synthesis of musical practice represents what Gregorian Chant is in reference to the classic chant repertory from antiquity. It was during this time of synthesis that the Roman Catholic Church was greatly expanding its power across Western Europe in forming the Holy Roman Empire. During this expansion of power, the church worked to codify and standardize its liturgy for unity of practice across the empire. This period of time has often been referred to as the golden age of the formation of Roman liturgy. Gregorian Chant was a part of this standardization, and thus it has held a priority of place in the liturgy and the history of Christian religious music up to the modern age. (Catholic University of America 756)

While Gregorian Chant is strictly positioned in history as described above, it is part of an immemorial past. There is little existing historical record actually accounting the development of this style. Chant only began to be written down in any form of musical notation during the ninth century although its use was documented as early as the sixth or seventh centuries. Traces of the music can even be found in the melodies of Yemenite Jews as far back as the beginning of the Common Era. (Mahrt, "Gregorian Chant" 29) For many years, the historical context of Gregorian Chant lay in much myth and mystery, telling of St. Gregory (Pope Gregory the Great) writing the whole repertory himself, inspired by a dove from heaven singing in his ear. What can be said now, with certitude, concerning the relation of St. Gregory to the chant bearing his namesake is that he was instrumental in the codification, standardization, and compilation of the liturgical texts and chants from the various sources available during his time. It is doubtful,

though quite imaginative, that Gregory wrote the repertory himself from nothing during the first millennium.

As a repertory of music, Gregorian Chant denotes a set of 500 to 600 chants for the Proper of the Catholic Mass. These chants represent the “stereotypical” Gregorian repertory first appeared in Europe, north of the Alps, around 900CE. While there are many different kinds of chants employed in any traditional Catholic service, the chants that are for the Proper of the Mass are those that are historically designated as Gregorian. This is certainly the most direct definition of Gregorian Chant. This narrowness, however, is not essential to our study here. Again, this is not a musicological survey or study. If anything, this is a sociological, religious, and *spirosonic* study. Thus, our definition of Gregorian Chant will include all those chants that have a place within the traditional Catholic liturgy. More truly, we are looking at Catholic Chant, not Gregorian Chant, but because Gregorian Chant has, in recent years, become an umbrella term for all Catholic Chant, it is the word we choose to use here. The Chants that find their way into this rather loose definition could include, but are not limited to, Responsorial and Antiphonal Chants, Ordinary Chants of the Mass, Proper Chants of the Mass, Sequences, Sentences, Gregorian Hymns, Recitations, and Lectures. For the intent of the study, it is not essential that the reader be familiar with the forms of these variations of Latin liturgical chant. Please, feel free to look them up, but these categories are not important in what we are observing here. What is important to know is that we are discussing chant, specifically within the Catholic Church, and anything that is chanting in these contexts is of interest.

The Evolution: The Long Decline and Rebirth of Chant

“Music was chaste and modest so long as it was played on simpler instruments, but since it has come to be performed in a protracted and confusing mixture of styles, it has lost its grave and virtuous manner, descending virtually to depravity, and preserving only a trace of its ancient beauty.” (Boethius 29)

“And above all we should bear in mind that if something is altered even in the very slightest, it will – although not sensed at first – eventually make a considerable difference and will pass through the sense of hearing into the mind.” (Boethius 29)

The history of Gregorian Chant since the Middle Ages is long and convoluted, shrouded in much mystery, and confused by much reform and transformation. Being a foundation of Western musical history, Gregorian Chant has been influenced by the contemporary musical idioms of each age. Repeated reformations have been made to the repertory over the centuries to make it fit into the contemporary musical tastes. Methods that have been used to fit chant to modern tastes have included the simplification of melody, quantifying the rhythmic declamation of the music and texts according to modern metrical concepts, and applying modern tonality (major and minor) to the chant melodies in favor of the traditional “modality.”

By the sixteenth century, during the height of the Renaissance, the church had developed almost all the present chant repertoire, including the simplest forms, such as litanies, sequences, and hymns, to the most ornate forms, such as the Responsories of the Divine Office and the graduals and alleluias of the Mass. As more complex, multi-voiced polyphonic music developed from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, the original nature of the chant was deeply affected. Many of the rhythmic and melodic subtleties of the original musical notation had been forgotten

by this time. Following the Catholic Counter-Reformation during the Council of Trent, certain decisions of the council's sessions on liturgical music created new and detrimental reforms for Gregorian chant in church. Over the next centuries, some of Europe's most respected musicians by the Church, would be assigned to modify the chants of the church, ultimately, according to most practitioners and researchers today, destroying the beauty of the chant repertoires. (Prowse 35) The slow progression and evolution of music in the West over the past millennium has carried with it the chant of the early Christian Church, but it has also drastically transformed the repertory through this process of reinvention and preservation.

Only relatively recently have efforts been made to reform chant in a new direction – backwards – seeking the original character of the repertory from the Middle Ages. The monks at the Abbey of St. Pierre of Solesmes, a Benedictine monastery reestablished by Dom Gueranger during 1833 in Sable sur Sarthe, France, began the first major chant restoration. After working independently for nearly half a century, Pope Pius X recognized the work of Solesmes in 1903 in his *motu proprio*, “*Tru le Sollecitudini*,” on the reform of sacred music in the Church. In this publication, the Pope recognized the need to restore chant, now “corrupted” by centuries of modification, to its original form. He thus approved the official publication of new chant books for the Roman Catholic Church by the monks of Solesmes. Furthermore, toward the end of 1913, the Vatican placed the responsibility for the continued restoration, preservation, publication, and practice of chant in the hands of the monks of Solesmes. Over the past century, the Abbey of Solesmes has been the leading institution for the restoration of Medieval Catholic Liturgical Chant, publishing numerous volumes on the history, performance practice, repertory, and liturgical uses of the chant while also using these chants in their daily services and releasing numerous recordings of the chant for international dispersal.

Solesmes has codified their long research and standardized interpretation of chant, which has taken popular place amongst Catholics and non-Catholic as the authorities interpretation of the Medieval form, though there are other counter-theories of interpretation that have emerged during the nineteenth century that have had lesser popularity. While these theories are important in any musicological study of chant, they are not essential here. Since the methods of Solesmes are by far the most widely practiced, published, and recorded today, it is appropriate that we frame this discussion of chant with the methods of Solesmes in mind. Because it is the method of Solesmes that most people hear and are familiar with, it would be nigh pointless to discuss and contextualize the other theories which have very few recordings and practitioners.

Spirosonance in the Liturgy and Music

“... liturgy is more than an activity ‘done to’ the worshipper, it is something ‘done by’ him or her.” (Love 153)

“A very wise, very well-informed historian of liturgy once made an apparently whimsical yet profound definition of liturgy: ‘Liturgy’, he said, ‘is people doing things for which they have forgotten the reasons.’” (Crocker 13)

The term “liturgy” has thus far been used repeatedly in the context of Gregorian Chant. It is appropriate that we now take a moment, before entering any further into our discussion of the spirosonance of chant, to define this word. It could easily take volumes to define liturgy in a completely comprehensive way, but here it is our purposes to be concise. Our focus is not the intricacies of Catholic liturgical practice. Thus, we will briefly overview the broad concept of

what “liturgy” is and how music fits into it, recognizing the incompleteness of this description of a complex religious institution.

Of the various and most simple definitions that one could conjure for the meaning of “liturgy,” there are two that would best suit our purposes here, for they are definitions provided by at least one of our subjects, the Abbey of Solesmes. The liturgy of the Catholic Church is:

- “the public worship that the Church renders to God,”
- and “the praise that the Incarnate Word offers to His Father.”

While a bit esoteric, both of these definitions are true from a Catholic and Christian perspective, but neither of them is all-encompassing. (Abbey of St Peter of Solesmes, *Reflections* 67)

The liturgy has often been compared to a theatrical drama. It is a series of gestures, words, sounds, and actions that all together create significant symbolic meaning. Many aspects of the liturgy are indeed “dramatic” in that they can be impressive, expressive, and personally moving. There is, however, an essential difference between theater and liturgy: drama is fictive, liturgy is not. The actions performed in many dramas are ultimately taken to be symbolic or imaginary. The actions in liturgy, however, are not fictive within their religious context for those who believe in the meanings behind the ritual. Liturgy deals with actions which the congregation essentially takes to be real (Mahrt, “Gregorian Chant” 23).

A prayer can be liturgical; a hymn can be liturgical, a lesson can be liturgical; a Eucharist can be liturgical. Many of the individual parts that comprise any worship services within the Christian Church are liturgical. Typically those parts of the liturgy and the liturgy as a whole have three distinctive characteristics. These characteristics include:

- its theological content
- its doctrinal structure
- its specific conceptual and symbolic modes of expression. (Abbey of St Peter of Solesmes, *Reflections* 73)

The liturgy expresses and attempts to conceptualize God, give instructions on how to follow or find that God, and give expressions, symbols, and specific structures by which one may orient themselves to better conceptualize and follow that God. It's a package deal. First, it gives one the knowledge of God and who that God is and how that God works. Second, it gives one the knowledge of what that God wants and how the God want one to act. Third, it gives one modes of expression to better know this God and achieve what this God wants.

For the Christian, the liturgy is part of the work of God. It is the “priestly mission” of the Church, fostering prayerful action and active worship of God. The liturgy is thus the designed ritual of both worship and prayer. The rituals and actions within the liturgy are supposed to be apart from ritual actions located within the secular world, or that reality outside the institution of Christian religion. (Tucker “The Chant Experience” 84) The symbols and rituals that unite people socially and culturally outside of religion, such as sports, concerts, or shopping are not a part of or suitable for liturgy, which has its own particular standards aligned with religious symbols, rituals, doctrines, and meanings. Theodore Marier poignantly describes what the liturgy embodies for the Christian Church comprehensively when he writes,

“... the word liturgy refers to the public acts of the Church, past, present, future, French, German, Ugandan, American, Australian, praying in the name of the

Church all together uttering praises and supplications to her sovereign Lord. Liturgy, then is strictly a matter of prayer, solemn, official, and performed by all in the name of the Church.” (Marier 15)

Ultimately, the liturgy can take many various forms and structures from church to church, denomination to denomination, and day to day, but there is the unifying idea that the liturgy is a matter of praise and prayer. So, how does music, and more particularly Gregorian Chant, fit into this action of praise and prayer?

The most important context for Gregorian Chant, in fact, is the liturgy itself. Outside of the liturgy, Gregorian Chant, according to its intended purposes, has no place. Chant, for most of its history, was and is an integral part of the liturgy. (Abbey of St Peter of Solesmes, *Reflections* 74) Chant participates in, enhances the performance of, and is an integral part of the liturgy. Thus, the Chant is essential in the religious efficaciousness of the liturgy; without the chant, according to its traditional purpose, the liturgy could not work properly. According to a monk from the Abbey of Solesmes, Gregorian Chant “enhances the liturgy’s contemplative prayer in a very special way through the exquisite perfection of its musical form” (Abbey of St Peter of Solesmes, *Reflections* 74). Thus, the *music* “enhance” people’s experience of a religious ritual, which would be, for some reason, less effective without the music. Does this music enhance the religious experience because it is more “religious” than simply saying the words of the chant without the musical expression, or does this music enhance the religious experience because it allows the performers and listeners to better understand the essence of the text and better relate it to themselves on a personal level? Does music act as a self-expressive medium for spiritual understanding to deepen religious experience? Music – and in our particular instances, Gregorian Chant – works with liturgy to enhance people’s understanding and personal experience of the

ritual. Just as a movie with sound as compared to a movie without sound, liturgy with music, or chant, is better felt, understood, and expressed with sound than without sound. Music is not merely an ornament to the liturgy, but a basic and essential part of the liturgy. The concept of what we are calling “spiritual music” – music that leads people to self-expression and realization – is absolutely necessary in any successful liturgy and liturgical experience. Without such music, the liturgy has the possibility of changing from a drama to a perfunctory action without feeling, without direction, without the ability to communicate to and move people. This is why music has become and is an essential part of most Christian worship and prayer today and throughout history. Gregorian Chant, or any music for that matter, is important to the liturgy because it is potentially spiritually enhancing, which is why it is a particular focus in this case study of spirosonance.

Brief Conclusions

The culture of Western Europe has, for the majority of its recent history, been a culture of progression, building and improving on the present, never stuck in the past, while living constantly under its influence. Each generation is conscious of the tradition of the one that came before, but each generation is also aware that its role is not so much about preserving tradition intact, but making a contribution to that tradition. In this same context, Gregorian Chant forms a fundamental stratum over which was constructed, according to the artistic dispositions and understanding of each consecutive age, superstructures of similar yet different sorts. Gregorian Chant, while still connected to its ancient roots, is still a living and changing tradition, just as the Church still lives and changes today. While it is in some senses an artifact, it is also a part of the

modern musical, religious, and spiritual culture. The monks of the Abbey of Solesmes articulate this in their own reflection on their ancient practice when they write,

“More recently, Gregorian chant has spread beyond the boundaries of Western and Central Europe, thus confirming that its universality is not de facto but an inherent characteristic. Africans, for example, can assimilate it perfectly. People from the Far East are also sensitive to its appeal; they eagerly listen to it, study it, and even practice it, although it belongs to a musical ethos quite different from their own.” (Abbey of St Peter of Solesmes, Reflections 32)

There is an extra-religious part to this music that reaches out to spirituality. It cannot be wholly contextualized within the institutions of religion. While it is an essential part to the Catholic liturgy, it speaks beyond it as well to the spirit of many people.

Within the Christian and Catholic tradition, however, this music has played a central role in the formation and continuation of the liturgy throughout its history. Many answers can be given as to why music has held this instrumental role in the expression of religion, but it seems possible that this music is a catalyst for spiritual manifestation that gives personal meaning and feeling to the drama of liturgy. It gives the sense of drama itself to the liturgy. Music operates as an enhancer of the religious because it imparts that which is essential to the meaning of and need for religion: a sense of spirituality.

This chapter is but a beginning in understanding how this particular form of music, Gregorian Chant, shapes particular people’s sense of self or spirit. It briefly outlines the history of this art of prayer, showing how it has influenced institutions of religion on profound levels, essentially creating meanings of and forms to worship for the Christian Church for nearly two thousand years due to the ability of music to enhance

people's self-expression and sense of meaning. It is not necessarily because Gregorian Chant is "religious," "or "sacred," or "liturgical" that gives it its power to move people; it is people's perception of Gregorian Chant as something personally expressive that has given it its power to move people and influence their institutions.

Chapter Six

The Practitioner:

Those Who Live the Chant

“... when we sing chant, we are doing more than merely singing a beautiful melody. In a real sense we are singing a song that has been part of a faith for many centuries, possibly from the earliest years of the church, through the modern period, all the way through our own time.” (Tucker “The Chant Experience” 85)

“My monastery was founded in 1133, and monastic life there has never been interrupted. Always, the Gregorian chant has been our form of spirituality as monks – it is the way we live out that continuity... the text is from the Bible, sung in Latin, and we sing it back to God through those wonderful melodies from the first millennium. Everything is about singing thanks to god.” (Miller 1)

“The most important thing [in Gregorian chant] is, we want to give a voice to the whole of all creation. And by our voices, everything – animals, plants, the planets, are praising God. That is what monastic praising of God means, that we give voice to all beings to praise God because he is worthy to be praised by all that he has made.” (Miller 1)

Again, this is not a musicological study of Gregorian Chant. This is not a religious or theological study of Gregorian Chant. This is, however, a spirosonic study of Gregorian Chant, looking at how this particular form of music has shaped particular people’s experiences, understandings of themselves, and perception of and relation to their realities. The quotations above begin to point to what this study is interested in. None of these quotations talk about the concrete historical background, theoretical framework, or codified religious uses of chant. These

quotations reference history, theory, and religion, but there is something far greater behind all these remarks that makes up a more comprehensive and esoteric whole. There is something in each of these remarks about the chant that points to something deeply and personally enriching about the music.

Chant is not “merely a beautiful melody;” it is something that represents a communion of believers throughout history. It is not only music but is also a “form of spirituality” and a “way [to] live.” Chant is not merely one person or one choir singing; it is a voice for “all creation” and “all beings” that is meant to praise God. These are the aspects of chant that this study hopes to address. While it is essential that historical contexts are understood, theory is implicated, and religious institutions are addressed, these are not ends but merely means to a greater, more abstract and personal whole. While Theosonance places chant within its religious contexts to explain its spiritual efficaciousness, Spirosonance places chant within its spiritual contexts – looking more broadly at this phenomenon on institutional, historical, theoretical, and personal levels – to explain not only its religious efficaciousness but its efficaciousness on all levels of personal experience.

This form of personal expression being classified broadly as music, or at least as sound, requires that we look at this phenomenon from three vantage or “action” points: the performer/practitioner, the listener/experiencer, and the composer/theorist. These three points of view are all essential to any musical experience. While they often blend together and subsume one another, these three are always in play at some point in the dialogue. Without one, the experience of musical discourse is incomplete. If a symphony is written, but there is no one to perform it, no music is created for anyone to experience. If no one decides to address the sound, essentially blocking it out of existence, then its sound essentially does not matter and makes no

experienced impact. Like a tree that falls in the woods when no one is around to hear it, when a symphony plays on the radio, but no one listens to it, the sound, for all intents and purposes, does not exist.

I identify them as “points of action” because they are not necessarily points from which something is viewed, but are rather actions that take place in the formal creation of sound, especially musical sound; something organizes sound, something performs that sound, and something experiences that sound. This “something” can range from various independent somethings to as few as one something doing all actions.

Take for example that which “composes” the music. Music must be constructed, sounded, or created by something; this thing or individual can be considered the composer at times when sound is “composed” or can be considered the performer when the sound is simply sounded. Here the boundaries between performer and composer can blend when considering how the music or sound is or is not constructed. The sound of a waterfall, when considered “music,” is not necessarily “composed” by a sentient being when found in nature; it is aleatory. This sound is not “composed” or constructed, it is sounded or performed by the waterfall unconsciously. When one chooses to take sounds and organize them in some conscious manner, whether concretely or abstractly – for example, by recording the sound of a waterfall and playing it back, or by building a waterfall for people to listen to – the sound is composed. The composer is thus something that actively organizes sounds in some manner, whether a person or not. These sounds are performed by the performer and are experienced by the experiencer, acknowledging that the performer and experiencer can very well be the same entity as each other and as the composer.

It is these three categories of actions in the creation of sound and music that will be essential in our understanding of the spirosonance of Gregorian Chant. Chant was and is composed in a conscious fashion; chant is practiced and performed, both by and not by the composers of the chants; chant is experienced, both by and not by the composers and practitioners of chants. Thus, keep these categories in mind as we enter more deeply into the discussion at hand to better equip our understanding of the personal meanings behind the phenomenon of chant. Who or what is ordering, creating, and experiencing chant?

Where Gregorian Chant “Lives” Today: Silent, Singing Monks

Our first arguments on the Spirosonance of Gregorian Chant will begin with those who have incorporated chant into their daily rituals to the most extensive level, both historically and contemporaneously: the ascetics of monastic communities. These communities are an appropriate place to begin looking at how music works with people on a spiritual level because these communities are essentially groups of people who have chosen to focus their life’s ambitions on spiritual cultivation. Monastic spirituality has been described by Brother Hala from the Abbey of Solesmes as a “spirituality of the present.” Sound, only perceived in the present moment, dying away the moment it comes into existence, is a perfect companion to a spirituality of the present. Indeed, monks have used sound as a medium for spiritual understanding for millennia. Often, monastic communities are perceived as communities that shun sound, seeking silence exclusively. This is not true. While monastic communities focus on silencing themselves they do so in order to better *hear* the “voice of God” around them, the world with all its aural possibilities imbued with the sense of divinity.

The art of the monastic lifestyle is not about being silent for silence's sake. Rather, it is upmost about listening, which is best facilitated through being quiet. Furthermore the Christian monastic lifestyle is about creating a deep and loving relationship with God and Christ. One is figuratively married to Christ, giving up all independence and placing one's whole self in Christ. This is accomplished most frequently through prayer. Prayer is central to the monastic life. It facilitates union and relation to God. God is perceived as speaking through the sounds of silence, thus it takes much inner and outward stillness and prayer to hear and understand the voice of God. The art of thinking and speaking with the sounds of silence and stillness has formed an integral part of the social, religious, and spiritual life of monastic communities.

The communal spirituality of monastics, both monks and nuns, is grounded in and shaped by the daily performance of the divine office and its liturgy. The divine office is the fulltime employment of the monastic once they have taken their vows; it is the fulltime worship of God. This fulltime worship of the divine office consists of around 7 services a day, seven days a week, every day of the year. This amounts to about 40 hours a week of communal worship, though it can be much more, but usually not less. Within these offices, prayer and praise to God take a central role. These actions are accomplished through the singing of chants and the recitation of psalms. This singing occupies monastics for nearly half of their waking hours. This constant music making through chant, the text of which is primarily taken from the Bible, shapes the manifestation of spirituality by teaching and reinforcing the tenets of Christian belief, interpreting the relationships among the monastics, and even connecting them to "the world of creation" outside of the cloister. For these people, chant shapes the personal experience of religion, community, and reality. At its most simple level, the constant chanting offers monastics the opportunity to build community through breathing, singing, and praying together.

By referring back to those three quotations that began this chapter, one can begin to see how this music has significantly shaped the particular experiences of monastics. There is a disposition that this music is essential in the monastic's search for their own spirituality in understanding their self and how that self relates to and is a part of the divine and its creation. Take the words of Dom Mocquereau, a Benedictine monk from the Abbey of Solesmes when he writes,

“Those who are familiar with the Gregorian melodies will understand us when we say that it is only by daily contact with the Chant that the Gregorian temperament can be formed. We have learned to speak, to sing, to appreciate this melodious language forgotten for so many centuries, and to become aware of its beauty. Our ear, at first astonished and rebellious, soon allowed itself to be fascinated by the charm of this free rhythm, supple and undulating, for which our modern education had little prepared us.” (Mocquereau 16)

There is “Gregorian temperament” that is created through the experience of this music, whether it be the composer, performer, or listener experiencing it. This music seeks to create a certain disposition in those that experience it in order to create stillness within them to better begin to hear not only God but themselves. Chant does not teach one how to sing. It teaches one how to listen and how to contemplate.

Monastic spirituality contains three key terms: *taciturnitas*, *obaedientia* (obedience), and *humilitas* (humility). *Taciturnitas*, not quite meaning the same things as taciturn, is a positive value to possess. It is the love of being silent. According to Dom Jacques Hourlier, a monk from the Abbey of Solesmes, *taciturnitas* is necessary in order to successfully perform the chant because “we need to listen to inner silence, even while singing.” *Obaedientia*, or obedience, is

also important in the performance of Gregorian Chant. It is important to be obedient to the melody itself, for within the melody is the religious meaning and spiritual character of the text. Lastly, *humilitas*, or humility, is important for it implies a willingness to listen and be obedient against all desire of individuality. Again, Dom Jacques Hourlier writes that listening “requires us to direct our attention outward to things other than the self, while our voice... becomes the instrument of conscience.” By being able to outwardly direct one’s attention, one’s conscious is able to begin recognizing the identity and qualities of each individual in the choir and, furthermore, the qualities of the greater interconnectedness of everyman and God himself. (Abbey of St Peter of Solesmes, *Reflections* 15-16)

Notice that these three words fall into our three categories, or “points of action,” in musical experience. First, to create Gregorian Chant, one must compose themselves by being silent, or through *taciturnitas*. It is frequently said that the chant arises out of silence, but this silence must first be present in and around those who bring it alive. Second, to perform the chant, one must be obedient to the melody. Without this obedience, it is impossible to properly experience the chant. Third and last, humility creates the opportunity to listen to or hear the chant, taking into account and understanding its full meaning both for the self and the community.

Chant: More than Music

“The chant makes you deepen your relationship with God.” (Abbey of St Peter of Solesmes, Reflections 12)

“Gregorian chant helps bring unity to the soul, enabling a person to be at one with himself.” (Abbey of St Peter of Solesmes, Reflections 12)

“[Gregorian Chant], whether solo or choral, was sung to the glory and praise of God, and not to man...” (Douglas 27)

While we call it music and for some it is music, Gregorian Chant is essentially *not music* for the monastic practitioner. What Gregorian Chant is for these people is ultimately, and rather exclusively, prayer. An often told story from the Abbey of Solesmes, which is known globally for their recorded and live renditions of the chant, is about the person who comes to the doorkeeper monk or to the monk in the bookshop and asks when the next “concert” or “performance” will be.

The visitor, walking excitedly into the bookstore, finds a monk – difficult to miss, wearing their billowy black robes – and asks, “When is today’s concert?”

The monk, looking confused, replies, “Sir, we do not have any concerts here today.”

“Oh, that’s too bad. I was told that there is a concert every day,” the visitor said, looking rather disappointed, having come a long way to hear a concert.

The monk, feeling sorry for the traveler, tries to console him. “But we do have Mass at 10 o’clock, which you are more than welcome to attend.”

This is a cause of one of the problems that traditional music faces in the market of “world music” today, of which Gregorian Chant has become a major part. The problem is that traditional music is most often performed, recorded, and listened to out of its original and intended contexts. (Dutiro 31) The process of recording and marketing this music produces an inauthentic and often misinformed experience of this music as it relates to those performing it. While the experience of

the performers is not necessarily important for the experience of the listeners, here, it is important to show how the experience of our monastic performers differs greatly from how the people, who popularly consume the music outside the cloister walls, understand this music and those who sing it. In gaining a comprehensive understanding of how Gregorian Chant affects people, we cannot begin by ignoring or misunderstanding the experience of those who “perform” it. A concert, as compared to prayer, carries quite different connotations with it, just as do performance and prayer.

In world music genres, especially those that focus on functionalist and participatory music, the functionality and participatory nature of the music is often omitted. This is true with Gregorian Chant. The chant is often lifted out of its liturgical, religious, and spiritual contexts to be made into something that is entertaining, relaxing, or pretty. While chant can be entertaining, relaxing, and pretty, it is far more than these things, something that cannot be so easily expressed on a CD or MP3. Essentially functionalist and participatory music is made to be consumed passively so that only a fraction of its essential experience can be transmitted. This is particularly the case with religious and ceremonial music, which can seem quite insipid, strange, and meaningless outside of its natural setting.

While this is not “bad” or a fault of record companies, it is simply not an accurate way to see the whole picture. While the chant can be a concert experience, it is also a part of a religious institution, the day to day lifestyle and reality of monastic groups, communal and personal prayer, and communal and personal spiritual growth and transformation, the feelings of which cannot be digitally recorded.

Forgetting or not addressing the extra-musical side of this chant for those who have integrated this practice into their very being is a grave abuse to the spirit of the chant. To make

the liturgical or religious functions of the chant be or appear to be secondary to the musical functions, to make the “sacred functions” of the chant the “servant of the music,” is something that is considered condemnable. Music is only one aspect of the chant and the liturgy. (Pope Pius X n. pag.) The monks at the Abbey of Solesmes say,

“The chant is so intertwined with the essence of the liturgical act that viewing it as a mere ornament reduces the liturgy itself to a theatrical act. Hence your penetrating conclusion: Gregorian chant becomes the liturgy!” (Abbey of St Peter of Solesmes, Reflections 12)

Gregorian chant is such a part of the liturgical act that it has become the liturgy itself, and to view it as something outside, beyond, or above the liturgy is not only a misunderstanding but a grave abuse to its meaning for these people.

While Gregorian Chant is music and an intrinsic part of the liturgy, it still functions as so much more for these monastics. As a group that has dedicated their lives to a communion with God, they have also dedicated their lives to a communion with each other, living a “stable” existence within their community for nearly their whole life, seldom leaving the confines of the cloister. This kind of lifestyle requires that these monastics find fellowship and unity with each other. Without such unity, the community would quickly deteriorate. The chant also functions in helping to create this unity. Again, the monks of the Abbey of Solesmes address this widely held notion when they write,

“In a liturgical assembly, the chant unites all those present. Though you barely touched upon this thought, we should take note of it. For whether we sing it or

listen to it, Gregorian chant generates unity – more so, perhaps, than any other type of music.” (Abbey of St Peter of Solesmes, Reflections 13)

The repeated singing of all 150 Psalms of David as part of the Divine Office every one or two weeks is an essential part of fostering unity amongst the members of the community. They are essentially working together to praise God and grow spiritually towards their primary objective, union with Christ and their God.

Even the manner in which they sing most of their chanting helps to foster this sense of unity by working together. Most of the psalms are sung antiphonally, meaning that they are sung in a call-and-response fashion. The monastic community is typically divided into two halves during any worship service, one of the left and one of the right of the sanctuary. These “choirs” sing back and forth to each other through the recitation of the antiphonal psalms. One half will sing two to three lines of the text. Once these lines are completed, the opposite choir will sing the next two or three lines in response to the first choir. This will continue until the psalm is complete, and then it will begin again with a new psalm. This antiphonal singing has been given many historical roots and purposes, but for those using this style of chanting today, many claim that the purpose is to build partnership, relationship, and unity with the community and each member of the choir. In essence you are not only singing to the other choir in response, but you are singing to each individual in the other choir who has sung to you. This kind of singing creates drama, motion, relation, and unity in the music and in those chanting it.

Another important extra-musical aspect of this music is from what it is derived and what it is primarily expressing. Almost all the text in the entire repertoire of Gregorian Chant comes from Christian sacred scripture, namely the Bible. Even more precisely, not only is the text for the chant taken from the Bible, but the chant has itself grown from the text. The text was not

superimposed upon the chant, and the chant was not composed for the purpose of the words, rather the chant is an intrinsic part of the words themselves, evolving directly out of the text. Eugene Cardine, a monk from the Abbey of Solesmes, who specialized in the teaching and singing of this chant, wrote of chant and its relation to the holy scriptures. He believed that the chant, “borrowed for the major part from sacred scripture, [has] a beauty and efficacy which grow precisely from their divine inspiration.” (Cardine, *Beginning Studies* 1). The melodies of the chant are not only adopted in an intimate fashion to the natural flow and meaning of the words, but have a particular ability to give a deeper expression to the “spiritual inner life” of the text (1).

The singing of this chant allows those singing it and hearing it to gain a deeper understanding of the text contained within the chant. This music has the ability to express the meanings beyond the conventional meanings of the words. Believing that these texts are not only divinely inspired by God, but are actually the words of God himself, there is an understanding that God himself resided within and behind these texts. This music, derived from this text, seeks to understand and experience the unobtainable divinity that is God. The monks from the Abbey of Solesmes affirm this when they write,

“Listening [to the chant] allows us to grasp the deepest meaning of the sacred words; it can carry us beyond all words and concepts to the very threshold of God’s inexpressible mystery. It can thus lead to conversion to God in the most basic sense of the term, conversion ad Deum, to a place where we experience silence and awe in the face of Divine Mystery.” (Abbey of St Peter of Solesmes, *Reflections* 3)

Thus, the singing and hearing of the chant not only opens one's mind to the meanings of the text being chanted, but opens one's mind to the hidden speaker of these words: God. Chant places one in a direct relation to God.

The idea that chant reveals God within his Word creates another extra-musical aspect of the chant: when one sings the chant, it is not ultimately a song for the self or a song for your neighbor, it is a song for the praise of and search for God. When one sings the chant, whether alone or in a choir, he is ultimately an individual singing, not a collective. Chant is a personal relationship with God that can be expressed within a group, but ultimately it is a *personal* relationship with God, one-on-one. The monks of the Abbey of Solesmes affirm this point when they write on the monophonic (one voice) character of the chant:

“Another aspect of its monophonic nature is that Gregorian chant can be sung by only one person... Thus each individual is placed directly before God; when singing the chant, a person is automatically paced in a relationship that is of a higher level than anything he can attain with his fellow human being.” (Abbey of St Peter of Solesmes, Reflections 39-40)

For the monks who sing the chant, this musical art is ultimately eclipsed by the primary object of the chant, which is union with their community and relation with God. While it is a musical expression, it has extra-musical purpose and meaning, that is essential to these monastics who sing it. For them, the goal of chant is not to please the listener, but to guide the listener and performer to He who spoke the words that the chant is married to, and to live by and grow in those words to cultivate the spirit towards the kingdom of God.

Opening the Mind: The Power of Belief

I would like to take a moment to ask the reader to briefly refer back to the note at the beginning of this document. It is imperative at this point in this discussion to stress the importance and power of belief. For the monastics chanting these melodies, there is a powerful belief behind this music that transforms what some might perceive as a concert or historical relic into something deeply personal and spiritual. There is no empirical evidence for what these people believe, but their belief in it is so powerful that it has effectively shaped and transformed their life. To fully comprehend the process, the phenomenon, that is happening when these people chant, one must not take for granted or discount these beliefs. While one might not find these beliefs to be “true,” to discount them is to miss a great portion of this argument, which is essentially oriented on personal belief. Thus, to gain the fullest understanding of the topic at hand, it is advisable that both the reader and writer take a moment to “believe,” in the face of empirical notions, that what these people believe and experience is true. If one cannot, for a moment, put aside their own dispositions and skepticisms, then one will not be able to understand the nature of Spirosonance. Here, we seek to understand how people feel and perceive their own reality, not how we perceive our own reality or feel in relation to others. Belief is central to any discussion of spirit, because what one believes and what one perceives and believes their reality to be form the center of who they are and how they feel.

Most medieval discussions of music, from which the music we are observing derives, stress the importance of belief in the religious actions that one does. Believing in the heart of one’s being the truth of what one sings is highly significant in any medieval religious musical practice. It is not so much about if ones is able to sing well, or whether the proper rules of music

are followed, or if the message that the music delivers is appropriate to the message intended. While these are important, the most important consideration for the singer is that they consciously *believe* in what they are singing. The Rule of St. Benedict, the defined code of living for many monastics throughout history and today, makes this point clear to the monastics singing this chant when it declares,

“And look, when you sing, that your heart accords with your voice; then you sing correctly. Lord, you give us our service to do that we may come into the fellowship of the angels.” (Kock 120)

A popular chorister’s prayer even today admonishes each singer to “take heed that what you sing with your lips you believe in your heart and practice in your life.” Thus, the expected results of the choral recitation of the Offices were and are the creation and nurturing of a core piety and system of belief. Through the daily, constant chanting of the psalms, antiphons, and responsories, each monastic internalizes the creeds and scriptures of the faith in a deeply resonant song that echoes within their self even when the actual sound dies away. (Yardley 15)

In Chapter 19 Benedict expresses an explicit and basic theology of religious singing:

“We believe that the divine is always present and that ‘the eyes of God observe the good and evil in every place’; we should believe this the most without doubt when we attend the divine office. Therefore let us always remember what the prophet said: ‘Serve the Lord in fear’ and further ‘Sing wisely’ and ‘In the sight of the angels I will sing to you.’ Therefore, let us consider how we ought to behave in the sight of God and his angels; and thus let us remain in singing the psalms so that our mind and our voice are in harmony.” (Yardley 21)

This passage from the Rule of St. Benedict is perhaps the single most important passage within the Rule concerning the performance of the liturgy. This passage presents Benedict's prevention against allowing either aesthetic considerations or personal pride to hinder the principal purpose of the Divine Office – the worship and praise of God. The standards used to define “good” worship were not musical or liturgical, but essentially spiritual ones. Good worship is created through the deep personal belief in what one is worshiping, singing, and doing. Without a spirit in the worship, it becomes a meaningless act. The way in which this music, the chant, is treated contributes significantly to the creation of this “good” worship, which is meant to excite spiritual manifestation.

Without first creating and fostering a genuine belief in what the chant conveys, represents, and means, there is ultimately no personal investment in these messages. Without a personal investment in the music and what it represents, there is little chance that the music or the message will move those, who are not personally invested. Without the ability to “move”, the liturgy, which is embodied by the music in our contexts here, has no vocabulary to communicate to individual's feelings. Without any “emotive potential” in the liturgy, religion loses its “spirit” and becomes simply an institution of personally meaningless symbols and rituals. In such a case, religion either becomes insipid or unneeded, which does not insure the preservation of such institutions. Without a personal attachment or feeling within and towards these institutions, they increasingly become less necessary within people's lives. Religion is necessary for some people because it helps them to direct their spiritual feelings. Without spiritual character, however, religion fails to accomplish its purpose. Here, within these monastic communities, which are highly concerned about spiritual maturation and understanding, the chant greatly helps in

forming and fostering this sense of spirituality through attaching institutional meanings to the self through the power of belief.

To understand how these people feel about the music they sing, we must begin by appreciating, and perhaps relating to, the beliefs they hold. What people believe forms a central part of their emotive potential. If one does not believe in the power of an exorcism, then an exorcism will most likely not be as effective as it could be for someone who believes. If one does not believe in the meaning and message of Christ, then the fact that some guy during the time of the Roman Empire was executed in Palestine for crimes against the empire by disturbing the peace through laying claim to some supernatural noble birth would probably not be that moving. If one believes in the meaning of Christ's execution, then this action becomes significantly more meaningful and potentially emotive. If one does not believe something to be musical, then they are probably not going to find such a sonic experience to be musical. If one does not believe something to be spiritual, then they are probably not going to find personal attachment to such an experience. Personal belief is essential in creating personal emotive potential in any experience. Without belief, then one is most likely not going to find something manifestable of spirit.

The Chant and the Text: The Power of Words

“One of the characteristic features of oral cultures everywhere... is an appreciation and sensitivity toward the power of language.” (Burton-Christie 208)

“Gregorian chant has originated from the text and its meaning, but then goes on to evoke a reality that causes the literal text to be forgotten and transcended.” (Heeswijk 68)

Until relatively recently, all the liturgy of the Catholic Church has been performed in Latin, with few exceptions. During the second half of the twentieth century, due to the revision that occurred under the Second Vatican Council, the liturgy rapidly converted to local vernacular languages in an effort to make a traditionally exclusionary and “conservative” worship that few could participate in or even understand more accessible. While this reform met with much approval, there were also many people who bemoaned the leaving behind of past and long-held traditions. Latin had been an essential part of the liturgy for nearly two millennia in the Roman Catholic Church. Such a change to vernacular languages disconnected many people with the history and meaning of their religious institution. Peter Lamanna, a Catholic church music director, tells a story in his article, “On Promoting Gregorian Chant” in the *Sacred Music* journal, of an encounter he had with a fellow parishioner on the first Sunday when Latin was replaced with English in his church:

“As a woman put it on the morning that we celebrated in English for the first time – (I met her on the steps of the church, I was going in and she was coming out) – when I asked, “Mrs. Tate, how do you feel about the vernacular?”

This was a woman who speaks broken English. And she said, “Well, it’s the will of God.”

I said, “But you don’t seem happy about this. Would you like it if it were in Italian?”

“No,” she said, “you know... somehow I don’t feel good about using language with my God that I have just used with my milkman.” (Lamanna 7)

There has been much disagreement between pre- and post-Vatican II proponents as to the importance and necessity of the Latin language in the performance of the liturgy. It is not the

purpose of this discussion to favor one over the other, or to address the history and points to each of these arguments. Rather, the purpose here is to discuss why this distinction is important to these people. Why is particular language and how it is particularly spoken so meaningful, whether Latin, English, or whatever, and how the use of such languages in conjunction with music effects the power of that language?

For monastics, language and words carry great power. Silence is not only encouraged to create an atmosphere of listening but also to emphasize the power of words. When seldom spoken, words are not taken for granted. When listening, hearing, contemplating, and thinking all become the primary focus of one's state of being, words are chosen carefully and used sparingly. When following these practices, the power of words becomes much more apparent. Only a few words can cause anger, fear, destruction, peace, calm, or love.

In these monastic communities, the power of Scripture becomes an oral expression through verbal meditation, involving the frequent repetition of words and sayings from Scripture, such as the chanting of the Psalms. Beyond the daily recitation of Scripture during Mass and the Divine Office, it is a common practice for monastics to meditate upon one or two verses of a psalm or other verses from Scripture, contemplating the many possible and nuanced meanings of the verse and trying to apply them to their own life (Burton-Christie 13). Through this process of verbal meditation, the Scripture and its meaning become interiorized.

The constant repetition and internalization of these words represents the fundamental way in which language is perceived within these spiritual communities, using words and sounds to enhance and better conceptualize their spirituality. For monastics the biblical text, while representing part of reality, is not wholly a representation of reality. The text is meant to be a window through which one must look to see beyond the mundane meaning of the text to the

super-mundane meaning, conceptualized as God and His word (Nye 159). Language for these people is not an end, but a means, whether it be Latin or not. It is then the purpose of the chant, as a method of verbal meditation and prayer, to improve the sense of the words, pointing to their super-mundane significances (Abbey of St Peter of Solesmes “Liber Usualis” xiv). Music, particularly the chant, when added to words imbues the plain meaning of those words with a radiance that the words alone perhaps do not possess. For these people, chant reveals an inner meaning to these words that would not be easily accessed otherwise.

More particularly, those who follow the traditions of pre-Vatican II, the Latin language is specially set aside for the liturgy for a particular purpose, primarily because it does not bear with it the secular connotations that vernacular language do, as we can see with the quoted story above. For these people, like the lady above or the monks at a traditional monastery such as Solesmes, speaking the vernacular at Mass implies that the Mass, and particularly the Eucharist – the most holy of Catholic rituals – is little different from any other daily occurrence. The Mass is thought to be sacred and so it is meant to be distinguished from common life. Pope Pius X in his *Motu Proprio*, addressing the music of the Church, says this in regards to the language of the Church and how music relates to it:

“The language of the Roman Church is Latin. It is therefore forbidden to sing anything in the vulgar tongue during solemn liturgical functions, and much more is it forbidden to sing in the vulgar tongue the parts, either proper or common, of the Mass and the Office.” (Pope Pius X n. pag.)

He goes on to say that Gregorian Chant is

“... closely bound up with the correct pronunciation of the words. Doubtless the melody is of itself independent of the text, yet they form but one thing in execution. We may go further: the pronunciation of Latin words has exerted an active and often decisive influence on the formation of certain Gregorian phrases.” (Pope Pius X n. pag.)

For those practicing this chant in its most “original” form, such as those at Solesmes, the chant is a vocal expression which is, above all, absolutely bound to its text. The text is primary. The music is an expression of the text; the text is not an ornament of the music. The monks of Solesmes say that the purpose of the chant is to “... decorate the text, to interpret it and to help the hearer assimilate it.” (Abbey of St Peter of Solesmes, An Overview 5) While these pre-Vatican II views are highly exclusionary to those who chose to use the vernacular in both the liturgy and the music, they demonstrate an important point that carries across the Vatican II divide: the words are sacred and are the primary expression, which the chant emotively and spiritually *enhances*.

While for some the ancient and traditional Latin lends to the enhanced spirituality of the text’s meaning, for others the easily understood and familiar vernacular lends to the enhanced spirituality of the text’s meaning. The chant constitutes an artistic examination of the text, both physically and spiritually: in the proper grouping of the words and phrases, and in their intrinsic and esoteric meanings (Abbey of St Peter, An Overview 8). In gaining a better understanding of how this music helps to inform the spirituality of these people, it is good to recognize the significance that the text, which relates to this chant, encapsulates and how the chant works with that text. The text, whether Latin or English, is emotively enhanced by the chant, revealing greater and more personal meaning within the text to those who are meditating upon it through chanting. The chant is an emotive and contemplative stimulus.

Chant as Prayer: Living the Spirituality of the Present

“He who sings, prays twice.” (Saint Augustine)

“It is interesting to note that, in Gregorian chant, art and prayer are inseparable; they are so clearly bound together that they cannot be disassociated. The Chant cannot be sung well without prayer, neither can we pray well without singing well too.” (Gajard 7)

“When we are engaged in sung prayer, we are not simply dressing out words in sound; rather, we are engaged in forming and expressing those emotions which constitute the very Christian life itself.” (Saliers 291-292)

As has been addressed previously, Gregorian Chant is, for these monastics, first and foremost prayer. It functions above its musical forms, addressing the super-mundane within the lives of these ascetics. Gregorian Chant is in essence a form of oral contemplation. This music is an essential part in the worship of God, not merely a decoration, because it is ultimately a conversation with God. When one chants this music, one is speaking to God – worshiping, supplicating, loving, fearing, questioning, and learning who this God is. This music facilitates a feeling of communal unity and personal spirituality by engaging these practitioners in worship and prayer that requires both directed listening and conscious intention of will. The use of music as a medium for prayer adds new dimension to this ritual experience, both ritually and personally, unifying the collected voices into one prayer while also adding to each prayer an element of intentionality to what is spoken. By the simple fact that singing takes more physical and mental effort than simply speaking, this form of prayer becomes more intimate, emotive, and intentional, connected in more facets to the mind and body. This is significant in our study at

hand because singing, considered in this way, increases the emotional breadth of prayer, perhaps connecting it more deeply to personal spirituality.

Take for example an often recited prayer, the Lord's Prayer. If one were to ever attend a Christian worship service, it is seldom that this prayer is not employed at some point within the service. Often this prayer is recited by the congregation at large. What is interesting in observing such prayer rituals is that it is frequently *recited*, not *prayed*. Another example is a national pledge. Perhaps, the reader has attended a Christian worship service or recited a national anthem at some point. Perhaps then, the reader can relate to one of the below situations, which the author certainly can relate to:

. . .

A group of students, half asleep, are gather early in the morning on Monday at school. After the bell rings for the beginning of the day, a voice comes over the intercom and says, "All please rise and recite the pledge of allegiance."

Half grudgingly, from their sleepy stupors, scrambling to finish their homework they neglected to complete the night before, the students rise to recite the anthem. Some place their hand over the heart. Some begin to raise their hand then put it back down, afraid of looking foolish amongst their peers. Some don't bother to lift their hands at all. Some don't even bother to stand, continuing to finish their homework as though nothing had happened.

All at once, the students begin, monotonously saying the pledge that they have been reciting, day after day, for the past decade they have been in school. "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." The drone of apathetic voices dies. Once done

with the arduous task, all plop back into their seats and continue doing their homework, stare sleepily into the distance, or go back to sleep, a truly inspired display of national pride.

. . .

You look at your watch. It's Sunday, and all you want is to be home, relaxing in front of the television, enjoying your few hours break during the week from the drudgery of work, but you are here in church and the service has already been going on for 45 minutes. It's 11:45. "How much longer," you say to yourself. The pastor just finished his rather long winded sermon. You had hoped that it might be shorter this week, but alas your weekly wish is never answered. You calculate it. "Well," you think, "there is the offertory, the church prayer, a hymn, communion, another hymn, and then the benediction left in the service. How long could that take?"

The music for the offertory starts as you consider the timing of all these events. "The hymns can only be about five minutes together and the benediction is no time at all (hardly anything to consider). The offertory is going by quickly because no one's giving any money, an extra time bonus. So all there is to really worry about is the communion and prayer, which is typically as longwinded as the sermons. Probably be out by noon if we are lucky." The offertory comes to a conclusion, and the pastor begins the weekly ritual of communal prayer.

You think, "Hmm, what do I want to have for lunch? Who's playing in the football game today?" The congregation utters a perfunctory "Amen" in response to something you missed. The prayer continues. After a few impatient minutes, the end of the prayer comes into sight. You hear the typical tone enter the pastor's voice that always signals the beginning of the Lord's Prayer, which always ends the communal prayer. It begins.

"Our Father, who art in in heaven, hallowed be thy name...." ("a tuna salad sandwich would be good for lunch, or maybe that pizza place down the road")... "Thy kingdom come, thy

will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven....” (“What time is it?”)... “Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors....” (“Why don’t we say trespasses in this church? I wonder where that comes from? I like the other version better.”)... “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever....” (“Finally, I can sit down.”)... “Amen.”

*You sit back down and recalculate to see if any improvement has been made on your estimated time of departure. You do not even consider that you have just uttered probably one of the most significant prayers in all of Christianity. You do not even consider that you have just been speaking to God himself in this prayer. You just **spoke** to God. How do you think the conversation was?*

. . .

Both of these events, while one is religious and one is typically considered secular, are both forms of prayer in a way. Both are also common examples of rather emotionless and mundane tasks, done begrudgingly without consideration to the significant implications of such performance: namely, pledging your whole self to a national ideal or talking to a supernatural power, who, you perhaps believe, controls your whole existence and knows everything, being a completely omnipotent creator. These described events are not elaborate fabrications. They are extremely common across religious and secular institutions.

For monastics, prayer is a deeply significant action. Their whole life is designed to be centered on prayer. To pray like described above would be the greatest fault that a monastic could commit within his practice, literally having insulted God, who is supposed to be worshiped and loved with the whole self. The chant, by engaging both the body and mind in greater intentionality when praying, helps to prevent such attitudes while praying. It is a lot easier to lose

your intention while speaking a well-known prayer when *reciting* it than if one is singing the recitation, focusing not only on the words, but the melody, the choir, the antiphony (if present), and the sound of one's own voice. The prayer becomes intentional and meaningful rather than mindlessly iterated, possibly lending to a much more personal and emotively powerful experience.

For many people, music is often cited as something that manifests prayerful experiences. This idea is not exclusive to these monastics, they have simply used this ability of music to intentionally enhance their life of prayer. Evidence for this not uncommon response to music can be found in the study by Terrence Hays and Victor Minichiello, "Older People's Experience of Spirituality Through Music," from the *Journal of Religion, Spirituality and Aging*. Within their findings, they quote a number of their interviewees, citing their feelings and responses towards music. Two quotations that are of great pertinence to this point are below.

Interviewee Maureen: "And so that's why it is prayer. And I think that for me, that's what music is. I mean I'm not always as conscious of that, but I will often be driving along and hear something and I'll say: Oh! Thanks you God for that and sometimes somebody will hit a note, you know a soprano just with such clarity. So for me it's such a gift from God. I've got a fairly broad definition of God. But for me, any beauty, if it's life, a sunset or whatever, is just another manifestation of that." (Hays 91)

Interviewee Pam: "My soul, my spirit, my inner self needs the music to fill me with joy, to fill me with wonder, to fill me with peace. If there's a God, I think [music is] God talking to me." (Hays 94)

Many quotations can be put here to demonstrate that this phenomenon is not exclusive to monastic institutions. There is a story often told at the Abbey of Solesmes about three Japanese women who visited the monastery. These women were native to Japan, had little familiarity with traditional (let alone ancient) Western music, and were not affiliated with the Christian Church, yet they came halfway around the world to the monastery to hear the chant. Upon being asked why they had come, they explained how they had heard a recording of the chant from this monastery as part of a Buddhist meditation and were so moved by it that they had to come hear it in person. They said, “We are interested in Gregorian chant, not because of the marvelous music, but even more because of its value as prayer” (Abbey of St Peter of Solesmes, *Reflections* 6). It is clear that music can heighten the personally spiritual and emotive potential that is intended in such an action as prayer. Dom Gajard emphasizes this point when he writes, “[Gregorian chant] is truly the instrument of one’s dreams, at the service of prayer which expresses the spiritual relationship of the spiritual soul with that pure Spirit, God” (Gajard 63). Music gives spirit to the ritual of prayer.

Within the monastery or convent, the chant is always sung as a part of worship. It is essentially prayer, in whatever context it functions. More exactly and poignantly, it is an intentional form of active prayer, a physically and mentally engaged conversation with God that lends itself to great emotive potential to manifest spiritual experience.

Performing Presence: The Manifestation of Music and Practice of Spirit

“Essential condition for an earnest and effective rendering of Plain-Chant is, a heart full of faith, a feeling of joyful hope, a recollected mind, a spirit of devotion,

earnest prayer, and the good intention of doing all for the greater honor and glory of God.” (Haberl 236)

When learning to sing chant, the monastics must practice proper breath control. By learning to breathe properly, one learns presence and is able to center themselves in the moment, an essential ability when performing prayer (Steindl-Rast 26). Intention, absolute awareness to the present and the conscious awareness of action, are at the center of the performance of this prayer. Dom Eugene Cardine from the Abbey of Solesmes, a well-known teacher of this musical and prayerful art, says that “To obtain the spiritual effect, and even more, the musical effect of Gregorian Chant, a certain degree of perfection is required” (Cardine, *Beginning Studies* 2). He defines two things that must be perfected to truly master this spiritual art. These are:

1. perfection in understanding of the chant, its character, its liturgical functions, its practice, and its theory.
2. perfection in execution, striving for a technique that is worthy of both the subject matter and the ultimate aim of the chant, which is “nothing less than the praise of God.” (2)

Said in another way, first one must know how to breathe, then one must breathe properly, perfecting both the concept and the execution. Thus far, we have been looking at the understanding of the chant, discussing its character and its function, in what way it is composed. Now, we shift to the execution of this art, seeking to understand how this “practice of presence” works to manifest the spirituality of these people.

The concept of proper breath, seeking centeredness and presence, is at the root of all other performance practices in this prayer. Being present to the moment is primary, for, at least for these monastics, God is only experienced in the present. One cannot access God in the past or the future, for we are essentially beings of the present, never existing outside of this moment. We can think about the past and the future, but we cannot be in either place, thus one cannot find relation to God in these places. God, while also existing at all times and outside of time, can only be experienced by humans in the present moment. Thus, if one is not living very consciously in the present moment, they will never come into relationship with God. Having formed their whole existence around the search for relation to God, not living in the present and never finding this relation is out of the question. Thus, requiring one to be present to the musical moment, conscious of all action, thought, and spirit put into the chant, chant works extensively to foster this relation to God within the present. The chant is a devotion to living in the present with the heart, mind, and spirit, speaking with a genuine voice through this presence to God.

Along with the spirit of presence, the performance of the chant must be characterized by three “virtues:” sobriety, simplicity, and restraint. (Spence xi-xii) These three virtues, as they are called, are all rooted in the art of prayer, which is itself rooted in the life of presence. Thus, these three virtues arise from the practice of presence and are not independent from this basic and primary understanding. Saint Nicetas of Remesiana, a fourth century Bishop of the Catholic Church, describes the character of chant very effectively:

“Let the chant, then be sung in a manner befitting holy religion; let it not display theatrical turgidity; but show a Christian simplicity in its melody, and let it not evoke the stage, but create compunction in the listeners. Our voices ought not to be dissonant, but concordant – not with one dragging out the song, and another

cutting it short, while one sings too softly, and another too loudly – and all must seek to blend their voices within the sound of a harmonious chorus, not to project it outward in vulgar display like a cithara. It must all be done as if in the sight of God, not man, and not to please oneself.” (Nicetas of Remesiana 21)

This is probably one of the earliest sources historians have on the performance practice of liturgical chant, and it lays a foundation upon which many other theologians, concerned with the musical prayer, will later comment. Here, Nicetas begins to outline the stereotypical medieval characteristics attached to chant practice, which the monks of Solesmes define as “respect for tradition,” “dedication to duty,” and “detachment of self” (Abbey of St Peter of Solesmes, *Reflections* 30).

Respect for Tradition

The tradition of chanting within the Christian Church finds its origins with the very beginnings of the church itself. The early Christians were profoundly concerned with distinctly separating themselves from all things that represent the secular world of Rome at the time. Thus, when considering music to ornament their worship, they felt that the harsh instrumental timbres and exciting rhythms of Roman sacred and secular music, at the time, was inappropriate for their worship. Anything that represented or mirrored Roman aesthetics was to be avoided. Thus, the smoothness, soberness, and arrhythmic character of chant was attractive for their needs.

Once this form has been integrated into the church over the first few centuries of Christian activity, early Christians then became profoundly concerned with the problem of singing itself, attempting to distinguish and perfect the characteristics of the chant of the church

from the attitudes of popular music. Again, living in a world against their relatively new religious movement, Christians sought to unify themselves through creating a solidarity within all aspects of their practice. This can be extended into developments within the liturgy, ritual, and music that would affect the Church for the next 1500 years until the Protestant Reformation.

Within the early development of Christian music, the formation of religious solidarity within music cultivated the concept *quasi una voce*, a Latin phrase meaning “as one voice.” Thus, when Christians were to sing together in worship, they all should sing as if they were singing with one voice. This excluded any early forms of homophony, polyphony, and instrumental accompaniment. This would create the standard of monophony (single, unaccompanied musical line) that would encapsulate church music for the next millennium. (Crocker 25) The singing in unison was and is a powerful symbol of both the unanimity of spirit in Christian worship and the essentially personal relationship that one seeks with God, one to one. One sings together with all Christians, participating in the whole spirit of the church, and sings with one voice, speaking personally to God. As Crocker writes, this experience of unison singing by all those involved “is not just a *symbol* of being together, it is an archetype, a primary experience of being together” (Crocker 27).

Quasi una voce is the tradition from which Gregorian Chant has grown. The *Liber Usualis*, the historical authoritative compendium of Gregorian Chant, addresses this character of the chant in its introduction:

“In order that all the voices may be one, which is most essential, each singer should attempt in all modesty to allow his own voice to become merged in the volume of sounds of the choir as a whole.” (Abbey of St Peter of Solesmes “*Liber Usualis*” xiv)

There is clearly an understanding within this musical and prayerful practice that there is a community of people participating, at different levels, in the experience. By its very communal nature, this music is meant to accommodate all kinds of vocal, religious, and spiritual skills. Within the monastery or convent, the chant is sung by all: the young, the old, the new, the trained, those searching, and those who have found. All enter into a shared spirit where imperfections are inevitable. This, however, is the intent. The community is about people sharing themselves with each other, for they are all in search for a spiritual experience. They share all their shortcomings, fears, desires, virtues, sins, loves, and hates when they give themselves to each other and to God in the chant. Through these imperfections, however, an extraordinary beauty is created, as they seek together a union with and understanding of something beyond themselves. It is through singing with one voice that each monk or nun begins to join themselves to those things, people, and ideas that are beyond their self. While they sing with their one voice to God, they also are essentially joining their own voice with the voice of all creation, moving beyond their self to experience “the other.”

Dedication to Duty

As has been noted before, the primary duty of the chant is as the liturgy of the church. In all things that it does, its character must be directed towards the solemn performance of the liturgy, praising and thanking God. Pope Pius X, a primary cause for the restoration and extensive musicological research in chant over the past century, begins to define, in his own

terms, these characteristics that music in general must have to be properly suited to the Catholic liturgy. In his *Motu Proprio* he writes,

“For these reasons plainchant has always been looked upon as the highest model of Church music, and we may with good reason establish as a general rule that the more a musical composition for use in church is like plainchant in its movement, is inspiration, and its feeling, so much the more is it right and liturgical, and the more it differs from this highest model so much the less is it worthy of the house of God.” (Pope Pius X n. pag.)

What then is the characteristic “movement”, “inspiration,” and “feeling” of chant that befits it so well to the liturgy. One characteristic has already been described, namely the unison – monophonic – character of chanting. While this lends to the performance of the liturgy, the purpose of monophony, the unison singing of the collect, is not liturgical. This is about the spirit of the Christian community and its relation to God, not about the ritualistic worship of God. Monophony is about forming relationships, not about performing ritual.

As part of its functions for the performance of the liturgy exclusively, chant must be clear and sober. It must be expressive, but not excited. Sobriety is important in this form of worship. The chant should be emotive, but not so emotive as to distract wholly from the purpose of the worship and turn attention solely to the music. To better achieve this sobriety, chant must be simple. It must not be insipid, for the worship of God is supposed to be fully of genuine and loving feeling, but it cannot be so over complex so as to again turn the attention away from the liturgy to the form of the music exclusively. The character of the chant must then ultimately enhance the liturgy, be the liturgy, and, most importantly, not distract from the liturgy.

First, the “tempo” or pace of the chant must be contemplative, but not slow or torpid. Also, it must not be too quick, for if it is too quick it lacks both reverence and does not facilitate good contemplation of the text and its message. In choosing the pace of the chant, the meaning of the text, the nature of the melody, and the ability of the choir must be measured (Sunol 122). If these are not properly taken into account, the pace can contradict the meaning and nature of the text, thus spoiling the melody. Furthermore, if the pace is not in balance with the ability of the choir, those singing can lose sight of the purpose of prayer, focusing rather on the difficulty of quick execution of the chant or becoming bored and distracted with the slow pacing, not being actively engaged with the prayer. There must never be a sense of drag or haste in the rendition of the chant, for neither is appropriately reverent. Charles Spence emphasizes this point in his compendium of Gregorian Chants when he writes that within chant “The rhythm, the melody and the text all contribute to this lightness and movement which make the chant by nature so capable of lifting our minds and hearts to God in liturgical prayer” (Spence xi-xii). Here, it is clear that the proper pacing of the chant is essential in the proper performance of the liturgy, desired to be contemplative and reverent, intentionally directing those participating to be present to the prayer.

Second, the execution of the chant should be perfectly smooth so as to create the desired sobriety and clarity required of the liturgy. Without such an execution, the chant loses its transparency, becoming confused and muddled. (Sunol 12) Without clarity, confusion distracts from the presence required in prayer, making those chanting focus less on the prayer and more on the music. Prayer must be natural, like speaking and thinking, it cannot be bogged down by the music, but rather enhanced by it. Immediately when the music stops enhancing the liturgy, it no longer serves its proper purpose. It is not meant to ornament, but to be a seamless, integrated

part of the liturgy, not confusing it, but becoming it. The monks of Solesmes, describe this character of chant in the *Liber Usualis*:

“Great care must be taken not to spoil the sacred melodies by unevenness in the singing. No neum or note should ever be unduly shortened or prolonged. The singing must be uniform, and the singers should listen to one another, making their pauses well together.” (Abbey of St Peter of Solesmes “Liber Usualis” xiv)

The chant is prayer and must be like prayer, full of emotion and sincerity, *flowing* naturally out of the spirit of the one praying. Again, nothing can be hasty or languorous. It must be naturally flowing, graceful and smooth in its execution, expressing in this way its sincerity.

Third and related to those before, chant must be simple. The monks of Solesmes say that the chant “never resorts to artifice” (Abbey of St Peter of Solesmes, *Reflections* 9-10). The chant, while part of a liturgy that is in essence a drama, is not dramatic. It does not build or die. It simply flows from beginning to end, arising from silence and continuing into silence until it rises again. It is to be eternal, as all praise to God should be. Through its simplicity, there is nothing contrived within the chant. It has elaborate technique, yet it should be performed with the utmost fluidity. According to the monks of Solesmes, chant “neither wearies nor stimulates the imagination;“ it is to direct one only to their spiritual practice, enhancing their relation to their self, their community, and their God, never glorifying itself in the process. It can only do this when it removes all artifice and exists as simply as possible.

Detachment of Self

Though the practice of monody – the independence of a single line of music – is to emphasize the individual’s personal relation to God, it also emphasizes the individual’s unity to the vast community of creation. While the chant helps one to discover their personal sense of spirit, it also requires that they remove their sense of individuality. By removing distinctiveness, by losing the sense of self, it is expected that one may better come to know the self, understanding it not as an independent thing but as part of an intricate whole.

In a single word, the monks of Solesmes describe this character of chant: “humility” (Abbey of St Peter of Solesmes, *Reflections* 46). Franz Xaver Haberl describes this character of chant performance quite poignantly. Here he describes the qualifications of a good chorister in a chant choir. This chorister must...

“... obey implicitly and attentively every hint, word, wish, and direction of the Choir-Master.... This blind obedience... should not spring merely from a love of order, but above all from a deep feeling of humility... A genuine feeling of reverence for the Lord’s house, will never be content with having what is prescribed carefully sung; but will strive, both in rehearsals and performance, to express the meaning, importance, and liturgical raison d’etre of the Chant itself, and make clear the end and spirit of the Church in each of her solemn functions.”
(Haberl 235)

Requiring complete anonymity of the chanter, chant divests any individuality from the performance. This is not to make the choir director seem a tyrant and the singers slaves to his will. Rather, this giving up of individuality – immersing one’s self completely into the wholeness

of the prayer of the community – must be done sincerely and willingly, not begrudgingly. What is most important in the chant is the sincere expression of the prayer that the chant embodies. Without sincerity, the chant, rather than lifting the self beyond the individual, depersonalizes the whole experience and removes any possibility for spiritual growth. Since spiritual experience is ultimately about personal experience, the self must be involved. If one chooses to go against the self in any way, lacking sincerity in the practice, the experience is depersonalized and loses much of its emotive and spiritual potential. In truth, these practices are designed to help facilitate the spiritual growth of the individual, for this is the primary concern of these practitioners. They are not meant to glorify the music or the practice, but to lift one out of the mundane experience, achieving something that is super-mundane. For these people, this is speaking to and experiencing sincerely the loving presence of God.

Brief Conclusions: Those Who Live the Chant

Here has been briefly outlined the practice of chanting as it is found in many Christian monastic communities. What is significant to take from this discussion is how this thing called chant, often taken as a musical artifact, is a living and integral part of these people's chosen lifestyle. It is not a filler of silence but a part of their silence. It is not music; it is the sounded prayer to God that speaks not only for the individual but for all creation. David Steindl-Rast and Sharon Lebell describe this monastic understanding of the chant well in their book, *The Music of Silence: Entering the Sacred Space of Monastic Experience*:

“That’s part of what makes the chant so beautiful: It is not just one voice singing, but it is the community singing. And it is not only the community singing, but quite

consciously singing with all of creation, with the birds, with the waves, and with the angels, with visible and invisible creation.” (Steindl-Rast 60)

Chant is a practice that facilitates an experience of the super-mundane by removing the barrier between the self and the other; stilling the mind to open one’s heart to contemplation; creating sincerity in action to personalize an experience of the genuine; and helping one to live with intention in the present.

What has been outlined here is not merely a practice, but a way of living and understanding one’s reality. These practices here are not only how people practice religion, but how people manifest their spirituality, particularly through a sonic experience. This sonic experience – Gregorian Chant – while a facet of religion, also functions to serve the purpose of religion, namely to direct one’s spiritual dispositions. It is part of an institution, but it is also an intrinsically personal part of those who literally live it. These monastics spend forty to fifty hours a week – the time of a typical American fulltime job – singing this chant. This music, this worship, the prayer, this chant is their career, the search for a relationship with God. In all these ways, chant is the tool by which they are manifesting their spiritual desires – a search for the eternal, the ineffable, and the divine embodiment of love.

Chapter Seven

The Chant Experience:

How People are Hearing Gregorian Chant Today

Interviewee Pam: “My soul, my spirit, my inner self needs the music to fill me with joy, to fill me with wonder, to fill me with peace. If there’s a God, I think that’s God talking to me.” (Hays 94)

“Because music can affect our feelings or sentiments, it falls into the realm of psychology. And, beyond this, the mind, worked on by these feelings, forms value-judgments and ideas. In the end, the soul knows it has been enriched. All this is what we refer to when we talk about the spirituality of music, a spirituality that simultaneously involves feelings, value-judgments, and ideas.” (Abbey of St Peter of Solesmes, Reflections 59)

Interviewee Maureen: “And so that’s why it is prayer. And I think that for me, that’s what music is. I mean I’m not always as conscious of that, but I will often be driving along and hear something and I’ll say: Oh! Thank you God for that and sometimes somebody will hit a note, you know a soprano just with such clarity. So for me it’s such a gift from God. I’ve got a fairly broad definition of God. But for me, any beauty, if it’s life, a sunset or whatever, its just another manifestation of that.” (Hays 91)

Gregorian Chant is not exclusively a monastic experience. Furthermore, it is not solely a Catholic or Christian experience. Over the past decades, this music, this prayer, has made its way into the popular listening market along with various religious cultures both Christian and non-Christian. Thus, when we are discussing how one experiences this particular form of music and possibly expresses or understands their spirituality better through it, we cannot limit our

discussion to monastics alone. While this group of individuals is important to observe because they are the primary utilizers of this music for spiritual practice as well as the primary performers of such music, they are certainly not the only ones experiencing it.

So now, our discussion makes a slight shift from looking at those “practicing” this prayer to those who generally “experience” this prayer, recognizing however that these two may and do intersect at times. The above three quotations are the jump-off point of how we begin to consider music from the “listener’s” or “experiencer’s” *point of action* (recall this term from chapter five). The listener starts first by simply perceiving the material or sonic aspect of the music, literally the sound. It is only after first registering the sound that the listener can gradually manifest their spirit through the music, given that there is a disposition for such a manifestation with the particular sonic experience. Here, we are looking at how people have manifested their spirituality in a few ways with regards to Gregorian Chant. Furthermore, we are also attempting to give possible reasons for these dispositions towards spiritual manifestations within this particular musical genre.

Medieval Monks Release Hit Album After 1000 Years: Watch Out Beyoncé and Lady Gaga

Within the past decade, Gregorian Chant has seen new popularity with modern and popular music listeners. Having not been a popular mode of music since the Middle Ages, the chant’s almost overnight comeback turned many heads in the musical world. The Benedictine monks of Santo Domingo de Silos in Spain, with the help of a top record producing label, essentially transformed Gregorian Chant into an international bestselling musical inspiration. In less than a year after the recording was made, the CD sold nearly 2 million copies, going

platinum and topping not only the classical but also pop music best-seller lists (Riggs 50). After its initial release in Europe, *Chant: Music for the Soul*, the name of the hit CD, began outselling recordings by other musicians of popular music at the time, such as Madonna and Winehouse, and became a hit in both Europe and America (Miller 1). While this chant was certainly not something new or not something that people were not already aware of and listening to in various capacities, this was the first time that the chant became known and available in widespread circles outside Catholic and Christian institutions, heard on the radio, readily available in music stores, performed in concert halls, used in meditation groups, and employed in music therapy practices. It became not only a musical phenomenon, but a secular phenomenon, which is significant when one considers the strong religious roots of the music. People were and are beginning to incorporate this music into their own lives, wherever they may be on the spectrum of religion and spirituality, making it a form of personal expression outside its intended purposes, whether it be for meditation, relaxation, therapy, or entertainment.

To an ear of the 20th and 21st century, accustomed to the gigantic sounds of the orchestra or amplified rock concerts and the striking contrasts of dynamics, harmonics, rhythm, and timbre in these sonic experiences, Gregorian chant seems rather unemotional and unexpressive in comparison. Why then is this music so popular? Is it the fact that it is so different from that to which our ears are accustomed? Interestingly enough, Gregorian Chant is most often categorized not as “Classical” or “Pop” music (even though it topped both of those musical charts) but rather as “World Music,” perhaps precisely for the vast difference in the sonic experience of chant. It is something that is considered exotic by many people. Joan Roccasalvo attempts to give reason to chant’s modern popularity when she writes about chant, describing it as “a fad.” She says, “it’s

relaxing. It draws listeners by its mystery, its beauty. It sounds holy.... The popularity of chant may be linked to the search for the sacred in a dispirited society” (Roccasalvo 19).

It is exotic; it is tranquil; it is peaceful; it is religious; it is sacred. All of these are personal interpretations as to the effectiveness of this music in reaching its current popularity. What, however, is in this music that leads people to these conclusions? Some answers may already be clear, some might seem, clear, and some might be rather elusive. The monks of Solesmes provide the simplest answer:

“The chant’s depth comes from its calm or gravity, which produces serenity and balance. These in turn give rise to an atmosphere filled with gentleness, strength, and peace.” (Abbey of St Peter of Solesmes, *Reflections* 46)

While this is not necessarily a complete answer, it is an effective point from which further answers can begin to grow. Why do people attach themselves to this music when they have no ties to the religious institution from which it has grown? This is the question of greatest concern in this portion of our discussion. While we could look at the listener from many points of reference (e.g. the Catholic monk, the Catholic parishioner, a Protestant music director, a secular music producer, etc.), here we are most interested in those that have loose, ambiguous, or no ties to the Catholic musical tradition. While we can use information from this tradition to inform our discussion, we are essentially asking how people are experiencing this music *spiritually* sans religion, especially Catholic religion. We have looked at how this music works with religion to manifest spiritual experience, not let us look at how this music works without religion to accomplish the same ends.

The “Exotic” in Music: The Popular Appeal of Gregorian Chant

As part of its character in the popular music world, outside the walls of the church and cloister, chant is labeled as “exotic” or “world” music. Many aspects of its construction and practice contribute to its labeling as such. It is simple; it is monophonic; it is modal; it is Latin. Coming from a musical world and tradition not displaced in space but rather in time, by about one thousand years, it is truly from a foreign world. For most people, both trained and untrained in music, it is a music that is unfamiliar and “exotic.”

Why then, being so “exotic,” has Gregorian Chant reached such popular heights in the music industry while other forms of sacred, spiritual, and “exotic” music, such as Sufi Chant, Hindu Mantra, Buddhist Chant, or Ancient Grecian hymnody, have been left in the dust? Gregorian Chant, above any other form of ancient music or traditional religious music, has won the favor of popular music listeners. Why is this? What are the characteristics within the construction of Gregorian chant – the theory behind the music – that people are hearing and finding so attractive? Within this section, we will be considering these characteristics and how they relate to what chant is and how it is used within musical culture outside the institution of Christian religion, seeing how people manifest their spirituality or create spiritual experience through a foreign and perhaps “exotic” music.

There is a lot more that goes into the sonic nature of the chant (i.e. the sounds that we literally hear). Sacredness, reverence, or humility are merely ways to describe the sound of the chant, but they do not necessarily describe the nature of the sounds themselves. What is within the sound of the chant that contributes to its “exotic” or otherworldly, foreign feel? How is our Western sonic world constructed so that this music, essentially the origin of our Western musical

forms, sounds familiar enough to feel comfortable to the ear, yet foreign enough to add the sense of mystery and wonder that often typifies the outsider's experience of the music? It is certainly something that is very familiar to the Western ear, yet is it something definitely different in its sonic construction.

The ancient Greeks, the fathers of Western musical theory, defined music as having three parts: *harmonics*, *rhythmics*, and *metrics*. In this understanding music and poetry are two parts of a similar art. Cassiodorus defines these principles in his *Fundamentals of Sacred and Secular Music*:

“Harmonics is the musical science which distinguishes the high and low in speech. Rhythmics is that which inquires whether words in combination sound well or badly together. Metrics is that which by valid reasoning knows the measures of the various meters; for example, the heroic, the iambic, the elegiac.”

(Cassiodorus 35)

In more modern understandings of music theory and appreciation, music is broken down into these same three elements with a few additions. In considering classical and popular music, several separate elements can be easily identified, but the most familiar elements are melody, rhythm, harmony, figure, timbre, and texture.

Melody is the shape of the primary musical line, or, more simply put, the part of the music that is memorable and able to be remembered and sung. Not all music necessarily has melody and some music has more than one melody. Furthermore, what is considered the melody is sometimes very subjective, depending on how one hears the piece. When considering chant, melody is the primary element, since the chant is almost melody exclusively.

Much of our thinking about rhythm is in terms of *meter*, or the measuring of musical time. Unlike melody, rhythm is a bit more abstract of a concept. When considering rhythm, the ancient Greeks grouped the six arts into two triads as follows:

- Architecture, sculpture, and painting
- Music, poetry, and dancing

Within the first group, what is considered beautiful as the end means of art is realized as a state or repose or as beauty manifested in static space. In other words, its various elements are combined and joined in space and are represented not as a developing and transforming series but as a fixed moment in existence. Within the second triad, what is beautiful is manifested in a state of movement, or by a series of elements existing in time. The first triad relates to space and is the art of rest; the second triad relates to time and is thus the art of movement. Once this division of artistic design is established, one can appreciate the essential quality rhythm has in the understanding and analysis of music, for music is a moving art. (Sunol 65)

In classical and popular music, harmony tends to come in standard packages called chords that we can learn to think about separately from rhythm or timbre. Figure is a less familiar analytic term, used to identify various kinds of abstract patterns that a voice or solo instrument may perform instead of a tune. Timbre is the quality of sound (i.e. how the sound literally sounds, whether reedy, brassy, metallic, electronic, stringy, breathy, etc.). We easily distinguish vocal sounds from instrumental, and just as easily we recognize the sounds of different instruments. Texture is a broad category that includes all the possible relationships among the

several participating performers, whether instrumental or vocal. An example of this would be the consideration of how the melody and accompaniment work together.

In Gregorian chant, however, none of these elements can be studied separately as one would do in more modern music, for in fact they are not separate elements. There is only one element within the chant. Since Gregorian chant is sung in unison, it is all vocal, and since it is all vocal, it is all with words; there is no accompaniment, no counterpoint, no meter or measure, no marked beat within the chant. Whatever separate aspects we choose to identify are simply expressions of various aspects of one musical character. Rhythm is the flow of Gregorian chant. Melody is simply another name for the same flow, Melody cannot properly be separated from the rhythm. Thus, when one thinks about Gregorian rhythm or melody, one must also consider how the text fits into the modulation of the pitches through the musical space, and how the timbre and nature of the voice influences all of these. (Crocker 41-42)

Thus, while Gregorian Chant is a product and origin of these musical ideas originating from Ancient Greece, the chant incorporates these elements in a very different way than most music that is heard today. This is perhaps a point of departure from which we may begin understanding how and why people perceive this music as “exotic” yet intimately familiar. What is it about the rhythm or the melody, the voice or the text, that make chant so appealing and strange, opening people’s minds to contemplative, otherworldly, or spiritual experiences? It is something very familiar and relatable, yet something very mysterious and exceptional.

Simplicity and the Mind: How Much isn't Not Enough?

If there is one description of chant that is common across all reviews of the music, it would be that the chant is simple. Whether this spawns a good or bad review is contingent upon the dispositions of the reviewer. We are not necessarily judging the validity of such reviews; rather, we want to show how some people align themselves with this character of chant to find some deeper meaning within themselves through the music. In quoting Dom Gajard, a prominent researcher of Gregorian Chant from the Abbey of Solesmes, Dom Gregory Sunol poignantly describes the effective simplicity of the chant when he writes,

“It needs but a few notes and makes so little noise; an intonation, an inflexion is enough; it has been said that this most of all makes one believe in the inspiration of the chant, since ‘no man, not even a saint, could have thought of anything so prodigiously simple.’” (Sunol ix)

There are some chants that barely employ four different notes within their melody. When compared to a Mozartian, Beethovenian or Robert-Hammersteinian melody this is quite spare. Some tunes last less than fifteen seconds. Again, compared to a Mozart aria, Beethoven symphony, or any generic pop tune, this is very short and, perhaps, emotionally limited. Given all this however, this musical art still has the effect to enchant its listeners with its minimal means.

Why do some people not cry out when they sing the chant or declare after buying a CD that the sonic experience that chant provides is simply “not enough?” Chant uses such minimal means at times that it is fascinating that someone could get the same enjoyment from listening to a Beethoven symphony that they can get from listening to a psalm recitation. How much is not

“not enough?” Why does the simplicity of chant capture the attention of people so readily? There are many answer to these questions. Again, it could be the “exotic” character of the simplicity in juxtaposition to typically and relatively complex musical structures that attracts people. Also, it could be the relaxing quality of the simplicity juxtaposed to a rapidly paced world that attracts people seeking stress relief. It could be the meditative soundscapes that chant facilitates that people, interested in seeking forms of contemplative practice, are attracted to. All these vary and depend of the dispositions of those seeking such simple sonic experiences. The specific reasons as to why individual people might be attracted to this music are many, and thus impossible to examine in whole. Rather than examining all particular reasons for attraction, let us examine how the music itself is possibly constructed in such a manner as to be attractive to people for various reasons.

How then does the simplicity of this music perhaps work to its benefit, especially when placed against the bombast and grandeur of something like a Beethoven or Brahms symphony? Interestingly enough, neurobiological monitoring within recent decades has shown that in particular measurements of alpha wave dampening during perceptions of abstract designs the brain is most aroused by simple patterns. In designs where there is about a twenty percent redundancy in elements (e.g. approximately the same amount of complexity in simple mazes, logarithmic spirals, and asymmetric crosses), the brain is most engaged. (Wilson n. pag.) There is a point at which there is not enough complexity to engage the brain adequately. Similarly, there is a point at which there is too much complexity that, while the brain is engaged, it cannot process all information adequately or it becomes overwhelmed. While a rock concert or symphony can be fantastic sonic event, full of various sounds, colors, rhythms, and motives, there is typically too much information to be processed by the typical listener. While this does

not make a symphony or rock concert an unpleasant or overwhelming event, sometimes they can be events that are difficult to fully understand, express, or feel to the untrained listener, just as complex or abstract art can be difficult to engage for the untrained viewer. Chant, however, does not seem to be a sonic event in this way. It is never described as complex, yet its simplicity is not insipid; it enchants many of its listeners.

The monophonic, and sometimes literal monotonous (literally meaning one tone or pitch), character of chant is essential to its simplicity, and perhaps its relatability. The unison sound of the chant melodies perhaps acts in the same way as the redundancy of the simple maze or the asymmetric cross. The fluid melodic lines are complex enough to engage the brain, yet are not so complex as to be unrelatable or not understandable.

This simplicity of chant is often cited as reason for chant's contemplative character. Why do people like to meditate to Gregorian Chant and not a Mozart Opera or Mahler Symphony? This is not to say that people do not necessarily meditate to these things, but such occurrences are arguably infrequent, while meditation to chant in various forms, including Gregorian, is quite common. Reason for this could be attributed to chants simplicity in conjunction with the complexity of other such musical forms that employ much more drastic and dramatic contrasts and emotions. Music that has multiple layers attempting to engage the brain, which can only process so much information at once, inevitably cannot be processed completely, and consequently overstimulates the brain. The overstimulation of mental process does not, for most people, typify contemplative activity. Chant, by being simple enough to not overstimulate mental process, but still complex enough to engage and possibly focus mental processes, is thus, for some people, a kind of sonic experience that is more fostering of contemplative states. It is

enough for the brain to cling to, but not so much that the brain loses itself in the process. It is a focusing tool, just like any mantra or breathing exercise.

Gregorian Modality: Breaking our Tonal Norms

Another character of the chant that stands out in a subtle way, creating both familiar and unusual sonic spaces is its “tonality,” or the hierarchical relationship of the pitches of the chant’s melody. Examples from our modern notions of tonality are major and minor keys. Major keys are often described as sounding majestic, grand, or happy. Minor keys are often described as sounding austere, ponderous, or sad. Examples of well-known tunes in major keys are *Happy Birthday* or *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star*. Examples of well-known tunes in minor keys are *The Imperial March* from the movie *Star Wars* or the beginning of the Beethoven’s *Fifth Symphony on C Minor* (commonly identified by the ba-ba-ba-bum rhythm). Gregorian Chant, however, does not work within these same tonal structures. Chant does, however, work in these same tonal spaces.

The reason that the tonal effects of Gregorian chant are accessible to us is that they move in the same tonal space as classical and popular music, only slightly shifted. Chant makes use of the same pitch relationships, only they are ordered in different hierarchies. Without going into the complex musical theory of these hierarchies and how they are constructed in relation to major and minor keys, let us simply say they have a different color than those scales, or musical hierarchies that we are most familiar with. If one wishes to hear these different tonal “modes,” take the white keys of a piano. First, find the pitch middle C, located approximately in the center

of the keyboard above one series of three black keys and below one series of two black keys. If you require assistance in finding this pitch, please refer to a printed guide on the piano.

Once this pitch is found, play it along with the seven white keys above it in rising sequence beginning with middle C. What you have just played is a major scale. Having found middle C, find the second note below it, between the second and third black keys in the closest sequence of three. This note is A. Having found A, play A along with the seven white keys above it in rising sequence. You have just played a natural minor scale. These are forms of the tonalities with which most popular and classical music are familiar. To hear a tonal “mode,” let us find a different white key displaced from middle C and play another seven note scale. Find the white key right above middle C. This note is D. Play D with the seven white keys above it in rising sequence. You have just played what is called the Dorian Mode. Again, take the second white key above middle C; this note is E. Play, starting on E, in the same manner as described before. You have just played a scale in the Phrygian Mode. Again, find the note above E, called F. Play as described before, starting on F. You have just played the Lydian Mode. Last, find the note above F, called G. Play as described before, starting on G. You have just played the Mixolydian Mode. As you can see, these “modes” are built out of the same pitches that comprise the major and minor scales, but they are shifted, giving a new hierarchy to the pitches, producing a different sound and feeling to the tonality.

These modes, sharing characteristics with our familiar tonalities while being slightly different, lend to this sense of aural familiarity juxtaposed to aural foreignness. What is even more fascinating about the character of these modal tonalities is that they each have their own characteristic sounds and feelings just like major and minor keys. Just as one might say that major sounds happy while minor sounds sad, one can make similar judgments about the modes.

Guido d'Arezzo, a famous Medieval music theorist, poetically describes the character of some of the modes. For Arezzo, the diversity of the modes

“... adapts well to the various states of the soul: one is charmed by the broken lines of [Phrygian], while another prefers the pleasure of [Lydian]; one is pleased by the sensuousness of [Mixolydian] ...” (d'Arezzo 60)

Poisson, In describing the character of the four Gregorian modes and their “plagal” counterparts (simply the same scale with a different vocal range), creates the chart of moods as seen below. Note the variety in mood and character. This, for some, is much more abundant in emotional contrast than our modern system of simply major and minor keys.

○ Primus [Dorian]	gravis	serious
○ Secundus [Dorian Plagal]	tristis	sad
○ Tertius [Phrygian]	mystics	mystical/mysterious
○ Quartus [Phrygian Plagal]	harmonicus	harmonious
○ Quintus [Lydian]	laetus	cheerful
○ Sxtus [Lydian Plagal]	devotus	devout
○ Septimus [Mixolydian]	abgelicus	angelic
○ Octavus [Mixolydian Plagal]	perfectus	perfect (Poisson 86)

Many others have also given their own interpretive feelings to these various modes. What is significant to note about these variously prescribed feelings of the modes is how colorful they can be. Some are sad and cheerful just like major and minor, while some can also be mystical or

angelic, allowing for a vast and sometimes unusual array of tonal spaces. This is what gives chant is exotically familiar feeling. It alters our sense of typical tonal hierarchies and gives different and perhaps unusual emotive characters to the sound.

Gregorian Meter: Breaking Our Rhythmic Norms

“Rhythm is the primordial element. One must consider it as anterior to all other elements of music.... Many people know nothing of the existence of harmony; some may know nothing of melody; but none ignore rhythm.” (d’Indy 20-21)

“For upon [tonality] would follow the consideration of rhythms: we must not pursue complexity nor great variety in the basic movements, but must observe what are the rhythms of a life that is orderly and brave, and after observing them require the foot and the melos to conform to that kind of man’s speech and not the speech to the foot and the melos.... rhythm and harmonia follow the text and not the text these.” (Plato 12-13)

The third most cited “exotic” character of chant is its rhythm, or lack thereof. For many modern musicians and music listeners, rhythm is simply a question of intensity in pulse, consisting of the periodical recurrence of strong and weak beats. To understand how Gregorian rhythm is so foreign to our modern ear, one should first appreciate how engrained rhythmic pulse is into our very existence.

What determines the rhythm that we might perceive in music, dance, or poetry? While it is something existing independently, it is something that is ultimately perceived by one’s mental capacities. Though we give little attention to it, there is a system within ourselves that recognizes and senses rhythm. This system not only hears, feels, and interprets these external rhythms, but

also allows for the subjective creation of rhythms that were previously non-existent. This faculty, while often taken as something very objective, is ultimately a subjective instrument. Take for example six even pulses, none stronger than the other. One could hear these six pulses as an infinite chain of indistinguishable pulses; another could hear groups of distinguishable sixes; another could hear two groups of three; yet another could hear three groups of two and so on. While there can be things within the outside world that influence our hearing of these pulses, there is also an internal and subjective judgment occurring when these pulses are received.

Rhythm is considered fixed when the beat recurs regularly at intervals of every one, two, or three pulses. Once a hierarchy has been given to these pulses, determining one or two that are stronger than the others, such as the first beat of a series of three beats being the most prominent pulse, the rhythmic measure is formed. Typically, in popular and classical music practice, when a metrical unit such as this has been decided upon, it is maintained throughout the piece. While there are certainly exceptions to this rule, it is true for the vast majority of examples.

Rhythm is called *free*, when the regular recurrence of fixed beat sequences is warped by irregular recurrences of strong pulses. Take for example these sequences. The first two are regular: 123-123-123-123-123-123 and 12-12-12-12-12-12. The third, being a random mixture of the previous two, is irregular: 123-12-12-123-12-123-123-12-12-12-123-123-123-12-12-123. This kind of manipulation of rhythm has become more popular in modern music, but was actually popular long before. This is the rhythm that is characteristic of Gregorian Chant. This “supple time” as Dom Cardine from the Abbey of Solesmes calls it, is the exotic character of the Gregorian rhythm. Chant is meant to have no regular beat or time. It is not meant to have a foot taped to it or to be clapped to. It is a conversational rhythm, growing out of the texts that comprise the melodies. We do not habitually speak in meter, thus the chant, being an uttered

prayer, is not in meter. It is a natural flow and randomized flow of diction that creates an ambiguous and free rhythm.

No other aspect of Gregorian chant has been so feverishly debated by scholars than that concerning the “original” rhythm of the chant. Because the chant originated in a time before printed word, the tradition, for almost a millennium of its history, was passed down orally. Due to this, much of the original information about the chant and how it was rhythmically performed have been lost to us. Numerous groups have been endeavoring over the past century, through methods of historical and musicological research, to ascertain what this original rhythm was. Many divergent theories have arisen because of this. It is not the purposes here to demonstrate the various theories of Gregorian rhythm, or to say that one is essentially better than another. Here, we are taking the rhythmic theory of Solesmes, not because it is necessarily better or truer, but because it is simply the widest and most commonly practice theory of Gregorian rhythm. The theory of Solesmes says that Gregorian rhythm, while containing grouped pulses of twos and threes, is rhythmically free, like our random sequence of two and three groups above.

This is the third distinctive characteristic of the Chant: its free rhythm. Often people cite Gregorian Chant as having no rhythm. Interestingly enough, Gregorian Chant has a true musical rhythm with a character all its own, but it is very distinct from the rhythm of modern music. The pulse-unit of chant is the individual pitch, sung in a “neutral duration” that is either lengthened nor shortened. Rather, the neutral duration is used as a default value, rather than a quantitative value such as the quarter or half note in modern music. To put it another way, many of the pitches of a chant are sung, more or less, with the same length. These neutral durations, however, are not made equal by quantitative measurement, but are simply made so by no deliberate lengthening or shortening. If a singer does nothing in particular about the duration of the pitches,

the result is a more or less equal succession of durations. Richard Crocker describes the effect of neutral duration, writing that such regular and free succession of pulses

“... provides a sense of flow but not of momentum. It is often called a pulse; as a pulse it is weak and relatively rapid, and can vary at any moment, It provides nothing to which the listener can respond with a beat.” (Crocker 44)

Again, Gregorian Chant is not something that is meant to excite the foot in tapping. It is not to be danced to or clapped to. It is, because of its function, meant to create reverence and repose, not rhythmic momentum.

Sunol does a good job at capturing various meanings and feelings that Gregorian rhythm creates in the listener. In writing about its feeling, he cites a number of experts in the field who attempt to describe the character of the free rhythm of Solesmes:

“All who have described the old cantilena, and especially those who have heard them sung at Solesmes, have piled up language in a hapless attempt to convey in word that is meant by Gregorian rhythm. One has praised its exquisite freedom, flexibility, elasticity ‘enabling it to take on the exact spirit and form of the word and phrases of the Church’s prayers’; (Justine Ward, Music Fourth Year, Chapter 1, p. 12) another emphasizes its ‘easy, moderate flowing character, never dragging, or racing, but maintaining the leisurely gait of perfect prose’; (Camille Bellaigue, Les Epoques de la Musique p 95) a third has said that it is so even, immaterial and aerial that it has power to hold the mind of the listener hovering, as it were, in recollection.” (Sunol viij)

This free flowing, undulating, unfixed rhythm, along with the modal tonality and sheer simplicity of form, that characterize chant, work together to create the sense of the “exotic” and “strange”

in this music. While the most metrical and measured forms of music depict a familiar experience not unlike the passage of time, the irregular and ambiguous rhythms of the chant create another dimension of time outside what might be considered mundane. Some say that the timelessness of the chant rhythm is an expression of eternity where time is surpassed altogether.

Perhaps it is this literal sense of timelessness that gives chant its meditative or contemplative qualities. It does not distract with attractive or exciting rhythms. There is little to grasp for. One cannot tap their foot or clap their hand; they must simply be attentive and listen in a state of repose. Furthermore, free rhythm, by lending itself to a sense of timelessness, perhaps has the ability to lift the listener outside a normal experience of time, even possibly losing all sense of time together, an identifier of some manifestations of spiritual experience. Contemplative and timeless, the rhythm of chant is one possible source for the enchanting qualities that have made chant so popular as a means to spiritual expression.

The Latin Chant and the Meaning of Words

“Words do not have fixed meanings: not only do they change, they also shift in subtle ways through the juxtaposition of words when spoke or written.” (Nye 159)

“To say that [music] supplements the spoken word, insufficient in itself, or that it is more subtle than words, would hardly suffice. For music adds nuances that words are simply incapable of expressing.” (Abbey of St Peter of Solesmes, Reflections 60)

How it is possible to share in a feeling that is uttered and understood in a different and unknown language? This is the experience that most popular listeners of Gregorian Chant have:

they take part in an alien and unfamiliar experience that they cannot linguistically understand. They sing along with words that have no necessarily defined meaning for themselves, yet they claim that the words hold feeling. Would the chant hold the same feeling that people attach themselves to if it were not sung with words. What if the chant were rather played on an instrument? Would it have the same feeling? Georgia Stevens in *The Musical Quarterly* asks this same question:

“Would it be beautiful without the words? I think so, but certainly without them it would not convey more than half of that meaning which lifts it even above music, and something would be missing not only to those who associate the words with it, but to the non-Catholic ear also.” (Stevens 211)

There is something attractive and enchanting about the strangeness embodied by the foreign and ancient language of Latin in the chant, so much so that without it something intrinsic and essential is lost. There is something human and relatable in the voice; something exotic in the language; something mysterious in its ancient character that the words create in the listener.

In Gregorian Chant, one could never say that the words had been “set to music.” The music is understood to have grown out of the words themselves. Sunol describes the chant as laying “latent and contained in embryo” within the words (Sunol xij-xijj). Thus, following its intention and function, the chant should not and cannot exist apart from the words. It is, as Sunol puts it, preeminently verbal music” (Sunol xij). The melody of the chant, having grown from the words, is believed to express the meaning of the words better than the word can do alone. The chant is an extension of the text, a much more nuanced expression.

The possible implication of this idea, which has been pervasive throughout musical history, is that music has a power of its own apart from words. While this is a rather speculative thought, it is certainly not original, and is, in fact, quite common. The origins of opera during the late sixteenth century were actually spurred on by the idea of creating music that better fit and expressed the meaning of the text to which it was set. It can be easily observed from experience that a message is often communicated in music when the literal sense of the words is not fully, or even partially apprehended. Consider, if you will, the opera. For centuries, people have been attending operas that have been in Italian, French, German, English, and various other languages, yet have not necessarily been facilitated in understanding these languages. This fact, however, has not deterred audiences from paying for, attending, and sitting through numerous hours of undecipherable prose. Would this be just as true if these texts were void of their music? Would a musical be quite as memorable, popular, or enjoyable if it no longer had music? Would the *Sound of Music* or *The Wizard of Oz* be the same without those memorable musical numbers? Possibly, but it is likely that they would not be so. The music in opera lends greater meaning to the words being spoken and the actions being performed on stage. While the exact meaning of the words might not be understood, the feeling of the music, if written for the words, should convey the same meaning as those words.

In the chant, the same is true as with opera or a musical: the music is an expression of the words. Take for example the type of chant with the greatest musical gesture with the least amount of text: the *Alleluia*. These chants are some of the most elaborate and florid, but are essentially only set to one word, "alleluia." This one word, when uttered simply, carries strength and power in its feeling and meaning, but when embodied by a musical gesture it can become something even greater. Imagine Handel's *Hallelujah Chorus*. This musical gesture certainly

gives strength to the word, so much so that this piece has been performed every year since its compositions almost 250 years ago. It is possibly one of the most recognized pieces from the classical repertoire next to Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. In chant, the Alleluia melodies work in the same way, giving greater emotional breath to the gesture of the text. Marier describes the effect of the chants set to the alleluia poignantly. The chant that arises out of the alleluia creates a musical gesture that "... rolls on without benefit of words. The music alone is reaching out beyond the barriers of words to express the praise of god in a way that words cannot do" (Marier 17).

Within the past fifty years, however, the language of the chant has actually been its greatest weakness within the Catholic Church, which has mostly rejected the use of the traditional chant primarily due to the inaccessibility of the Latin language. Latin language stood in the way of understanding the liturgy and the word of God. The Latin language, however, has been one of the greatest sellers of chant in the popular market. People have not bemoaned the fact that they cannot understand the mystical chant; they praise the fact that the language is displacing and mysterious. No one demands to have CDs available with English, German, Japanese, or whatever language of chant. While these CDs do exist, they have not met with the same popularity as those of the traditional melodies in the traditional style and language. The Latin is popular because it is exotic.

For those who do not know Latin, the chant is purely a musical expression that intends to speak beyond the words it uses, because those words essentially have no meaning except that which is "beyond" the unknown definition. The monks of Solesmes describe this phenomenon well:

“In Gregorian chant the music carries us far beyond the word. You can look up the meaning of the words lux and fulgere in the dictionary, but the Introit from Christmas Mass of the Dawn, Lux fulgebit, transports you a thousand leagues beyond the dictionary.” (Abbey of St Peter of Solesmes, *Reflections* 7)

The Latin text is not necessarily a barrier to understanding, provided one is sensitive to what the music expresses, and the music is sensitive enough to express it.

In their traditional forms, the simple chant melodies of rising and falling pitches and fluid movements, entwining themselves around texts as not only embellishments and emotive energizers but also musical embodiments of the words themselves, disclose greater meaning to the listener than the words alone could express, even when the literal meaning of the text may not be clear. In perceiving this message, those experiencing the chant may not be able to articulate their reaction to it in verbal terms, but it is a sensation that is felt. The use of such exotic and ancient language, imbued with a sense of timelessness and mystery, unknown or incompletely known, helps to heighten and deepen the emotive potential of any ritual. It displaces a person out of the ordinary into something that is extraordinary. It creates a sense of the super-mundane, helping to create sonic spaces that have the potential to manifest spiritual experience.

The Soundscape of Chant: Gregorian Chant and the Super-Mundane Experience

To recapitulate what has already been said, the essential, fundamental characteristic of Gregorian Chant is its pure monophony, modal tonality, and free rhythm. The style is always linear. Furthermore, while the chant can be in many languages, especially since Vatican II, the

typical and traditional language of the chant, especially those that are in the popular music market, is Latin. In the chant, there are no dramatic or climactic moments, such as those one might eagerly await in a symphony or opera. There is no rising action, no falling action, no resolution. It is not meant to be a story with a beginning, middle, and end. It is meant to sound eternal, without beginning and never ending. Simply rising from silence and falling back again to silence, but still always present, waiting to rise again. The monks of Solesmes describe these chants as “sound mosaics” that

“... nearly always leave us with the remarkable impression of being spontaneously written. This is perhaps one of the most beautiful and successful features of the artistic technique of the early chant composers.” (Abbey of St Peter, An Overview 10)

There is a great freeness and flexibility in the chant; a rigid sense of symmetry and melodic balance is nowhere to be found. It is fluid and organic, never making use of artifice or contrived motives. In all the characteristic elements of chant, there is a sense of impermanence and endurance. Not one note lasts more than a brief moment, moving freely and conversationally to the next as organically as possible. Chant is movement. Chanting through all rhythmic, melodic, and tonal planes, the sound conveys a quality of permanence and timelessness together.

Often chant is cited as something that sounds foreign and exotic, even though it is a music that is innately a part of Western musical history. These elements outlined here contribute to this sense of “otherness” in the music: simplicity, modality, ambiguous rhythm, and unfamiliar language. These elements that are such an essential part of the music’s character have assisted chant’s rise in popularity as a contemplative, relaxing, and spiritual music. While there are many

possible reasons as to why people have attached themselves to this music, these reasons are derived from the most permanently recognized characteristics of the chant. Furthermore, while these elements have also worked to make chant popular, they are also the very elements that have made chant unpopular throughout the centuries. Some people describe it as boring, uninspired, mundane, and old fashioned. This is not to say that chant is popular amongst all people. It is quite evident that this music has been more popular in the past decades, since the fortuitous recording with the monks of Silos, than it has been in centuries past. There can be many reasons for this surge in the popularity of spiritual experiences in general, which have benefited this music. What is interesting to consider here, however, is not how or why this kind of experience has become popular, but how people have been attracted to this particular music seeking this experience of spirit in it. For those who are listening, there is something in this music, beyond those things that are intrinsically religious, that speaks to people, creating high emotive potential to manifest spiritual experience. These things outlined above are only conjectures as to the spiritual efficaciousness of this ancient art, which has spoken to the spirit of people for two thousand years.

Chapter Eight

Gregorian Chant: Spirosonance in Practice

“The Christian would say that [Gregorian Chant] simultaneously expresses God and leads us to God. This indeed is the supreme requirement of all spirituality.”
(Abbey of St Peter of Solesmes, *Reflections* 61)

“I remember the word of Jules Herford. He said, ‘You know, Peter, Gregorian chant presents man as he would love to be, and the Baroque Chorale presents man as he is. Both are expressions worthy of God.’” (Lamanna 7)

“So many musicians, even non-believers, have praised the beauty of Gregorian melodies that it is unnecessary to insist on this point.” (Cardine 1)

“It is timeless in a way in which kings, wars, and empires are not. It is a tangible thread – a thread made of small sounds – that connects us back to our heritage, ultimately back to the very beginning of our faith.” (Tucker “The Chant Experience” 85)

Throughout this discourse, direct quotations have been used liberally. Even right above this there are four independent quotations not contextualized within the prose. These remarks by people, speaking often subjectively, are here because they are essential to how we seek to understand people’s experience of music and spirituality, which is essentially subjective and personal. Listening to and understanding what people are saying, experiencing, and expressing in relation to chant, or any music, is important to any adequate discussion on music and spirituality. While not everything anyone says can be taken as a comprehensive understanding, it should be

recognized as part of the whole nonetheless. These words are not chosen or placed lightly. They are people's personal feelings as to the experience of chant, music, and spirituality, which is what we are ultimately attempting to understand in a more comprehensive way. While we cannot speak to everything that everyone says, we can at least listen to and consider what they have to say in relation to what ideas have been laid out within these pages. These quotations point to how people are understanding and manifesting their own sense of spirit.

While I have not always addressed these quotations directly, they have guided our discussions silently, setting a stage, posing questions, and giving possible answers. Through these quotations and the intervening discussions we have sought to approach these manifestations of spirituality, not from objective claims that are then superimposed on subjective realities, but rather considering those subjective realities and then attempting to give reason to them through objective understandings. Rather than giving spirituality to the character of the music, we have given it to those experiencing the music and then endeavored to show how this music is effective at engaging this personal sense of spirituality.

The first large group that we used to study spiritual manifestation through Gregorian Chant were those employing chant as an intrinsic part of daily life: Christian monastic communities. Within this group we endeavored to show how these people have interpreted their own practice and to use this interpretation to show how spirituality is manifested through this understanding. Having created a music that is meant to foster and induce spirituality for a practice that is essentially spirit focused, these monastics are consciously attempting to find spiritual manifestation within their musical practices. The purpose within this discourse was to understand how the beliefs of these people, in regards to chant, have created the emotive potential to allow a higher possibility for the manifestation of spirituality.

Peter Lamanna describes Gregorian Chant in three words: “intimacy,” “awareness,” and “proclamation” (Lamanna 5). These three characteristics truly embody the essence of the chant for these practitioners. While the chant is first and foremost prayer, it must be an intimate prayer, for it is spoken with love to God. Furthermore, it must be uttered with awareness and intention, not said lightly or halfheartedly, for God must be given the utmost respect and reverence. One must give Him all their heart, body, and mind in prayer; to do this, the action of prayer must be fully intentional and he who prays must be fully aware of the meaning of the action. Lastly, chant is a proclamation. It is the voice of the community singing for and with all creation. It is the praise and worship of God which all the world is to hear and be a part of. It is somber and gentle, yet it is powerful, meaningful, and sincere.

The chant itself is a single musical line that is traditionally unaccompanied. It is sung simply, in unison, and without undue vocal vibrato or inflection, focusing rather on unity of sound, striving for a collect voice. The unadorned quality of the music, its stark simplicity, lends itself to single-minded focus and intent, seeking undistracted participation in the worship and prayer that it embodies. The melodic lines are free and undulating, often described as a river or the waves of the sea. While free, there is still a sturdy, understood foundation that keeps the singers unified. This foundation is very intended and not as free as the chant sounds. It is a shared understanding among all the singers about what and to whom they are singing and for what purpose. It is not an idle tune or sound to fill a quiet space. It is a deeply meaningful and spiritual practice, intended to lead one beyond their self to the soul of their neighbor, the soul of the world, and the transcendent reality of the divine.

Being so deeply rooted in religious tradition, how can one then account for the secular popularity of chant? Jeffrey Tucker makes this suggestion:

“The [chant] has a holy quality that suggests a sacred space, and this comes at a premium in a world devoid of sacred spaces. Our intellects and souls cry out to touch something pure, fundamental, and eternal.” (Tucker, “Chant for the Soul.” 65)

Is there a common need for something super-mundane, pure, unspoiled, mysterious, exotic, holy, or sacred in our increasingly secularized modern world? Indeed, people travel all around the world seeking the exotic, untouched, and unspoiled, attempting to escape the modern world. We make attractions out of nature, capturing it in reserves to preserve its pristine quality. People make sojourns to distant lands seeking something foreign, always wishing for something that they do not have, imagining it to be better in some way than what they do have. More and more people are identifying as “spiritual, but not religious,” seeking something that is beyond themselves and beyond their mundane everyday existence. There is arguably a prominent desire in many people for something beyond the ordinary. Does the demand for Gregorian Chant in the popular music scene express some universal or even localized demand for something “sacred,” “religious,” or “spiritual?” Perhaps.

How can people listening to this music, who are not affiliated with the Catholic Church, the traditions of this music, or even the Latin language, be so drawn and inspired by this chant. The Catholic church itself has been less inspired by this music over the past half century. How is it suddenly popular with those who do not even understand its most basic meanings, when it cannot even attract those who are tied to it through centuries of history and tradition? David Goldman writes:

“Many Catholics love Gregorian chant... but I do not think it communicates quite the sense of the sacred to non-Catholics as does the music of Bach, and Mozart. Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Confucians, and Buddhists can hear Bach and Mozart (or Josquin and Palestrina) with equal joy, but they never will hear church or synagogue chant the same way” (Mahrt and Goldman 6).

I must contend that Goldman is greatly mistaken. Having written this comment in 2009, he claims that Catholics “love” the chant, but does not recognize the fact that the chant is no longer practiced in most Catholic churches, as of Vatican II. Catholics might “love” the chant, but it does not necessarily seem to outshine its popularity in the secular world, or pan-religious music market. Nor do I believe that the non-Catholic cannot hear Gregorian Chant just as passionately and spiritually as a Catholic. Nor must a Catholic necessarily, by virtue of being Catholic, hear the chant in some unique or more "sacred" way.

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that all those composers mentioned by Goldman, except Mozart, were inspired by and used Gregorian chant melodies within their own compositions. Also important to note is that some people do not necessarily like Bach and Mozart or Josquin and Palestrina just as much as they do not like Gregorian chant. It is not about liking the experience with “equal joy,” it is about the feeling that arises from the music. Sacred does not necessarily equal joy, and neither does Gregorian Chant have to create joy to be sacred or spiritual. Likewise, there are examples of non-Catholics and even non-Christians from around the world having been moved by this liturgical chant. Thus, claiming that chant cannot connect with non-Catholics is simply untrue.

This music, while coming from a Catholic history and institution, is not only meant to speak to the Catholic or Christian. As our monastic practitioners believe, the chant is meant to be the voice of all creation, sung for and by all creation, not just Catholics, monastics, or those who

know Latin. As the monks of Solesmes say, “[Chant] is deeply spiritual because it is profoundly human” (Abbey of St Peter of Solesmes, *Reflections* 11). This point is emphasized in the book by the monks of Solesmes, *Reflections on the Spirituality of Gregorian Chant*. The author of this book quotes a Japanese man who visited Solesmes: “This music is sacred and it belongs to the heritage of all humankind.” The author writes,

“[The Japanese man] perceived [the chant] as a means of sharpening his own human and Japanese identity. The members of the group he directs, nearly all Buddhists, believe that Gregorian chant is the most profoundly religious music in existence, and they practice it as such.” (Abbey of St Peter of Solesmes, *Reflections* 24)

Many possible reasons can be given as to why the chant is so popular among such wide varieties of people. The reasons given here are just a few, focusing on the most cited characteristics of chant that people find attractive or exceptional. Ultimately, why someone is moved or attracted to the chant is personal and could be for any reason. What was attempted here was to show how, in a few ways, people are perhaps experiencing something personal, something spiritual, within this chant that does not necessarily tie itself to religious practice. There is clearly something about this music that speaks to people beyond the terms of religion, moving into more “spiritual” realms.

It has not been the purpose here to dwell on comparisons, showing how Gregorian chant is more spiritual than some other form of music. We simply want to better understand why Gregorian chant deepens the spiritual life of so many people. Furthermore, through this understanding, we may better begin to comprehend how people deepen their spirituality through music in general. It is difficult to adequately capture in words the essence of this spiritual

discipline, both for those practicing it and those simply experiencing it secondhand. Its potential effect upon the personal and spiritual formation of the people who participate in this practice is great and needs to be better understood and appreciated.

The monks of Solesmes will leave us with one last thought on the nature of their practice that has fascinated and inspired people for centuries:

“It is certain that one day you will come up against the disconcerting discovery that God is far above and beyond Gregorian chant. But, even then, you will have to admit that, second only to silence, Gregorian chant is a most excellent means for attain God.” (Abbey of St Peter of Solesmes, *Reflections* 57)

Music is not necessarily transcendence. Music is not necessarily God. It does not, however, necessarily possess a spirituality of its own. Music is a tool by which people *realize* their own spirituality, *reach* for transcendence, and perhaps touch the face of God in the sounding on one beautiful note, chord, melody, or song. It is the purpose of spirosonance to better understand how people are using this tool to achieve these esoteric and personally moving ends. Gregorian Chant is but one mode of this tool called music, which can adapt itself to the dispositions of any person at any time in any place.

On its own, music cannot present us with objective information, possess abstract feelings, or manifest spirituality. The purpose of the musician, the composer, and the listener is to express and experience his or her own feelings through the music, and, in so doing, understand the self in a deeper way, finding the God within themselves.

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