

THE ROLE OF MUSIC IN WORSHIP AMONG DEAF CULTURE CHRISTIANITY

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Abstract

Throughout the Word of God, we are called to worship our Creator through music. "Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music; make music to the Lord with the harp and the sound of singing, with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn--shout for joy before the Lord, the King" (Psalm 98: 4-6 [NIV]). It has been said that music is a universal language: but all cultures use it differently and therefore it is not a universal language but a universal phenomenon. What about the individual who cannot hear the music or the individual who has no voice and cannot sing? The purpose of this study was to seek out how the Deaf Culture defines music and utilizes it within the church and for expressing worship.

After observing both predominately hearing church services and Deaf church services, watching music worship videos created by Deaf churches and interpreters, as well as conducting interviews among the Deaf Culture, I found that there is a place for music in the church. After interviewing people connected to this culture including Christian American Sign Language and hearing interpreters, it revealed that music does in fact play a role in the spiritual lives of the Deaf Culture for many but not all, however it also shed light on the minimal percentage of Deaf Christians and the lack of musical worship materials for Deaf Christians to utilize in their daily walk with Christ.

While understanding the minimal percentage of Deaf Culture members in the church, and after speaking with several different members of the Deaf Culture, it was well understood that many Deaf people have been left out of the church or told that they do not belong in the church. From those individuals who have remained in or returned to the church or have recently begun attending, their musical preferences range in a similar variety to that of the hearing Christian

church: anywhere from classic hymns, to rock and full bands, from traditional to contemporary depending on the person.

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Finally, I thank my Creator, my God, for being the one true Artist and instilling in me a passion for music, for culture, and for people. Most importantly, I thank Him for His timing, for opening doors when they needed to be opened and not when I thought they should be opened. I put my hope and trust in You in everything. Thank you, Lord.

Technical Notes

There are two types of deaf persons: big "D" and little "d." If someone has lost their hearing in older age, still ascribes to the "normalized hearing world" or considers themselves to be "hard of hearing," they will often use the term "deaf." Those who consider themselves members of the Deaf Culture or community almost always use a capitalized D to differentiate between the people who involve themselves mostly in the hearing world versus the people who involve themselves primarily within the Deaf diaspora. The majority of the people I interviewed and spoke with identified in the Deaf Culture which is why I utilize a capital "D" through a large portion of this thesis.

"Members of the Deaf Culture do not like to be referred to as handicapped or disabled. They believe that their eyes and their hands are as good, if not better, than the ears and the mouth as a means of communication...[They] call themselves "Deaf" (using an upper case "D") and see it as a badge of pride and identity, plain and simple" (Johnson 2007, 14).

Johnson, along with most other references used in this thesis, referred to Deaf Culture always capitalized as a means of distinguishing between those who use sign language as their primary means of communication with a shared tradition, value, and history. Deaf Culture has also been described as a diaspora in that Deaf Culture is not passed from generation to generation but from one Deaf person to another. There are also people who are deaf or hard of hearing who do not consider themselves members of the Deaf Culture, so in those cases I did not capitalize the D in deaf or the C in culture.

In addition, direct quotations were used for those Deaf individuals who spoke or wrote out in English their answers to my questions. I used an asterisk on each side of the translations in

some cases in lieu of quotation marks as American Sign Language (ASL) in a conceptual rather than a linear language.

Dedication

This master's thesis is dedicated to the Deaf community, to those who have been persecuted and told that they don't belong or been cast away believing that God doesn't love them. God loves you, and you are beautifully and wonderfully made.

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Introduction

According to the World Health Organization, approximately five percent of the world's population has a significant degree of hearing loss. Currently this addresses about 466 million people. By 2050, this number could reach over 900 million (World Health Organization).

According to research at Gallaudet University, about two to four out of every one thousand individuals in the United States are functionally deaf.

Paul writes in Colossians to “Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts” (Colossians 3:16 [NIV]). In order to do this with members of the Deaf community, it is important to understand the functional role of music in the life of a person who identifies with Deaf Culture. The purpose of this study is to do just that.

I will examine the ways music is currently being integrated into corporate worship within the Deaf Church population as well as how music personally impacts Deaf individuals. I will define what deafness is, what worship is, and what music is as well as the functionality of music within Deaf Culture and those who have had significant hearing losses for the majority of their lives.

Overall, I believe this investigation will open doors for music to be utilized as a part of corporate and individual worship in the Deaf Church along with other visual arts, and aid in evangelical efforts with hearing impaired individuals. Currently only two percent of people who identify as Deaf or hard of hearing also call themselves Christians. Christianity can be seen by Deaf individuals as “only for the hearing” as it can be confusing and hard to relate to at times as well as personal experiences with being told to leave the church because they didn't belong there.

Jesus spoke in many parables and these stories can be hard to follow for those who communicate differently, such as a physical language.

Personal Introduction

As a music therapist and a worship leader, I have witnessed the power of music in the lives of thousands of people I have come into contact with throughout my life. I have seen a song help a woman cope with grief in a time of loss, witnessed the power of music to aide a man diagnosed with Schizophrenia in differentiating between reality and the voices that plagued his mind, and watched a five-year-old girl who never spoke a word begin to sing along with her classmates. Hymns and other spiritual songs have had an impact on the lives of countless people in my life and these songs have reportedly brought them closer to God. I even had the experience of seeing a song change the heart and mind of a friend about to commit suicide who remains alive today. Music literally has the power to save lives and to seriously impact the emotional and spiritual well-being of those who experience it.

Someone once asked me if I had to live either without sight or without hearing which I would choose: as a musician, I naturally chose sight to give up. I could not and still cannot imagine life without music. It occurred to me sometime years later that a life without hearing sound the way I have always imagined it in my own brain does not necessarily confine someone to a life without music. Throughout my time of study in music therapy, I met a music therapist who identified as hard of hearing and another music therapist who identified with Deaf Culture. I learned from them that music is not just about listening, but about experiencing, about feeling, about physically connecting with something greater.

I personally connect spiritually through making and listening to music, and I know many others that do as well. David wrote many psalms about making music to the Lord and praising the Lord through song, through dancing, through playing instruments from the harp to clanging cymbals. Though music is only one form of worship expression, it is a powerful one and one that we are commanded to take part in throughout God's Word. After meeting a few Christians who identified with the Deaf Culture, I wondered about how they would respond to the call to worship through the musical medium.

In observing and inquiring about the role of music in worship among Christians identifying with Deaf Culture, I hope to find that it is an important aspect of worship, despite the major differences between the Deaf Culture and hearing culture. I hope to find that actively engaging in worship through music is relevant among in the spiritual life of Deaf Christians. This research will impact the fields of ethnodoxology and ethnomusicology as well as other music fields including music cognition, music psychology, and music therapy. Hopefully it will also illustrate to hearing Christians that ministry to the Deaf is vital, and that crucial elements of music can still be a part of that ministry.

I hope to use the data collected from this research to further educate the importance of ministry in all forms of worship with Deaf Culture. I will also use the collected data to benefit ministry efforts around the world with hearing impaired individuals. This research will seek to find what elements of music impact the Deaf Culture and how these can be positively used in worship. The research will take place across the United States, specifically in the Greater Atlanta area in Georgia, Washington, D.C., and California. It will seek to find the relationship that Deaf Culture individuals have with music and worship and Christianity in general.

Limitations

Naturally, there are limitations to this study. Deaf Culture individuals do not ascribe to being disabled or that their lack of hearing has a negative impact on their lives. There may be members of the community that do not wish to engage in music as worship as music is seen as belonging to the hearing culture by many older Deaf individuals. Additionally, many Deaf and hard of hearing individuals at one point in time had been told to leave the churches they visited, been hidden away in the worst rooms and lighting when they did continue to attend and been told by church leaders that they didn't belong. Some Deaf individuals might question why I am asking these questions and what I seek to do with this information and some have had horrible experiences with corporate worship. The minimal number of Deaf Christians will also be a potential limitation.

Conclusion

This study hopes to support music as worship among all cultures including the Deaf Culture. Music impacts many people's lives and God calls us to use our voices and instruments and words, regardless of the language, to worship Him. He calls us to sing to him, to use cymbals and lyres and trumpets, to praise His name. God is the author of music and the greatest artist: we were made in His image. All peoples, no matter the culture, can praise his name through music.

Literature Review

Introduction

It has been said numerous times that music is a universal language. However right or wrong that statement may be, music appears to play in a role in every culture known to man. Every culture has its own body of music, many have instruments, and more individuals than not are impacted by music in their lives. What happens, though, if one cannot hear the music, such as the hearing impaired? How does this “universal language” apply to them?

Defining Deafness

In order to begin this project and to prepare for the individuals being interviewed and observed, it was important to first define deafness and what it means for the individual who experiences it. Deafness involves a problem with the auditory system and is the “inability to hear sound, with or without a hearing aid” where their sense of hearing is “nonfunctional for the ordinary purpose of life” (Sampley 1990, 19, 21). There are multiple types of deafness. To speak of a deaf person, one may be referring to anything from a mild loss of hearing to a profound hearing loss (Sampley 1990, 21).

Congenitally deaf people are those who were born deaf while an adventitiously deaf person may have been born with normal hearing but lost a degree of it or all of it later in their life from illness or an accident (Sampley 1990, 21). It also matters when the hearing loss occurred in terms of learning language. Pre-lingual deafness is a hearing loss that occurs before an age to which language was acquired while post-lingual deafness occurs after one has learned a spoken language (Sampley 1990, 22). There are millions of people who have such hearing losses. “Depending on the criteria used, one out of a thousand to five thousand people have such

a hearing loss from birth or early life on that without early intervention they do not acquire the spoken language of their environment” (Broesterhuizen 2005, 306).

The amount of hearing loss in a person is measured in decibels (dB). Decibels is the unit used to describe the intensity of sound. Average hearing occurs between zero to twenty decibels (Holmes 2017, 175). Loss of hearing can range from minimal loss to profound loss. Those who have a loss of ninety-one decibels and above and cannot hear sound below this are termed “profoundly deaf” (Holmes 2017, 175). Those who have a hearing loss less than this can be called “hard of hearing.” These individuals hear “enough sound for it to have meaning” (Sampley 1990, 22).

Hearing loss and deafness occurs through multiple causes. Premature birth and other hereditary factors can cause deafness in babies while other complications such as maternal rubella, childhood diseases such as meningitis, infection, encephalitis, measles, and high fever, and accidents can cause loss of hearing. Another factor is often old age (Sampley 1990, 22-23). It is important to those who experience hearing loss to know what kind of hearing loss, to what degree, and how it happened (Sampley 1990, 22-23). This helps with their identity within both hearing culture and Deaf Culture as well as what type of communication the individual will utilize. “The onset, severity, and pathology of the hearing loss and/or other physical symptoms sometimes associated with deafness influence these decisions, as do the family’s educational background, its socioeconomic position, and the amount of support it can give to the Deaf member (Johnson & Walker 2007, 15-16).

There are four types of “deaf-hearing” dynamics. These are defined by Leo Yates Jr. as: 1. Culturally hearing, 2. Culturally marginal, 3. Immersed in Deaf Culture, and 4. Bicultural. Culturally hearing means that references to the norm are based on hearing and “the role of

deafness in one's identity is not emphasized" (Yates 2015, 8). Culturally marginal, on the other hand, represents individuals who do not fit into either a hearing or deaf society. Those who are immersed in Deaf culture represent the positive identification of a Deaf person with Deaf culture and lowered values placed on hearing whereas bicultural identification allows individuals to "comfortably negotiate hearing and Deaf settings" (Yates 2015, 8).

Hearing impaired individuals, whether they identify as Deaf or hard of hearing, do not ascribe to being "disabled." They believe that their way of communication using visual cues and their bodies are "as good, if not better, than the ears and the mouth as means of communication" (Johnson & Walker 2007, 14). Jessica Holmes describes deafness as not a disability, but a cultural-linguistic minority, a "visual variety of the human race" (Holmes 2017, 177).

Though almost all individuals who identify as Deaf or hard of hearing do not associate with being disabled, they do acknowledge that deafness brings suffering with it. This suffering, however, is not due to being deaf itself, but rather the "oppressive way in which hearing society treats deafness, by the dynamics of exclusion" (Broesterhuizen 2005, 312).

One of the most important things to understand about those who identify with Deaf culture is to understand where those individuals reside. Similar to how Jewish peoples have left their homeland and scattered across the nations, Deaf individuals do not live in one or two specific areas but are rather scattered and considered a diaspora. A diaspora is defined by Bob Ayres as "a general term to indicate the widespread settlement of Jews outside of Palestine" or a "scattering of any group, particularly those with a language and cultural identity; a dispersion of an originally homogenous group" (Ayres 2004, 3). The "diaspora" created by those identifying with Deaf culture, however, was and is mostly because of the "result of educational mainstreaming" (Ayres 2004, 3). In the past, individuals identifying with Deaf Culture were very

interspersed, but with the immergence of technology, this culture is becoming more and more connected.

Communication Among Deaf Culture

In order to conduct interviews with Deaf individuals, understanding their communication venues is key. Identification within Deaf Culture is based on how one was raised. A member of the Deaf Culture may be hard of hearing and rely on American Sign Language for communication while another person who has a profound hearing loss may rely on orality and lip reading and not identify with Deaf Culture. It does not necessarily correspond to the degree of hearing loss but rather a “sociocultural outlook” (Holmes 2017, 178; Johnson & Walker 2007, 15).

Hearing loss at a young age means learning alternative ways of communicating. Communication is a key factor in the world to live and communication is a hallmark of Deaf Culture. Because sign language does not utilize English grammar and syntax, it is common for Deaf people to be more straightforward in their communication. They relay “direct information without excessive verbiage” (Johnson & Walker 2007, 14).

There are several types of communication among the Deaf. There are multiple manual languages including American Sign Language (ASL), Signed English Exact (SEE) and Pidgin Signed English (PSE) as well as finger-spelling. Oral communication is also used which utilizes normal speech, residual hearing, and lip reading (Sampley 1990, 23). Among the manual signs, handshapes are used in various ways to present a word or phrase. One or more handshapes may be used for each sign. They can occur in front of the body in the “neutral space”, to one side or the other of the body, or outside the neutral space (Maler, 2013).

T.D. Horejes describes the phenomenon of communication among the Deaf Culture as “languaculture.” This means that both language and culture are “intertwined and are both needed for the Deaf child in forming his Deaf identity” (Horejes 2016, 426). Deaf Culture is as important to a Deaf person as anyone’s culture is to them. It solidifies their identity, their language, their traditions, and how to cope as a Deaf person in a hearing world.

Deaf Culture, with American Sign Language and visual (and sometimes auditory) ways of experiencing the world, and its networks of people who share their experiences coping in a hearing world, may not be recognized nor tapped for resources but dismissed as irrelevant particularly in light of modern developments in genetic engineering, auditory technology, access to public education, and a decline in attendance in deaf clubs and enrollment in Deaf center schools (Horejes 2016, 426).

In light of new technologies and improved hearing devices including cochlear implants, the Deaf Culture remains vibrant in today’s world and continues to quietly flourish. It is through the use of communication through multiple venues, especially that of American Sign Language (ASL) that the Deaf Culture maintains its identity as a separate culture with an independent language, traditions, and history.

ASL is the main native language of Deaf Culture individuals and does not use English grammar or syntax. “Body and facial movements are equally as important as the signs performed on the hands” (Johnson & Walker 2007, 11). It has different vocabulary from that of English as well. SEE uses manual signs in the order of English grammar and signs exactly as one would speak in English, which is used mostly for educational purposes and for hearing parents of deaf children. PSE combines parts of ASL and SEE as well as finger-spelling which uses a handshape for each letter of the alphabet (Sampley 1990, 23-24). Finger-spelling comes in handy when introducing someone who does not have a name sign, for historical people, and for names of different places that are unfamiliar.

The Deaf Culture (using a capital “D”) are a group of people who share a language and culture, traditions and values (Darrow 2006, 5; Johnson & Walker 2007, 11). Whereas most cultures are passed from generation to generation through parents to children within the culture, Deaf Culture is passed from one Deaf person to another, related or not. The majority of Deaf children have hearing parents and many Deaf parents have hearing children. “Cultural knowledge comes from one Deaf person to another Deaf person through the use of ASL along with its shared experiences and traditions” (Johnson & Walker 2007, 12). The Deaf Culture can be termed part of a “diaspora” which means that a people group with a similar language and culture has been scattered (Buck 2014, 51-52).

Helen Keller once stated that “blindness separates people from things, while deafness separates people from people” (Sampley 1990, 25). Deafness limits communication among people, however, communication is key among members of the Deaf Culture. Speech is the hearing person’s typical means of communication. While all Deaf persons can learn to speak and utilize oral methods of communication such as lip reading, it is not the most effective. “Lip reading is very difficult because only about 30 percent of English sounds can be clearly understood from watching the lips (Sampley 1990, 24).

Manual language began being used for education in the 1800s by a man named Thomas Gallaudet. “This was a radical approach to education as other schools used oral instruction and only hearing people were allowed to teach because they could speak” (Johnson & Walker 2007, 19). By 1860, this was altered. Oralists believed that the use of sign language was primitive and that speaking “was the highest form of communication known to humankind” and that it was their “duty to raise deaf people into this higher world of speech that was dignified and respectable” (Johnson & Walker 2007, 19). This method of oralism and teaching lip reading was

used for over a hundred years. American Sign Language remained, however and was used in “safe places” such as in the homes and in the Deaf Church. “Language and culture was respected [in the church] and could continue without the political influences of government and educators” (Johnson & Walker 2007, 20).

By the early 1980s there was a shift in educational practices. The new philosophy of “Total Communication” began to be used. Total Communication utilizes all ways to converse for educational purposes including speaking out loud, ASL, SEE, finger-spelling, lip-reading, listening devises, and hearing aids (Johnson & Walker 2007, 40). It is this method that is still being used today among hearing impaired individuals for educational purposes. Hopefully, because this type of education is being used currently, conversations between both Deaf and hearing individuals can be more clear and meaningful in today’s world.

Deaf Theology

Before I can ask questions about worship and music, it is crucial to understand the history of Deaf Christians and their relationship with God. Despite the Deaf Church movement being a saving grace for the Deaf Culture’s language and traditions, the majority of Deaf people have often been and seem to remain apart from the church at large. Deaf people’s knowledge of faith and of God remains limited in light of the technologies that exist (Broesterhuizen 2005, 307).

As stated previously, handshapes for signs exist in the neutral space in front of the body, on the sides of the body, or outside the neutral space. Most signs exist within the neutral space, but the signs describing Heaven and God are outside the neutral space, above the body. It is easy for a deaf person to assume that God is distant and does not understand their communication system, that he is “far away” (Broesterhuizen 2005, 310). This may be part of the reason for why

less than ten percent of the Deaf population attends church (Buck 2014, 49). This compares to thirty-one percent of the world's population identifying as Christian, with only one percent of that number identifying as profoundly deaf (Pew Research Center, 2010).

Another reason why the Christian faith can seem distant for Deaf individuals is the way in which the message is given. Deaf people are very visual, and in many traditional churches there is not a lot of movement by the speaker. This makes sitting through church very tedious for individuals who rely on visuals for their emotional stimulation (Buck 2014, 55). Also, if there is an interpreter such as in a hearing church, the interpreter must have a solid understanding of what the message the preacher is speaking or the subject matter may be lost to the Deaf individual. "When ASL interpreters are not well-versed in the Bible, they may not fully be able to interpret the sermons and complex theological concepts without causing confusion to those who are Deaf. This usually results in an overall lack of understanding of the intended message" (Buck 2014, 50).

A third reason for the lack of Deaf Christians has to do with religious language. It can be confusing for a hearing individual to understand some of the metaphors and figurative meanings within the Bible, especially in many of Jesus' parables. For a Deaf individual, especially a young one with a much different vocabulary, these "symbols and verbal symbolism lack a character of reality" (Broesterhuizen 2005, 308). Concrete actions and objects used as symbols can cause much confusion among the Deaf Culture.

The fourth reason for limited Deaf Christians includes their sense of pride within their culture about their identities and not identifying with their deafness as a disability.

For hearing people, it seems logical that the Gospel story of the healing of the deaf man is about charity extended to an unfortunate person. The message contains the idea that deafness is a less complete, deviant, and unredeemed form of humanity which awaits healing and salvation (Broesterhuizen 2005, 308).

God can seem, to many Deaf people, to belong to the hearing person rather than to the whole world. It takes much explanation and a desire to know who God is. There are quite a few Deaf Churches however, and ministry among Deaf people around the world is growing. Started in 1851 by Thomas Gallaudet Jr. was St. Ann's Church for the Deaf in New York City as the first officially recorded church for the deaf in the United States (Buck 2014, 25). Today, there is at least one fully Deaf church in every state in America including Alaska and Hawaii as well as a Deaf church in Washington, D.C. (Hampshire View Deaf Baptist Church, 2018).

From the perspective of one particular Deaf man, however, ASL adequately accounts for theological questions. Wayne Morris writes that "Deaf theology is not dependent on the written text, because as I have argued, neither is God dependent on this human invention either" (Morris 2008, 157). It is Mr. Morris's view that Deaf theology can express both abstract and concrete ideas and that Christianity is a theology that does not require man made language. It is hard to understand this when growing up in a literate society that places much importance on audible language and books; but God communicates with us in our own languages: he does not restrict himself to a human invention (Morris 2008, 104-105; 157).

Defining Worship

To understand the role of music in worship, it is first important to understand what worship is and Who we should worship. One of the primary reasons for attending church is corporate worship. Is it all singing songs and listening to preachers? No. Worship is about God, for God, and to God. Worship is "both an attitude and an act" (Hill, 1996). It is about a relationship.

Worship is above and beyond about God and who He is. Worship happens in the heart as evaluate and understood by the mind: our response is what comes out of that. Harold Best describes it as “the continuous outpouring of all that I am, all that I do and all that I can ever become in light of a chosen or choosing God” (Best 2003, 18) and names God as the “Uniquely Continuous Outpourer” (Best 2003, 21).

Worship is how one chooses to live. It is their response to what God has done for them. Worship should be expressed through every action one takes, through everything that one does. Worship can be through giving of time or money, through the arts, through prayer, or through listening to God’s Word. Sandra Van Opstal describes worship as “a response to God, the only one who is worthy to receive glory, and mission is the call for us to invite others to that same response” (Van Opstal 2012, 9). Worship expression is our way of showing God our thanks for all that He has done and praising Him for who He is.

True worship, in other words, is defined by the priority we place on *who* God is in our lives and *where* God is on our list of priorities. True worship is a matter of the heart expressed through a lifestyle of holiness. Thus, if your lifestyle does not express the beauty of holiness through an extravagant or exaggerated love for God, and you do not live in extreme or excessive submission to God, then I invite you to make worship a non-negotiable priority in your life. (Kennebrew, 2012)

God created mankind in His image. It is only right to worship Him and thank Him for all that He has done and continues to do in each individual’s life. “Who Christians worship is significant for their behavior” (Aniol 2017, 101). God calls His people to worship Him and not to worship other gods nor other things.

The logic of the gospel is this: God reveals himself and calls us to worship him, and individuals respond with adoration and confession of their sins as they recognize their unworthiness to be in his presence. God responds by forgiving sins through Christ and welcoming believers into his presence, where they hear him speak, they commit to obedience, they bring their petitions to him, and they enjoy open and free communication. (Aniol 2017, 103-104)

Mankind was created to worship and God calls His people to worship Him in spirit and in truth. True worship takes place in the heart of the worshipper, with active participation of the mind (Psalm 45:1; 103: 1-2). “Worship pleasing to God must be unfeigned and transparent, offered with a humble and pure heart” (Hill, 1996).

Authentic worship begins with God. No order of service or specific song or dance can be better than one or the other. Authentic worship begins and remains in Christ. “It is not driven by a liturgy or a call to worship, change in style or a methodology” (Best 2003, 21;27).

One important factor in how one worships is culture. Theology, denomination, social location, ethnicity and culture shape worship. It is linked to and grounded in culture as it is contextual as well as based on personal and cultural experiences (Van Opstal 2012, 9;12;16;20). It is necessary, therefore, to engage in various types of worship.

The arts are one of the greatest tools that can be used to express worship. It is an expression of the soul to sing, to paint, to dance, to act. The arts have the capability to stir the emotions of worshippers (Buck 2014, 33). There is no one way to worship. Worship can be expressed through any kind of art as God is the true Artist. “Arts used in worship can shape thoughts, awaken the sense, and help solidify faith” (Buck 2014, 46).

The arts, especially visual arts, are important for Deaf Culture Christians. Arts are able to communicate truth in an “inaudible language” and can also “quietly inspire and guide” (Buck 2014, 43). Visual arts include drawings and paintings, dance, and acting. This can be an effective way to “convey the gospel message to persons who are visually oriented” (Buck 2014, 33).

Music as used in worship is an important part of hearing culture Christianity. David writes in Psalm 150:1-5 to

“Praise the Lord. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens. Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness. Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, praise him with timbrel and dancing, praise him with the strings and pipe, praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals.” (Psalm 150:1-5, NIV).

If God made mankind in His image, then the Deaf Culture is not excluded. David’s call to praise the name of God through music does not exclude the Deaf Culture. This begs to answer the question “what is music and how can a Deaf person be a part of it?”

Defining Music

Throughout this project, I hope to provide a definition of music from a Deaf person’s point of view. In previous definitions from hearing individuals, music is innately organized sound. Sound, however, is not just what one hears: “it is a multisensory experience” and can be “an exclusively visual-spatial experience” (Holmes 2011, 171;196). Music goes beyond sound and aural feedback. Music “exceeds the acoustical parameters of sound itself” (Holmes 2017, 211).

Jerrold Levinson attempted to define music as an art and proposed that “music is sounds temporally organized by a person for the purpose of enriching or intensifying experience through active engagement” (Davies 2012, 536). He posits that any sounds can be treated within the realm of music. Stephen Davies also points out another man who attempted to define music, a man named Andrew Kania. This man proposed that “music is (1) any event intentionally produced or organized (2) to be heard, and (3) either (a) to have some basic musical features

such as pitch or rhythm, or (b) to be listened to for such features (Davies 2012, 537). Neither of these definitions, however, encompass what music is.

In his way of defining music, Bruno Nettl points out of ethnomusicologists “we claim to study music, and if we’ve become sufficiently broad-minded, all societies have something that sounds to us like music, but the point is that there is no inter-culturally valid conceptualization or definition of music. Very few societies have a concept (or a term) parallel to the European “music” (Nettl 2005, 17). Music dictionaries mostly avoid an actual definition of music. “The old *Harvard Dictionary* under ‘music’ discusses the phenomenon without giving a definition” (Nettl 2005, 17). Music tends to be described by musicologists and ethnomusicologists as a phenomenon. There is no one true definition of music as it varies from culture to culture. Music does not exist with a “functional definition” (Davies 2012, 540).

Ian Cross states that there is a “singular phenomenon called music, which has material manifestations and some knowable relationship to human biology, mind, and behavior” as well as “music exists as musics, diverse, multiple, and unknowable within a single unitary framework” (Cross 2012, 17).

Music has existed as long as time has. Ancient writings including the Bible refer to music in many forms.

“Archaeology thus suggests that human musicality is ancient; the fact that music appears about as early as possible in the traces of *Homo sapiens* in Europe, together with the fact that musicality is an attribute both of the peoples of the pre-Hispanic Americas and of the Aboriginal peoples of precolonial Australia, provides good grounds for believing that music accompanied modern humans out of Africa” (Cross 2012, 19).

Music tends to provide expression for those who produce and listen to it. Music is experienced and has the ability to elicit emotions (Cross 2012, 21) as a reminder of a learned cultural or personal lived experience. Music is more than just sound. Music is a concept, a

behavior. There are several different perspectives on this premise: whether music itself conducts the emotion within a person or whether the person responds cognitively based on their own lived experiences. Lots of ongoing research in the fields of music therapy and music psychology are currently undergoing this argument.

“The concepts that underpin music may take different forms in different cultures, as might the practices that embody or that give rise to those concepts; hence, although the acoustical manifestations of music in two different cultures may appear quite similar to a Western listener, their conceptual and behavioral contexts may render them quite distinct as musics” (Cross 2012, 21).

Music differs from language and other communication systems. It also has many similarities among differing cultures, whether they have a word to describe it or not. Music is “complexly structured, affectively significant, attentionally entraining, and immediately—yet indeterminately—meaningful” (Cross 2012, 22). Cross proposes that music, as a human capacity, “can best be interpreted as a communicative medium that is optimal for the management of situations of social uncertainty” (Cross 2012, 24).

Music is said to be a universal phenomenon. The human brain understands music in ways that humans cannot even understand. There is even a field of research called music cognition that focuses on how the brain responds to music and why.

Music and Deafness

Deafness does not exclude music from entering the brain. Jessica Holmes asks the question “if music is a universal capacity of the human brain, it is important to ask whether anything could go wrong with the brain to render it incapable of dealing with music...even profound deafness does not automatically exclude high levels of musical achievement” (Holmes

2017, 183). For example, Beethoven was able to continue “hearing” music and composing after he lost his hearing (though he had the experience of being able to hear at a younger age). “His deafness was a slow deterioration, rather than a sudden loss of hearing, so he could always imagine in his mind what his compositions would sound like” (Wienberg, 2016).

There are multiple Deaf musicians in the world today who grew up deaf, many of them percussionists: most notably, Evelyn Glennie, who lost most of her hearing by the age of twelve. She has collaborated with many famous musicians in today’s world (TED Radio Hour, 2005). Her mission involves teaching the world to listen in unique ways and “to improve communication and social cohesion by encouraging everyone to discover new ways of listening... to inspire, to create, to engage and to empower” (Evelyn Glennie Biography, 2017). Other notable deaf musicians include Mandy Harvey, a jazz vocal singer who became profoundly deaf at the age of eighteen and Sean Forbes, who began playing percussion at the age of five and started a non-profit organization called D-PAN or Deaf Performing Arts Network (Lammle, 2010).

Most Deaf persons have a type of “residual hearing.” They are able to react to certain sounds that are within a decibel range their brain can pick up on. Deaf children have historically responded to and reported to enjoy many aspects of music (Darrow 1993, 105; Darrow 2006, 5; Holmes 2017, 175; Sampley 1990, 21). Because music is more than sound, ‘the tactile, the visual, and the kinesthetic all play important roles in deaf perceptions of music” (Maler, 2013).

One form of music participation in the Deaf Culture is song-signing. "Song-signing' is a traditional form of storytelling found in Deaf Cultures around the world. The act of song-signing involves translating a pre-existing song’s lyrics into a signed language, or composing an original

sign language song. The signed song is one of many face-to-face storytelling traditions in Deaf Culture" (Maler, 2013).

Song-signing is used in various genres and in many different venues including churches, YouTube, at Deaf clubs, and at weddings. It utilizes four forms of expression including music, lyrics, ASL signs, and other gestures that are not necessarily a part of any signed language including dancing, swaying, and pulsing (Maler, 2013).

The 'pulsing' method of phrase delimitation is closely related to rhythmic closure. Pulsing is one of the most common and noticeable ways of defining a phrase in ASL songs, and consists simply of the regular pulsation of the signer's body in time with the beat while either holding or repeating a full sign or part of one...The 'pulsing' technique blends linguistically meaningful signs or sign components with dance to indicate a phrase's completion (Maler, 2013).

Song-signing has a long history among the American Deaf Culture as well as other Western Deaf Cultures. It is a form of "musico-poetic expression that originates in the community's storytelling traditions; in Deaf storytelling and poetry, storytellers arrange signs aesthetically to follow a sort of 'rhythmical cadence'" (Holmes 2017, 191).

Song-signing and visual cues are an important musical device at Deaf raves, clubbing events organized by and for Deaf people at which music is played at notoriously high volumes. Musical tracks are typically selected for the prominence of their bass lines, while lighting is designed to showcase onstage performances by song signers, comics, and dancers, and also to ensure that dancers can communicate on the dance floor in sign language (Holmes 2017, 192-193).

Though Deaf individuals do not participate in music to the extent that hearing individuals do, they can still be a part of and enjoy what music is. Prominent bass lines and low resonating percussion allow Deaf people to feel the vibrations in the music. Rhythm, rather than melody, is the most important aspect in music for Deaf people (Darrow 1993, 105;109; Darrow 2006, 11).

Not all Deaf individuals prefer to be involved in music, however, as music tends to identify with the hearing culture. "There are a variety of attitudes toward music in Deaf Culture,

due in part to the lack of consensus among Deaf people as to how music relates to Deaf identity” (Holmes 2017, 191). Some Deaf individuals feel “ambivalent” about music, as it can easily interfere with Deaf Culture values (Holmes 2017, 199; 210). Many Deaf individuals favor visual arts to adhere to their values.

...signed hymns usually involves Deaf people looking uncomfortable, unable to understand the rhythm of the music while following the unexpected hand movements of the hearing leader. Rarely do hymns use all the many facets that Deaf people communicate with normally, like facial expressions. It should be acknowledged, however, that some Deaf people have explained that they enjoy watching signing to music and that it does help them to worship. Deaf people have stressed the importance of worship as a place of unity...Many younger Deaf people resist signing to music and are beginning to explore more obviously Deaf ways of expressing themselves in a way that can be beautiful and artistic. The role of music is one which I predict will gradually disappear from Deaf worship along with so many other impositions from the hearing world, making a way for worship that is more authentically Deaf (Morris 2008, 129).

Music is, however, incorporated in many contemporary worship services. Services dominant in ASL do utilize music. Some “adapt liturgy to better suit congregations” while some Deaf congregations “may give less emphasis to music and more to drama, an extension of ASL storytelling” (Yates 2015, 20). And contemporary music often is performed at a dynamic level that can literally be felt. In fact, there is an emerging “theology” that if you cannot literally feel the beat hitting your body, the Holy Spirit is not present and/or moving.

The reason that music interferes with Deaf Culture values and identity is that deafness can be seen as “music’s ultimate disability” (Holmes 2017, 179). Though this is a misconception as many Deaf persons have been involved with music, it remains to be a problem among many Deaf Culture members, particularly older individuals. Deaf Culture clearly has many different views on music and their participation with it.

Deaf Culture does not espouse a single view of music. In the Deaf community, music can provide meaningful creative expression, sensory pleasure, and cultural fulfillment. But it can also threaten the semantic value of sign language and potentially threaten the visual orientation of Deaf Culture. (Holmes 2017, 210)

In whichever way that the members of Deaf Culture view music in today's world, God calls His worshippers to utilize this gift He has given. Music has its own definition within each culture as seen throughout the various continents of this earth. Why should the Deaf Culture be included in this? They are individuals and members of a community just like any other culture: humans created in the image of God, the true and foundational artist.

This research will take place across the United States, primarily in Georgia, Washington D.C., and California. This research seeks to understand from a more intimate level what the functionality of music is in the mind of a Deaf person as well as how music is currently used and can be further utilized as worship among Deaf Christians in today's world and its role for future Deaf Christians around the world.

Methodology

This research sought to understand the role that music plays in the life of Deaf Christians. It begins a conversation and starts to answer questions on how Deaf individuals identify with music both in and outside of the church and answer from a diverse group of Deaf individuals what defines music and what purpose it serves in their lives. This study will demonstrate the importance of music in the Christian life, as we are called to many forms of worship expression. The types of questions being asked and answered within this study come from an ethnomusicological background as well as music cognition and music psychology elements. Ethnomusicology elements support the cultural aspects and identity with music from the Deaf Culture while music cognition and psychology provide a background in supporting the theories behind what music is and the way the brain and interprets it including how the Deaf individual experiences musical elements.

Data collected includes multiple interviews with Christians in the Deaf community as well as those who identified as hard of hearing, had strong rooted connections with the Deaf community such as interpreters and families of Deaf persons. A sample of hearing persons was also asked to define what they felt that music was in one to two words.

Outside of interviews, observations of worship services across America, mostly along the Eastern United States and California, that utilized interpreters were documented as well as all Deaf congregations. These worship services ranged from traditional hearing churches, contemporary hearing services, traditional Deaf services, contemporary Deaf services, and online churches streaming with interpreters and chat groups for them. Song-signing videos and ASL poetry created by some of these churches were also viewed and observed.

I began by emailing personal contacts I had made through the International Mission Board (IMB) who were missionaries to Deaf Culture for the past thirty years. They connected me through email and text with interpreters whom I interviewed first. After developing a trust with these individuals, I was introduced to members of the Deaf community including a few Deaf pastors. I also emailed churches (specifically those over the Deaf ministries) in the greater Atlanta area and told them my intent of study and was invited to come and worship. After attending and observing three distinctly different worship services, I was introduced to song-signing videos developed by a Deaf church in California to serve as personal worship materials for them. I was given permission immediately to cite these and other online sources.

One of the most important factors going into this study was learning from key hearing people, specifically interpreters, on how to approach Deaf individuals and present myself as someone eager to learn about their culture and get to know them and develop a trust before asking some of the more personal questions about their spiritual relationships. I approached physical church observations through first emailing the interpreters and pastors and getting permission. Some churches responded right away while others did not. When I went to an all Deaf congregation without a hearing person, I used a notebook to communicate and they invited me in when I wrote down "I want to come worship with you" and gave them my consent form.

Through my time working with ASL interpreters, I began to study the language and was able to properly introduce myself in sign and develop an understanding of some conversations in ASL. After visiting and observing three church services, meeting with Deaf individuals for twenty to thirty minute interviews with the help of two hearing interpreters, I interviewed the interpreters a second time.

I set out to identify how musical experiences impacted Christians in the Deaf community both in corporate worship services and in their individual spiritual lives. The most important questions answered included personally defining music by the individual as well as answering what musical experiences meant the most to the individuals that met with me. I utilized a personal ethnographic approach through individual and group interviews and physical and online observations.

Through interviews I discovered sensitive issues involving personal experiences with other Christians and church groups that caused many of these individuals to leave the church and also the events in their lives that brought them back to Christ. I witnessed many hardships faced and why the Deaf Culture is considered to be the largest unreached people group in the United States. After discovering this, I made it known to all participants in my study that I was doing this research out of love and that I wanted to make a difference and help bridge the gap between hearing Christians and the Deaf community.

Research Findings

Going into this project as I reviewed previous research on Deaf individuals and Christianity, I knew that I might not find as many people to interview as I would prefer given the low numbers of Deaf Christians. The Deaf population is much larger than I originally thought but the population of Deaf Christians is even smaller than I imagined. I had previously heard that ten percent of Deaf individuals are Christian, when in reality it is actually closer to two percent according to the hearing interpreters I spoke with in my interviews. I knew the numbers in the church were low, but I honestly did not know just how traumatized Deaf people were and still are from the hearing church. What started as interviews on musical worship often turned into a conversation about how individuals came back to the church and the pattern was all too clear: Deaf people have continuously and are still being turned away from hearing churches because *we don't belong,* or *we can't help you.* Not speaking the same language is no reason to omit God's love as a Christian. The message that has been received from the Deaf people that have tried to attend church in the past is one of two things: God doesn't love them, or God made them mistakenly. The stories that were revealed to me broke my heart for the Deaf Culture and made me seek even more to reconcile with the Deaf Culture.

Throughout my time spent with Deaf individuals, I had the opportunity to speak to a variety of people with unique backgrounds from Deaf pastors to Deaf music therapists, from hearing interpreters and linguistics professors. I also had the opportunity to observe multiple church services, some hearing led with interpreters while some were all Deaf led services. After meeting with people and beginning interviews, I was introduced to a collection of Deaf-made song-signing ministry videos and given permission to observe them and use them in this research

by the all Deaf church that created them. Among other related topics was my introduction to ASL poetry and Deaf rap.

The first service I chose to observe was a traditional service that had just recently began a Deaf ministry. There were six Deaf people in attendance and they all sat up front by the piano, which was the only instrument in use. There was no type of screen to display any words but the rest of the congregation read from the hymn books.

While the hymns were being sung and played, the Deaf individuals sat and watched the interpreter intently, watching her hands. She signed only words (no musical cues) in the space in front of her chest, face, and above her head. Where the Deaf people sat, they could also see the pianists' fingers on the keys of the instrument. They went through three hymns, all four verses on each hymn.

During the sermon, the Deaf individuals stared at the interpreter's hands. The interpreter often looked up at the pastor when he took pauses. The Deaf people in attendance were all at least forty. They watched the interpreter almost without moving during the sermon and their eyes visually took in the words. At the end of the sermon, the hymn books came back out and the congregation sang another song. As soon as the service was over, the Deaf individuals animatedly began conversing in ASL and moving their bodies and faces to catch up with their peers.

A week later, I attended a contemporary hearing service with a more prominent Deaf ministry. There were twelve Deaf people in attendance. During the musical worship, the ASL interpreter signed the lyrics and gave musical cues according to the music being played. The Deaf participants in the congregation stood in the pews off to the left of the stage, some watching the interpreter while others watched the worship team, and others still read from the power point

and the visual backgrounds. Some people swayed, some stared, while others clapped along to the rhythms. Two individuals mouthed along words as well.

During the sermon, the interpreter sat in a chair that was slightly elevated above the ground but not on the stage in front of them. There were screens on the sides of the church so that the congregation could look in different directions for the notes on the power point. The verses being taught on were displayed on the screens in bold and changed as the sermon progressed. The backgrounds were different colors but no particular patterns. Three Deaf people had their own Bibles on their laps while the others looked on the screen to read the scriptures.

Near the end of the service, right after the sermon, a video was played about collecting Christmas music boxes to send around the world. The closed captioning was kept on and the interpreter did not sign through the video but rather turned her eyes to the video herself.

The third service I attended was that of an all Deaf church. There were a few hearing people there as well and they typically had a "hearing interpreter" during major events. The first time I went, I went without an interpreter. They did not have music because it was an afternoon service that they do twice a month aside from regular worship times. When I went for the morning service and was able to witness the musical worship, it was a bit different than the hearing churches I had been to all of my life. Rather than one or two percent of the people knowing sign language, only one to two percent did not use ASL and instead there was a "hearing interpreter" for their benefit. They welcomed everyone, regardless of language, into their congregation.

The first portion of the service included musical and visual worship. It would probably be considered on the more traditional side music-wise. Variations of hymns and "contemporary" music from the nineties and early 2000s were signed along to the recorded music. They had a

music leader who was hearing and led the signs on the stage, along with the Deaf choir. About eighty percent of the attendees signed along with the songs, swaying and smiling and watching the music leader. Some people were really engaged both with their bodies and their facial expressions while others passively signed along in motion, almost robotically.

After the musical worship portion came announcements. They did not have a power point screen but had bulletins that the announcer directed the congregation to look at. Then the choir came onto the stage, eleven older women and two older gentlemen. They stood in a semi-circle on stage while the music leader stood on the floor at the center facing them. The choir members watched the music director and had smiles on their faces as they began.

When the music began, everyone swayed a little to the right and left in the rhythm of the music while watching the music director, clapping along with the bass drum beats. During the verses of the songs, the woman on the right signed a line, then the woman on the far left. Those who were not signing kept their hands at their sides but continued to sway side to side. When they reached the pre-chorus of the song as it began to grow, six choir members were signing together. By the time they reached the chorus, the whole choir was signing together.

Whereas most ASL conversations and individual ASL song-signing interpretations involved a lot of differing facial expressions, the choral song-signing did not change facial expressions as much. The group started with a smile on their face, some more than others, and they kept that facial expression throughout the song while letting their hands do the singing, which I found interesting because of how important facial expressions are in ASL and is considered "grammar" in the language. What I did note, however, was that the choir was very important to the church as a whole being that when I introduced myself, almost every church

member was eager to introduce me to their "singing hands choir." All of the choir members I spoke with afterwards seemed to hold a positive sense of pride at being in the choir.

After many interviews with interpreters and Deaf individuals across the Eastern coast, I was introduced to an all Deaf church in California. I was able to contact the church in California and have the chance to interview some of their members as well as some of the hearing interpreters who helped spearhead the song-signing ministry on Youtube, unlike any other ASL ministry online. How this particular ministry came about will be further discussed in the interview section.

There have been approximately hundred song-signing videos developed and recorded by the Rock Church Deaf Ministry in California over the past five years. The important thing to know about song-signing, I have learned and observed, is that English is a linear language and ASL contributes to a broader linguistic context. Therefore, the song interpreter does not necessarily translate the song word for word in the English language, which I imagine may be similar to other linguistic translations among other cultures.

I watched every single ASL song-signing video created by the Rock Church Deaf Ministry. In watching the hands move from the signers and also being able to hear the music I could tell that the signs visually represented the music and not just the lyrics. Songs with a strong bass drum driving quarter notes were seen in the full body movement while the hands spoke the words.

During introductory sections and instrumental moments, the signers would represent the music visually depending on the instrumental section. For piano interludes, the signers played air piano in front of their chest area and string interludes were shown playing an air violin. More upbeat interludes would use clapping or pulsing back and forth to the music. During songs that

had repetitive lyrics such as "Set A Fire" and "There's Nothing I Hold Onto" showed the lyrics the first few times in a small space in front of the chest. As the music made it's crescendo and grew, the body movements were more drawn out and the visual signing space built up to a larger area. Sometimes the repeated signs would be expressed in a different way even though the words were the same.

At a certain point, I turned off the sound and watched songs that I knew well lyrically and saw the music really moving despite not hearing anything musical. Between the hand shapes, body swaying, and facial expressions, it was an obvious visual art that had rhythm and dynamics within. I watched Chris Tomlin's "Lay Me Down," a very fast, upbeat song, and observed full body swaying side to side, rhythmic air guitar, clapping, and smiles.

All of these songs from the Rock Deaf Ministry would be considered on the contemporary worship side. I also watched a few secular song-signing videos and found many similarities including swaying, air instruments, intense facial expressions, handshapes in front of the body and dynamic growth. The major difference was in the facial shapes (grammar) where worship songs often involved looking up at the sky above where secular songs held a gaze more forward looking at the camera.

During an interview with one of the creators of the Rock Deaf song-signing videos, I was also introduced to a Ted Talk done by a Deaf "sound artist" named Christine Sun Kim entitled "The Enchanting Music of Sign Language." Kim was born with profound deafness and was initially taught to believe that sound was not a part of her life, until she discovered that it was a huge part of her life, despite not being able to hear it. "I watch how people behave and respond to sound...I create sound...I learned sound etiquette" (Kim, 2015). In Deaf Culture, movement is the equivalent to sound. Kim stated "I always thought sound was a hearing person's thing...I know

sound. I know it so well that it doesn't have to be something just experienced through the ears. It can be felt tactually, or experienced as a visual, or even as an idea. So, I decided to reclaim ownership of sound and to put it into my art practice" (Kim, 2015).

The thing is, in music, you can never reach complete silence. Where there is piano, there is pianissimo, and therefore there is no amount of sound musically that can reach *complete* silence, as a rest isn't considered a playable note. Just as a musical note cannot be fully captured on the page, a concept in ASL is not just a handshape. They are both "highly inflected, meaning that subtle changes can affect the entire meaning of both signs and sounds...You don't have to be Deaf to learn ASL, nor do you have to be hearing to learn music" (Kim, 2015).

The metaphor that Kim gave next really struck me as a musician in how to understand ASL and Deaf Culture and communication. "English is a linear language, as if one key is being pressed at a time. However, ASL is more like a chord: all ten fingers need to come down simultaneously to express a clear concept or idea in ASL. If just one of those keys were to change the chord, it would create a completely different meaning" (Kim, 2015). The same concept applies to music in pitch, tone, and volume. A major chord with a flattened third tone turns into a minor chord and it completely changes the character, the mood, the whole interpretation of what is being heard. ASL and music are very similar in this way.

After hearing so many stories about how hearing Christians have treated Deaf people in the church, and hearing the perspective of Deaf individuals who have attended so many churches across the United States, I made the decision to do a church observation at an all Deaf church with a Deaf pastor and did not arrange an interpreter and recorded my personal observation and feelings on the matter:

I walked into this small, all Deaf church with a Deaf pastor and not a hearing person in the room today: about twenty or so people, all definitely older than me. These individuals, who had previously been turned away from so many hearing people, told they didn't belong in the church, asked not to come to the service because they didn't have an interpreter: they welcomed me with opened arms. We wrote across church bulletins to communicate. I wrote "I am here to worship with you and ask you some questions about how you worship for my studies, but I do not know ASL well" and finger-spelled my name: M-A-L. "Hearing translator not here today" one woman wrote to me, "but please stay. You are always welcome here." I thanked her in ASL. I sat near the front, in front of the pastor and next to his wife.

On a white board, the pastor wrote down the topic of the sermon: Five Crowns. He signed about a man who earned many trophies throughout his life and how he lost them all to a fire. In this world, we are constantly running and fighting and competing for trophies that will only be melted down. He said that the crowns and the trophies we have inside of us are what matters, that those are what we are running the real race for. The race we are running is for Jesus and it is not done until our earthly death. He signed regarding five different crowns that we should be setting out to earn. Two such crowns were the crowns of righteousness and the crown of rejoicing. I didn't understand the other three.

The one that struck me most was the crown of rejoicing. When he made his sign for rejoicing, he had to finger spell it out a few times and I watched as each individual in the room absorbed this word in their faces and followed up by showing him their own sign for rejoicing. "We all have different signs for rejoicing" the pastor's wife wrote to me on the bulletin between us. I smiled and signed "I understand" back to her. And I did: from the smiles on the faces of those in the room to the confusion of others on the matter it made so much sense in the moment.

We all worship in our own ways and express joy the way we were made to express joy, so it made perfect sense that everyone in the room might have a different ASL sign for rejoicing.

The pastor signed that when you accept Jesus into your life, *really* accept Him and *live* for Him, then you rejoice and you don't keep it inside of you: you share it with everyone you love, with your enemies, with the unknown; because Jesus died that we might live. He then finger-spelled out, much slower so that everyone would really take it in: W-H-A-T H-A-V-E Y-O-U D-O-N-E I-N Y-O-U-R L-I-F-E S-I-N-C-E J-E-S-U-S S-A-V-E-D Y-O-U? He raised his hands up above his head and looked upward, his eyes closed for a moment before looking back to the congregation. You can live a life without cursing, without drugs, without lies: but it's not what you do without. I-T I-S W-H-A-T Y-O-U D-O.

It dawned on me somewhere during the fourth or fifth crown the pastor was signing about that this experience was quite unique for me, sitting in a small church trying to decipher what the pastor was saying while not actually speaking the language and only a piece of paper and a pen to communicate (yes, I totally forgot about technology in the moment; most likely because I was a good twenty to thirty years younger than everyone there and felt like it would be rude to pull my phone or laptop out when they weren't even using power point or any other kind of technology).

The thing is, listening to many stories from members of the Deaf Culture over the past few months, I found that they went into predominately hearing churches and *we were turned away for not being able to communicate in the same language, or the church not having or wanting to pay for an interpreter* (name withheld by the request of provider). These people sat pretty much in silence while the rest of the congregation pulled out hymn books and strung together words that didn't even exist in their language and then sat for an hour staring at a man

moving his hands around a little but not really saying anything while his lips moved on the stage, too far away to make out much of what was being said.

I got to experience in those hours what it felt like to not speak the language, to make out a few concepts here and there, to wonder why everyone around me was laughing and I heard nothing. There *was* a major difference though: I wasn't turned away, I was invited in. And at the end of the sermon, the pastor wrote for me "I hope you were able to understand. I can answer questions if you have them."

For not knowing very many signs I think I understood quite a lot of his sermon. Afterwards, I spoke with individuals about their personal worship experiences. *We love music, to sing songs with our voices and with our hands to Jesus* (name withheld by the request of provider). Within an hour, I had been invited to a picnic by the lake, a Deaf choir concert, and a Bible study at someone's house. I didn't need to speak the language to know that despite my outsider status, I was welcomed in with the love of our Lord and Savior.

I set out to interview Deaf individuals about their thoughts on musical worship, but instead I came away with so much more. Before I began interviewing Deaf individuals however, I asked a group of hearing musicians to define music in one or two words. I came away with a lot of unique description words, yet out of twenty hearing individuals, only one person used a word that reflected auditory sound. Some of these music definitions included: expression, emotion, freedom, auditory beauty, signal, interpretation, communication, comfort, solace, peace, escape, heart, soul, personality, joy, and soul-stirring. Of every Deaf individual asked the same question, I received answers including: rhythmic patterns, emotional, physical, creativity, expression, feeling, internal rhythm, vibration, escape, and distraction.

One of the interviews I conducted near the beginning of my research was with a pastor named Stephen Taylor who has been profoundly deaf his entire life. Both of his parents were hearing but as he grew up he felt he fit in more with Deaf Culture individuals. One of the questions I asked him in particular was how he came to be a Deaf pastor. When Taylor was just a child growing up in the Methodist church, he was the only Deaf person in attendance. The church gave him sermon notes and kept a place for him up front by the piano. He always felt bored going to church because he couldn't sign and hold a hymn book or watch the music director and read the words at the same time and it was frustrating.

At the age of twelve, Taylor went to confirmation classes with all of the other children his age. When he arrived, he was pushed out of the door and told he didn't belong there and that he didn't need to be there by the church leaders. He showed up the next week and was told the same thing. Taylor took this experience as a sign from God that he didn't belong in the church and that God didn't love him, that God made a mistake on him by giving him ears that could not perceive sound. So, he left the church with those emotions digging deeply into him.

Taylor grew up and went off to college, met a group of Deaf friends and went down "many horrible roads." He tried all kinds of drugs and "other encounters" to search and find someone who did love him. And he came up empty. In his early thirties, he decided to give up on life. He made a noose and hung it in his apartment, stepping up onto a chair and wrapping the rope around his neck. "In the very moment I was about to step off of the chair and hang myself," he told me, "I heard, yes heard, an audible voice say, 'Stop. This is not my plan for you. I love you.' I know, I'm deaf, right? But I heard God speak to me then and it is the only time I have ever heard a voice through my ears." After returning to the church and putting his faith and trust in Christ, he felt the call a few years later to tell his story and to share with other Deaf people and

people who had been told they didn't belong that "they do belong and God loves them unconditionally." He now works as a pastor in a special needs ministry outside of Atlanta, Georgia.

In another interview, I spoke with music therapist Anna-Margaret Brown who began to lose her hearing at the age of four. She currently uses hearing aids and has limited hearing. She went to college undecided but felt the tug on her heart to be a music therapist, despite the challenges she would face. She plays the piano mostly, along with the guitar, hand drumming, and voice. She cannot hear high tones or speaking voices without her hearing aids. "I don't rely on sound when I play, but on feeling internal rhythms." During college, she often felt nervous playing the piano but learned to feel music instead of depending on her minimal hearing of pitch. She described going through music history class and having to take tests on choosing which song was being played. "I had to focus on different things that made the distinctions in the songs and I always sat next to the speaker in the room." When asked what music was, she told me that it was "creative expression" and that we have all experienced music from before we were even born. Ms. Brown stated that "When we are children in the womb, we feel our mother's heartbeat, we don't have to hear it. We need something consistent and humanity is drawn to symmetry and order to bring calmness, like a mother patting her child to sleep or other rhythmic patterns in the body."

I also interviewed two Christian ASL interpreters, one working on her doctorate of linguistics at Gallaudet University named Cami Miner and the other who was previously a doctor of linguistics at UGA, Dr. Judith Oliver. Miner was involved in creating the Rock Deaf song-signing videos. About six years ago while working at the Rock Deaf Church, she went on a mission trip. Her team made a few song-signing videos to use for the mission trip and when they

returned had many other Deaf individuals in their community asking if they could use the videos for their own personal worship. The church began to realize how minimal the amount of materials that are out there at hand for Deaf individuals to worship outside of the church and started a song-signing ministry. There are now over a hundred videos and when Ms. Miner made her way to Gallaudet to work on her doctoral degree found that she was "YouTube famous" with the Deaf Culture, not just in California but all over the world. "I have been so blessed by this ministry and many others tell me they have been blessed by it as well."

The second woman I spoke with, Dr. Judith Oliver, started a camp for Deaf children and utilizes art, drama, and music. She also interprets at a church often and has Deaf children. One of her children has been studying percussion for years. "I would be interpreting songs at church and he would tell me 'Mom, you were off beat' when the sermon ended. I'm listening to the music and signing and I think I'm feeling the pulse right but his rhythmic instincts are so much better than my own because he internalizes the music."

Both women felt that they could never speak for a Deaf person or make any generalizations about the Deaf Culture from their point of view because they aren't physically deaf, but still very connected to the culture. Ms. Miner stated that "each Deaf person experiences sound drastically differently. I would never speak for any of them in describing what it is like because I know what they tell me it is like, but it isn't my experience with music."

Both of these interpreters had a similar vision on ASL song-signing and concert interpreting. When asked about interpreting, Dr. Oliver said "You have to show the emotion, be the instrument and give the audience all of the auditory clues. It's not our job to edit the sound. Even if an ambulance goes by I sign it so the audience will know why all the hearing people turned around."

Many of the Deaf people I spoke with found rhythm, pulse, and vibration to be important musical cues for them. *I like to feel the beat in my chest, in my toes* (name withheld by the request of provider). Feeling the rhythm and vibration through the floor and in their heart with the bass and bass drums were some of the best musical experiences for many. Some had been to concerts, both Christian and secular and even orchestral, and had very enjoyable experiences. "I went to a U2 concert once and just turned off the hearing aids, took off my shoes, and felt the vibrations inside of me. I've been listening to U2 for years, but I still only really know the lyrics to the choruses" (name withheld by the request of provider).

When discussing the importance of certain musical elements, I heard many varieties, but rhythm and vibration were definitely at the top. "I think rhythm is the most important in music because that is what you feel, what you can count when you hear the way we do" (name withheld by the request of provider). And also, no Deaf person hears in the same exact way, just as hearing people.

Stephen Taylor told me about a time when he went to a Jesus Culture concert in Gwinnet County, near Atlanta, Georgia. "I memorized some of the chorus and just felt the music and meditated on those short phrases and let the music fill the air: it was magical."

In the all-Deaf Church I attended, the singing hands choir was the most talked about event in a church service. There are many choirs like such around the United States that use ASL, but very few Christian choirs. One Deaf man from the all-Deaf Church commented about watching a Deaf choir sing with their hands for the first time: "There's nothing like it, just watching their hands dancing. The music is playing and there are no lyrics being played, just hands moving together and expressing worship to God. It's so beautiful" (name withheld by the request of provider).

I discovered some unique conversations about music in the Deaf Church and among Deaf Christians that were oddly similar to hearing churches and hearing Christians. A common discussion in the church over the past fifty years has been what kind of music to play. These discussions, these "worship wars," have split churches down the middle, have caused countless arguments within the church, and even driven others away from the church.

Fifty years ago, there was not a vast distinction between traditional and contemporary services. Some people felt that hymns were the only way to use music in the church, while others disagreed and started playing electric guitars and drums and dancing. After observing multiple types of services and working with people from all walks of life and various physical and emotional setbacks, I believe that worship through music only needs two things: to be theologically sound and to come from the heart. A hymn with only a light piano background that cannot be heard by the hearing impaired or even felt with lyrics such as "here I raise my Ebenezer" is not necessarily going to make a Deaf person feel comfortable or feel like they belong in hearing the gospel possibly for the first time who may have been previously hurt by other Christians. It would just cause more confusion and build a higher wall. At the same time, an individual with a sensory disorder may be overwhelmed by visual effects used in Deaf programs and someone with epilepsy watching moving lights during a service would not be conducive for their worship environment as well.

One of the biggest hindrances to music in the church during worship in a contemporary service is figuring out what to look at, as Deaf people are quite visual. Between the worship leaders on stage, the ASL interpreter, the many screens with lyrics on them and backgrounds flashing, the Deaf person may not know which to choose to look at. Stephen Taylor told me that "It's hard to concentrate where there are way too many words going on and you're trying to read

the words and then the rhythms and vibrations become distracting but if there is a short phrase repeated over and over then it isn't distracting but rather worshipful. Like you're connecting with God through the vibrations."

Worship should be about connecting with God and praising Him for Who He is, for all that He has done and for all that He is going to do. Whether you use art or music or dance or poetry to express your adoration for what Christ has done and will do, it doesn't matter, so long as it comes from the heart and is theologically sound. Hearing or Deaf, music is simply, as most people stated when asked, expression.

Summary, Recommendations, and Conclusions

Summary

Setting out in my research, as I set up observations and interviews, I expected to understand the role of music in the lives of Deaf Christians and in the Deaf church. It was my goal to determine the attitude of Deaf Christians on music and in what ways they personally worship Christ. I wanted to know what kinds of musical experiences had made an impact in the life of a Deaf person, specifically worship related experiences using music. I sought to learn about what music meant to a Deaf person and how that person would define music itself.

After reading many articles and books on Deaf Culture and Deaf people in the church, I knew that I may not find as many people to talk to as I would like as there is such a small percentage of Deaf Christians. What I did not know prior to my interviews and observations was that Deaf people are the *most* unreached people group in the Americas, specifically in the United States. I was honestly shocked: until I started listening to their stories.

Every interview about music and worship turned into a sharing of testimony, of how they had personally been and watched others in the Deaf community be mistreated by the hearing church. Dr. Judith Oliver, one of the interpreters I interviewed, told me about a time when she was asked to notify all of the Deaf individuals to not come to church on a certain Sunday because they couldn't find an interpreter. "It was as if by them coming to the service, they would be an inconvenience to the rest of the hearing individuals in the church" (Dr. Judith Oliver).

From another church, a woman expressed her frustration with a time that her Sunday School class has been moved around to the most awkward places with lots of visual distractions because other hearing people needed the original room. "Our class was moved to the hallway a few times where the door kept opening for people coming in and going out. Another time we

were put in the choir loft which made it hard to see everybody signing and communicating" (name withheld by the request of provider). For a time, her group was moved to the back of the sanctuary during services where the lighting was bad, in the back with all of the nursing mothers and toddlers where they were visually distracted and couldn't see the screens.

Every single one of the Christians I talked to, however, also had a story of redemption, of someone who had reached out to them, of someone telling them they were loved, and most importantly, that God loved them and that they *did* belong. My first interview with Stephen Taylor, the Deaf pastor, is one strong example. Another example is from woman who stopped going to church for the longest time, but met an interpreter who showed her love and invited her to her church. "She showed me kindness, so I went with her. I go every week now" (name withheld by the request of provider). Unfortunately, though, those stories of redemption are only two percent of the Deaf community. How many others visited a church and never went back?

Through my interviews I learned that the Deaf community likes all different kinds of music, including some traditional hymns. Often, their relationship with music and lyrics had a lot to do with their educational background. Where children growing up fifty years ago in a program for the deaf would have been forced to read lips and use Signed Exact English (SEE), ASL and all-inclusive methods of learning are currently being used. Therefore, the way that each of these individuals lyrically express music is different from person to person. In ASL, the lyrics may look vastly different from a song signed with SEE, a whole different visual language.

Some Deaf people like hymns and signing word for word whereas others prefer ASL translations and contemporary story songs that have two to three verses, a repeated chorus, and possibly a bridge. There are also those who prefer repetitive, meditative songs that have only a

few lines of lyrics and while some people find them dull and boring. This is remarkably similar to the hearing world.

I had a conversation at a mission's conference several years back about the differences in musical taste in culture. Primarily white cultures in the past preferred to tell a story and have a repetitive chorus, such as most hymns and the beginnings of "contemporary" music. An African American church on the other hand is like a crockpot: they put a few main ingredients in to begin with (the lyrics) and let it simmer for hours (repetitive lyrics). By letting it cook longer, the seasonings permeate the meat and vegetables and soak in. This would be the equivalent to really meditating on just one line in a song over and over again, as is typical of gospel music. It's not the same, though, for each time the lyrical line is repeated, the music grows.

I found that among the Deaf Culture, their educational and worship background has a great effect on what type of music they are fond of in worship. Those who were taught to speak and to read lips are more likely to sing aloud to a hymn and not move their hands at all while watching an interpreter sign the lyrics. A child brought up with an all-inclusive education would be more likely to sign a song. Unfortunately, ASL worship is not used as often in the church among Deaf Christians due to the fact that they just don't have a large background of music in their hands to pull from: most Deaf people don't have an iTunes or Pandora with thousands of songs they have been listening to in the car since childhood or at church every Sunday. It's one of the reasons the Rock Church Deaf Ministry began their song-signing videos five years ago. Not a lot of people worship this way because there is not a lot of material out there to worship at home with. It doesn't necessarily mean that Deaf Christians don't want to worship through music.

There are some individuals, however, that could care less about music as a whole, music in the church, or music personally in their lives: both hearing and Deaf. Where music can be one

of the most important ways to worship for some people, it isn't for everybody. Everyone that I personally interviewed seemed to have a positive connection with music, but quite a few commented that they had friends who held the view that music didn't belong to the Deaf world, but only to the hearing.

Recommendations

From my experience in attending churches around the greater Atlanta area in addition to viewing services and speaking with others from around the United States, it is my highest recommendation that ministering to the Deaf is of utmost importance. This will require the hearing community to learn more about the Deaf Culture. Just because someone is deaf or a member of the Deaf Culture does not make them any less than. At times, they made need assistance in understanding particular concepts, however one should never assume that they cannot understand the conversation or that they do not belong in the church, whether an interpreter is available or not.

The International Mission Board does have a ministry for the Deaf, however it is very small. I recommend further contact with the IMB and making reaching out to lost Deaf persons a priority. There are also members of the music therapy community and the Society for Ethnomusicology who could be of some use in starting conversations and in understanding this culture. I also recommend to get into contact with some missions agencies such as Wycliff, Heart Sounds International, Operation Mobilization, and the International Council of Ethnodoxologists to get a conversation going.

As hearing Christians, we need to show the same amount of love to all people, no matter their cultural background or their method of communication. It would be helpful to poll churches

with Deaf programs throughout the entire United States and see what their thoughts are regarding the musical matter, but the most important element is to share the gospel to the unbeliever and to show Christ's love for them.

Conclusions

So, to answer my initial question of the role of music in the Deaf Christian world, it is just that: one role. Musical worship exists in as many different forms in the Deaf church as it does in the hearing church and in the hearing church with prominent Deaf programs. There are "contemporary" services with music singing and signing songs that have been released in the last ten years. Some churches used repetitive songs such as "Set a Fire" while others used story songs including "Revelation Song" by Phillips, Craig, and Dean and "How Great Is Our God" by Chris Tomlin. I was also told of "blended" services that include both hymns and modern songs, while other services only used traditional hymns with and without the use of Power-Point to display lyrics. Some churches used recordings, others used only a pianist, some who used orchestras with strings, winds, and percussion, while others had full bands with electric guitars, keyboards, bassists and drum sets. Music, however, isn't necessarily a part of every person's worship language among both the hearing and Deaf populations. Music has been defined in the Deaf world as expression, emotion, rhythm, vibration, life. As Christine Sun Kim said in her Ted Talk, music isn't for one person to own, but for everyone who chooses to enjoy it.

Deaf individuals have had multiple positive worship experiences through musical elements and some of them described these experiences as being "magical." Others thought music was valuable sometimes, while others still bragged about their Deaf choirs because they loved to worship in that way.

The crucial element here is that individuals worship in various ways and no one way is "better" than another way. Music is valuable in many Deaf Christian's lives, but it is just one part of worship. If song-signing is something that attracts a Deaf person to a church and brings them closer to Christ and expression adoration of our Creator, then they should sign and worship through music. In the same way, if visual art is something that attracts a Deaf person to a church and helps them connect with God, then they should create and share art.

"Praise the Lord. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens. Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness. Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, praise him with timbrel and dancing, praise him with strings and pipe, praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord" (Psalm 150: 1-6 [NIV]).

God's children are called to praise the name of God in so many different ways, in ways that we can speak our heart language. Culture and preference are important in order to bring people into the church and telling them the truth: that God loves them just as they are. As Christians in a predominately hearing world, and as a hearing person myself, it is crucial that we tell Deaf people who walk into the church that they are loved, that they belong, and that God has not forgotten them; he didn't make a mistake when he made their auditory world unique, he made them just the way he planned to just as he made us with different cultures and values. Deaf people just want to be accepted and loved for exactly who they are. The church needs to recognize this and address the needs of the Deaf community and invite them back to the church to worship God and to share God's love with one another.

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