

THE NEW DIGITAL MEDIA: OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHURCH SOUND RECORDING,
SONGWRITING, AND MUSIC PUBLISHING

By

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LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

A THESIS PRESENTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

Doctor of Worship Studies

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Abstract

The new digital media, particularly streaming music, has made the original record industry model antiquated. Now it is possible for independent artists to be their own label and publisher and through streaming platforms, have a national or global reach. This new model also applies to churches with some church leaders considering beginning a songwriting ministry and producing original worship music, Church record labels are not new; in fact, there is precedent for this extending back to the Jesus Movement of the late sixties. Although research and literature covering changes in the old music paradigm and new opportunities are plentiful, there is little written about the feasibility of non-megachurches becoming independent labels. The purpose of this study is to compile and aggregate research from various literary sources and present them in such a way that medium-sized churches can make an informed decision about starting a music label or employ strategies for success if they already do. The data collected will be from books, periodicals, dissertations, and articles written within the past five years and it will cover such things as the current state of the music industry, the nature of digital streaming as it applies to distribution and music publishing, the history of church music labels, the theology of songwriting, and the practical implementation of a songwriting and production ministry. The research approach will be qualitative because there is a need for more exploration of the question. The information presented is intended to benefit medium-sized churches considering a songwriting ministry.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

Over the past several years there has been an upheaval in the traditional music industry which has disrupted the gatekeepers and powerbrokers of the major record labels. The disrupting force is the streaming of music and the move away from consumers purchasing CDs, LPs, and even digital downloads. This development began a reordering of the industry on many levels because the major labels not only controlled or influenced public access, but also controlled physical distribution. The decline of CD sales and their distribution ushered in the arrival of the independent digital distributor which can take any mastered recording, and have it distributed to nearly all the digital streaming platforms such as Spotify, YouTube, or Apple Music.¹ This means that independent artists, labels, and by extension, churches, can record original music and have it streamed anywhere on the planet where there is internet access. The new digital media has created new opportunities for churches, worship leaders, and pastors desiring to create a worship songwriting ministry.

Background

To understand opportunities presented by the new digital media, it is important for one to have insight into how the music industry operated before digital streaming. The record labels controlled or influenced much if not all of the process of producing music for mass consumption, from the development of artist and their repertoire to the placement of songs in commercials and movies. This control spanned the entire process ending with a CD or LP merchandised in a

¹ According to Digital Music News, digital streaming overtook CD sales in 2018 with streaming taking 38% of the market and CDs falling behind to 30%.

brick-and-mortar store. The digital media dislocated distribution and moved it from the control of the major record labels.² Currently, digital distribution companies such as CD Baby, Tune Core, and Distrokid have largely taken the place of CD factories, warehouses, and trucks, and with streaming platforms like Spotify and YouTube replacing the local record store. It is the transformation of the traditional distribution system by the new digital media that is the at the core of the production opportunity available for medium-sized churches.

Digital music streaming is monetized in such a way that once music is part of a streaming platform's catalogue, in most instances, the responsibility for paying royalties rests with the streaming platform and not the church or artist. Patrik Åker and Greg Goldenzwaig write, "For the industry, the growth of the trend of service-based models affects the possibility to broaden the spectrum of income expectations: every time a subscriber plays a certain track on the internet, royalties are generated, and a small individual transaction takes place."³ This means that the royalties are paid by subscriber fees or in the case of case of YouTube and Spotify which have free versions, advertisements. In the past, churches printing records or CDs would need to pay the mechanical license up front. With a federally mandated statutory rate of 9.1 cents, a record with ten songs would have 91 cents in royalties needing to be paid. If one thousand units were pressed, the church would be required to pay \$910 in royalties upfront. For a church on a limited budget the cost of royalties could discourage any music production. Sadly, in the time before digital streaming most churches did not have access to meaningful distribution and in many instances, albums and CDs would be relegated to a storage room or given away.

² Daniel Nordgård, *The Music Business and Digital Impacts: Innovations and Disruptions in the Music Industries*. (Cham: Springer, 2018), 42.

³ Sofia Johansson, Ann, Werner Patrik. Åker, and Greg. Goldenzwaig, *Streaming Music*. (London: Routledge, 2018), 64-65.

As already discussed, with the new media, distribution is facilitated digitally. Because there is no physical product, there is no longer a need for brick-and-mortar stores. Although this development is significant, disrupting the entire music industry, there are still costs involved that churches must consider if the decision to produce original worship music is made. First, there is the process of writing songs. A culture of songwriting must be developed. Members of the worship team or songwriting team must regularly compose music. Second, there is the issue of professionalism and depth of talent. A church may not have studio level musicians causing a need to hire better players. Third, most churches lack facilities to record. It may be necessary to use a local off-campus studio, which can potentially be an enormous cost. At the same time, the church may not have a key person with production skills. It might be necessary to hire a person to mix and master the recording. Finally, to make financially significant royalties from digital sound recordings, millions of streams must occur regularly. For an independent music producer like a church, this may prove very difficult. Author Patrik Burkart writes, “Independent music is still produced in high volume. But, for bands trying to break through to commercial viability, digital distribution introduces new challenges. Returns on digital distribution are meager.”^{4 5}

The Need for Diversity in Worship Music

The production of worship music by the music industry is a financially lucrative market. One only needs to look at the revenue generated by the Australian church and label Hillsong to understand the kind of financial opportunities exist. Ethnomusicologist Tom Wagner records that

⁴ Patrick Burkart, “Music in the Cloud and the Digital Sublime., *Popular Music and Society* 37, no.4, (2014):401, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03007766.2013.810853>.

⁵ Although many advancements have been made since the publishing of this article in 2014 such as the Music Modernization Act of 2018, recordings still need to have millions of streams for the income to be significant. The monetization of streaming will be covered later in the thesis.

in 2017 Hillsong generated AUS\$109.5 million (approx. 78 million dollars US.)⁶ The Bethel Music label of the Bethel Church in Redding, California is not far behind with an annual revenue of \$60.8 million in overall income. This includes tithes, online sales, and streaming revenue.⁷ Keeping in mind that Hillsong is one of many stakeholders in the industry, one can only imagine the total amount of revenue generated when all the megachurch worship labels are considered. There are also individual artists like Chris Tomlin and Matt Redmon who play a large financial role in the worship music industry.

The reality is that only a few songwriters account for most worship songs sung in churches on any given Sunday. Megan Fowler of *Christianity Today* notes that today's most-sung worship anthems come from a "handful of songwriters with half being the top hitmakers-Tomlin, Hillsong, Bethel Music, and Matt Redman."⁸ Based upon data provided by Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI), in 2013 CNN (Cable News Network) reported that between 60,000 and 120,000 churches were singing Tomlin's songs every Sunday and by extrapolating this data estimated that 20 to 30 million people could be singing his songs weekly.⁹ CCLI is the primary licensing company for most church worship music and as such, collects

⁶ Wagoner, Tom. *Music, Branding, and Consumer Culture in Church: Hillsong in Focus*. 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2019), 48.

⁷ Annelise Pierce, "The Really Big Business of Bethel Church, Part 1: Show Us the Money!" *Anewscafe.com*, May 13, 2019, <https://anewscafe.com/2019/05/13/redding/the-really-big-business-of-bethel-church-part-1-show-us-the-money/>.

⁸ Megan Fowler, "Why Chris Tomlin Still Dominates Both Radio and Sunday Morning," *Christianity Today*, September 20, 2019, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2019/september/chris-tomlin-still-dominates-worship-music-popular.html>.

⁹ Eric Marrapodi and Tom Foreman, "Chris Tomlin: King of the Sing-Along," *CNN* (Blog), March 9, 2013, <https://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2013/03/09/the-most-sung-artist-on-the-planet/>.

hard data on songwriters and publishers.¹⁰ In her article, Fowler notes that worship leaders sometimes feel pressure to use worship songs popular on the radio. She also puts forth the idea that songs may lack lyrical and musical diversity and may also be spiritually shallow focusing on simple theological themes.¹¹

Fowler is not alone in her opinion. Many theologians, pastors, and Christian leaders believe today's worship music lacks diversity and theological depth. Among the Protestant tradition of worship music, theology was often presented in a systematic way going back to the practices of Martin Luther. In his 2017 best seller *Martin Luther: The Man Who Rediscovered God and Changed the World*, Eric Metaxes wrote that Luther knew that the best way to “inculcate the truths of scripture into the minds of every man, woman, and child was to put good doctrine into musical forms.”¹² Hymnals published in the 19th century purposely included and categorized music according to theological subjects. In discussing three early American hymnals professor of religion at Wellesley College Stephen Marini writes, “These three hymnals and their hymn classification suggests that early American evangelists understood hymnody to be a function of doctrinal teaching and church practice.”¹³ Theologian John Witvliet goes as far as using a food and nourishment metaphor for the types of congregational music that should be selected. He believes that just as the physical attributes of food become building blocks for our

¹⁰ As of the writing of this document August 2020 Tomlin, Hillsong, Redman, and Bethel occupy exactly half of the first 20 sings of CCLIs Top 100. These numbers come from hard data tracked by SongSelect, the company which licenses music under CCLI.

¹¹ Fowler.

¹² Eric Metaxes, *Martin Luther: The Man Who Rediscovered God and Changed the World*, (New York: Viking, 2017), 375.

¹³ Stephen Marini, Hymnody and History: Early American Hymns as Sacred Music,” *Music in American Religious Experience*, ed. Philip Bohlman, Edith Blumhofer, and Maria Chow, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 13.

bodies, so too, “musical substances become building blocks of our life of faith.”¹⁴ Perhaps the idea of spiritual nourishment and discipleship gets lost in the corporate need for profitability.

Independent music or “indie” is popular with many because it is directed to a niche market which does not care for popular music or share those values. Indie artists are motivated more by self-expression than popularity. In many ways a church label or production company functions similarly. In producing music from within a medium-sized church, a songwriting ministry may be motivated by things such as discipleship rather than an emotional connection to God. Additionally, independent church music producers might write about themes which may never get to the top 100 of CCLI or Billboard such as suffering, loss, or disillusionment. Ethnomusicologist Anna Nekola discusses the convergence of Christian media and advertising writing, “Christian popular media communicates a discourse of the experience of the divine immanence.”¹⁵ She argues that worship music is marketed in a certain way which promotes individual transcendence. The desire to sell music may push back other hymnody which might emphasize aspects of Christian living which could be perceived as mundane. Alternative songwriters from within the vast evangelical community could help span the gap with song topics necessary for Christian growth, but not as popular. Medium-sized churches may not have the marketing reach of a major record label or megachurch, but they do have access to the same distribution on the streaming platforms.

There is also the need for contextualized worship and hymnody for non-western countries. There are many immigrant congregations in North America which have a connection

¹⁴John Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding: Windows into Christian Practice*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 234.

¹⁵ Anna Nekola, “‘I’ll Take You There’: The Promise of Transformation in the Marketing of Worship Media in US Christian Music Magazines,” in *Christian Congregational Music: Performance, Identity, and Experience*, ed. Monique Ingalls, Carolyn Landau, and Tom Wagner, (New York: Routledge, 2016), 124.

back to the country of origin. For some of these churches there is a strategy of developing hymnody in their native tongue and export them using platforms such as YouTube which can easily be accessed by the producer and listener. Worship leader Carson Li from Koinonia Evangelical Church in Vancouver British Columbia started a production company- Koinonia Music- with the idea of producing songs first in English then Cantonese. These songs will eventually be shared worldwide. ¹⁶ Developments like these would be impossible without the new digital media.

Statement of the Problem

The problem itself is twofold. First, there is need for diversity in the writing of worship songs and the development of hymnody. There are parallels between today's dilemma and the Jesus Movement of the late 60s and early 70's. in that era songs were written that included doctrinal lessons and emotions associated with them. Churches today have the opportunity to fill in some of the gaps left by a music industry which sometimes is more concerned with producing a top ten hit than writing and producing a song about suffering or discipleship. ¹⁷ New independent music may work to only edify the local church from which it was created and produced; however, with the new digital media, a local song has the chance to impact the body of Christ nationally or even internationally. A mid-sized church with a songwriting production ministry will probably not be motivated in the same way the Christian music division of Sony Music might be, but that same church will have identical access to the same streaming platforms any of the giant labels might use.

¹⁶ Carson Li, "Principles for Starting a Song-Writing Ministry." (Master's Thesis, Liberty University, Lynchburg, 2019), Scholar's Crossing, Master's Thesis.

¹⁷ Wen Reagan, "A Beautiful Noise: A History of Contemporary Worship Music in Modern America," (PhD. Diss, Duke University, Durham, 2015), Dukespace. 171.

Just as there is a need for songs which fill in theological gaps, there is also a need for contextualized worship for bi-lingual churches or Christians in non-western countries. Immigrants and first-generation Americans can reach out to their home countries or expatriates through music and songs contextualized for their home culture. Ethnodoxologist Roberta R. King writes, “In our haste to make the Gospel known quickly, we have bought what we know about God without realizing that we must also work at the deeper levels of a people's worldview. There is much more to the global arts that so easily engaged entertain us; They play critical roles in addressing these deeper levels.”¹⁸ Music affects the listener on many different levels and a composer from a certain cultural group will have a connection simply because of shared cultural experiences and language. As well intentioned as the worship industry’s few songwriters might be, they probably will not have the same connection with the Zomi people group of Myanmar as that of a Burmese immigrant church in North America streaming new songs in the familiar dialect. Anybody on the planet with internet access and a smartphone can tune in and learn contextualized music produced by small immigrant or bilingual churches. In short, the new digital media can bring similar cultures together and help foster more effective Christian outreach and discipleship.

The second part of the problem is the lack of literature and research in assisting churches in developing a songwriting ministry and producing songs. Church leaders may have a desire to do this but lack information and understanding to make an informed decision. Paradigms are slow to shift and many are still caught up in the mystery surrounding artist development and the production of original music. Part of this research is to help worship leaders, pastors, and church leadership make a missional decision about developing, recording, producing, and publishing

¹⁸ Roberta King, *Global Arts and Christian Witness: Exegeting Culture, Translating the Message, and Communicating Christ*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 38-39.

original worship music. Now is the time to take advantage of this opportunity created by the creation of this new technology.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to compile and aggregate research from interviews and various literary sources and present them in such a way that medium sized churches can make an informed decision about starting music a label or employ strategies for success if they already do with the ultimate goal that all these churches can contribute to the diversity of worship hymnody.

Significance of the Study

The study is significant because there is a gap in the literature relative to medium-sized churches recording, producing, and publishing worship music utilizing the new digital media. The emergence of this media is so new that it is difficult for stakeholders and researchers to keep up to date with new advances and practices. The digitization of music has not only created how the music creators operate, it also has transformed how people function socially, especially those 35 years old and younger. The growth of streaming revenue can be mostly attributed to the consumer habits of Generation Z, those in their mid-twenties. In a paper presented to the Varazdin Development and Entrepreneurship Agency in October 2019 researcher Josko Lozic said, “The postmodern society dictates habits that are significantly different from the habits of consumers before the emergence of internet and digital forms of production and distribution of media content.”¹⁹ There is also an expectation that music as well as other types of media be presented digitally. Johansson and Werner write, “However, as hypothesized by Steve Jones²⁰

¹⁹ Josko Lozic, “Digitalization Creates A New Paradigm of the Global Music Industry: The Traditional Music Industry Is Under Pressure of the Streaming Platforms,” *Varazdin Development and Entrepreneurship Agency (VADEA)*, (2019): 189, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fsearch.proquest.com%2Fdocview%2F2317570353%3Fa>.

²⁰ Steve Jones is a professor of communication and researcher at the University of Illinois Chicago and contributing author to *The Handbook of Internet Studies*.

the ‘real revolution in popular music in regard to the Internet’ can likewise be thought of, as not primarily concerning industry upheaval or the development of new formats and services for music listening, but rather ‘the availability of news, information, and discussion about music and musicians’ facilitated online, for example by fans.”²¹

The study is also significant because it describes how different sectors or aspects of the new digital media work together. Essentially, a digital EP or single is a type of information as opposed to a hard-physical product. Listeners can consume any digital release by clicking on a link to one of the digital platforms. For a church or any independent artist to have success in the digital world, all aspects of digital interaction music must be used. A church which utilizes social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram will have more success with producing music than one that does not. Churches desiring growth must utilize social media. Professor of economics Young Joo Lee notes the correlation between church success and use of social media writing, “Surveys of Christian congregations in the United States show that the majority of churches view social media as a more effective outreach and proselytization method than such traditional ways as knocking on doors, radio, television, or newspaper advertisements.”²² A church with several thousand social media followers can release a single on Facebook and even “boost it”²³ so that it is presented to a larger demographic group that may not be a follower of the same church on social media.

²¹ Johansson and Werner, *Streaming Music*, 12.

²² Young Joo Lee, “Is Your Church “Liked” on Facebook? Social Media use of Christian Congregations in the United States,” *Nonprofit Management & Leadership*. 28 no.3 (2018): 384, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1002/nml.21291>.

²³ For a fee, social media platforms such as Facebook or Instagram can cause posts or advertisements to appear more frequently, attracting greater attention. This is called “boosting.”

The thesis also discusses independent services which have grown to assist independent record labels. In the traditional major label model services such as marketing, branding, and sales were departments within the label. Now, many of these services are available piecemeal by independent companies. Essentially, the old departments of a record label are now available as standalone entities where an independent label or church production company could pick what service they need.²⁴ This means a church label seeking a bigger market could use one of these services. Additionally, a church which wishes to become a publisher can also utilize publishing administration services where they can own the publishing while another service takes care of the paperwork. These services are so new that some church leaders may not even be aware of them. Most of the mega-church labels are also publishing companies. Although publishing allows a church to have ownership of a song, many medium-sized churches may have avoided publishing because of the administrative knowledge required to adequately preform the service. There are now services which will perform this function and allow the publisher to retain ownership; in fact, many of the mega-church labels are using administrative services for publishing admin.

Finally, the thesis is significant because it demonstrates a need for diversity in worship music. It is this need which in large part should drive the church to start a songwriting ministry. Even without public commentary or journal discourse, statistical data alone from various musical metadata monitoring services demonstrates that shallowness of the songwriting pool. The very nature of the music industry itself will always tend to gravitate towards a sure thing. A church can produce original worship music without pressure from a label. With advances in digital

²⁴ Ben Homewood, "SERVICE STATIONS: Right now, labels and artists have more options than ever when it comes to releasing music. With traditional models facing increasing competition, Music Week meets the label services companies who are shaking things up....," *Music Week*, January 29, 2018, https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/apps/doc/A534663299/BIC?u=vic_liberty&sid=BIC&_xid=ec762666.

streaming technology, a songwriting ministry can reach the world with new music. Solid theology and deep spiritual truths are needed in today's worship catalogues. Christian leaders who in the past may have been critical of the worship music are now in the position to create their own hymnody. Additionally, contextualized music- music for other languages- can be created and streamed globally. Roberta King also writes, "There's more to music than reaches the ear. And there is more to the performing and visual arts than beauty, as wonderful as that is. When it comes to Christian witness, we need to evaluate whether we are effectively communicating or only transmitting the gospel message."²⁵ Contextualized songwriting combined with the new digital media can aid in the process of effective intercultural communication of the gospel.

Research Questions

The two research questions will be answered in this study:

RQ1: What are the common struggles shared by North American medium-sized churches that wish to produce their own worship music?

RQ2: In what ways can the digital streaming marketplace help medium-sized churches already producing and publishing worship music maximize exposure and global outreach?

Hypothesis

Based upon early research question one is addressed in working hypothesis one.

H1: Common struggles shared by American medium-sized churches that wish to produce their own worship music may include the lack of recording equipment, studio, or practical experience in the music recording and production industry.

²⁵ King, 47.

Based upon early research question two is addressed in working hypothesis two.

H2: The digital streaming marketplace can help medium-sized churches already producing and publishing worship music maximize exposure and global outreach in terms of advanced publishing assistance, sharing marketing strategies, and branding advisement.

For hypothesis one the guiding principle is the unique mission of the medium-sized church. In the case of Carson Li, it was a “moving of God” which led his church to start a songwriting ministry.²⁶ The church must have a mission which sees songwriting and its production as a function necessary for the local body of Christ.

Hypothesis two examines strategies for better success and outreach for churches already producing music. The situation is so new that many stakeholders in church-based labels may be unaware of new services and techniques available. There is also the concept of churches becoming independent publishing companies and having ownership of songs produced. Music publishing is a role most churches have avoided but in the case of producing original worship music, should probably consider.

Core Concepts

Although there may be many concepts embedded in the paper, there are several which are key to the overall thesis. One is the theological mandate for the composition of songs. Hymns and songs of the Spirit written about by Paul in Colossians (Col. 3:16) and Ephesians (Eph. 5:19) are considered by most to be songs composed by believers. The Psalmist David implored us to

²⁶ Li, 4.

sing a new song to the Lord. *Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord all the earth.* ²⁷ The church has a rich history of compositions for congregational singing springing from the Reformation and continued by people such as Isaac Watts and John and Charles Wesley. During the Jesus Movement of the 1960 and 70s, Calvary Chapel, the epicenter of the movement, started its own label to record and publish music created there. ²⁸ Through the technology of tape duplication, this home-grown label started a transformational wave of worship music.

It is easy for an industry or big business to become disconnected from its market or constituents with significant corporate resources set aside for the purpose of creating branding and marketing relevance. Each church will have its own issues and characteristics. Also, everyday people may have concerns which may not be addressed by the handful of Christian songwriters composing much of the worship music. The Jesus Movement of Calvary Chapel during its infancy needed a new hymnology for both cultural and theological reasons. For these hippies and products of the counterculture, authenticity, and relationship with Christ and each other was given much value. They wanted to create music which communicated their personal experience. ²⁹ There are some which see parallels between the 1960s and life today with many viewing corporate products with suspicion. Like Calvary Chapel many years ago, the local medium-sized churches may drive the new emerging worship hymnody.

Another concept is the need for a diversity of worship songs and hymnody. Although the popular music industry-produced songs are often good ones, there are certainly other writers who have significant ideas to offer the local and international community. The composition of songs

²⁷ Ps. 96:1, NIV.

²⁸ Regan, 176.

²⁹ Ibid., 168.

is not only essential for the Body of Christ in the United States, but it is also important and even necessary for believers abroad, especially for the creation of contextualized hymnody. There has been concern over the years from missionaries and ethnodoxologists that popular worship music lacks the cultural connection of a song composed for consumption by a non-western indigenous culture. In the context of this thesis diversity means many things including theological, musical styles, and cultural. Churches, particularly ones with expatriates from other countries, can target an overlooked people group or subculture without the pressure of a Billboard ranking.³⁰

The concept of practicality and feasibility is a critical theme. A church may have a culture of writing worship songs but lack the resources to start a production ministry. Although the biggest obstacle is usually financial, there are other key elements. A church may lack the proper facilities or rooms. More importantly is the need for qualified personnel. In short, the transition from writing songs to recording and even publishing them may not be possible for everybody. It requires planning and pastoral support.³¹ To produce music with any kind of success there must be someone with an ear for production and a knowledge of music technology. The “key man” or person concept is significant in music production and business because of the human dynamic involved in creating excellent music. Churches may go through a period where they do not have all the parts needed to create a quality sound or worse, they may produce something mediocre that they may not want for public consumption. Part of answering research question one is communicating the idea of having realistic expectations.

³⁰ Billboard is a music industry service which ranks songs from different genres in a top 100 list. This data comes from such sources and radio, streaming data, and physical sales.

³¹ Li, 4.

Any church considering worship music production will need to determine where the recording will happen. Recording will either be in-house or contracted with a studio. In some situations, it may be a combination of places with recording happening at the church and mixing and mastering occurring elsewhere. Even with the fact that a person with a decent computer can download free software and make a relatively decent recording, there are still such issues as microphone placement, microphoning drums and amps, and the recording space itself. A church considering creating a songwriting ministry may not have the funds to remodel and transform a room into a studio. Using a church sanctuary as a recording space may yield varying results as solving one acoustical problem may create another.³² Regardless of how challenges are met, virtually any church desiring to produce original worship music will probably need to make some type of financial investment and if remodeling or significant acoustical enhancements are needed, that investment could be substantial and outside the scope of a churches operating budget.

Another concept is the realignment of the music and recording industry and its benefit to the independent artist. Recording artist David Bowie predicted this upheaval in 2002 in an interview with the New York Times. He said, "'Music itself is going to become like running water or electricity, so it's like, just take advantage of these last few years because none of this is ever going to happen again. You'd better be prepared for doing a lot of touring because that's really the only unique situation that's going to be left. It's terribly exciting. But on the other hand, it doesn't matter if you think it's exciting or not; it's what's going to happen.'" ³³ In many

³² Acoustics for the Church Studio," *Technologies for Worship*, February 24, 2014, accessed September 14, 2020, <http://tfwm.com/acoustics-for-the-church-studio/#>.

³³ Jethro Nededog, "David Bowie Accurately Predicted the Future of Music in this Interview 14 years Ago," *Business Insider*, January 11, 2016, <https://www.businessinsider.com/david-bowie-on-future-of-music-2016-1>.

ways the music industry has become more like a utility. Bowie compared it to running water or electricity, but it is probably more like cell phone or cable.

For many years, the major record labels controlled access to popular success. They had great influence with popular radio and controlled the distribution of records into brick-and-mortar stores. Digital streaming took power away from the major labels and distributed it to the independents. Bowie did not predict the benefit the new digital media would have for independent artists. Streaming services, especially YouTube, have become a platform where artists can connect with anybody on the planet. These factors cause one record executive to exclaim “you can’t compete with free.”³⁴ In the writing of her dissertation lecturer Leslie Meier quoted founding executive editor Kevin Kelly of *Wired* magazine who noted in 2008 that an independent artist only needed 1000 true fans to be financially successful. He argued that if 1000 fans spent \$100 per year, an artist would make \$100,000 annually.³⁵ With the potential to reach millions of people through digital media, a medium-sized church producing independent worship music could with focused marketing recoup the potential costs of the production. These concepts along with the previously mentioned service companies give potential church music labels new advantages.

The last major concept is the monetization of streaming music. In the traditional model, the major label would advance funds to a recording artist who would make a record to be distributed to retailers around the world. Upon the sale of the records or CDs the label would recoup its financial advance and after certain expenses were paid, the artist would earn a royalty.

³⁴ Nordgård, 75.

³⁵ Leslie Meier, “Promotional Ubiquitous Musics: New identities and Emerging Markets in the Digitalizing Music Industry,” (PhD. Diss., University of Western Ontario, 2013) 119, Western University Scholarship @ Western.

Digital streaming is monetized in such a way that once an audio file or video is uploaded to a streaming platform, the artist, label, songwriter, or publisher can immediately begin earning royalties. This is because the responsibility for paying out the mechanical royalties is on the streaming platform like YouTube or Spotify; in fact, streaming platforms such as Spotify, Apple Music, SoundCloud, and Pandora have substantially increased the accessibility of music with little to no distribution costs to artists and record labels.³⁶

Anybody who watches videos on YouTube will note that they are often asked to subscribe by video makers to their channels. This is because the artist needs millions of streams per week to make a decent amount of income. Before the industry completely transformed, Hillsong was already involved with streaming by having several different YouTube channels. With several Grammy awards and nominations in 2017, Chance the Rapper was one the first artists to achieve mass success with no CD release. David Schreiber writes, “As an artist, Chance the Rapper utilizes social media to portray his personality to his fan base. He engages fans in political discussions on Twitter and posts pictures of his daughter on Instagram. Chance the Rapper appears reachable, often retweeting fans on Twitter and returning comments on Facebook and Instagram.”³⁷ Like Hillsong, Chance the Rapper also uses streaming platforms and social media to optimize success. So theoretically, a church-based label receiving significant international social media traction could potentially earn enough back to break even because the potential for financial success is there for anybody who uploads music to streaming platforms.

³⁶ Cassidy Best, Katie Braile, Emily Falvey, Samantha Ross, Julia Rotunno, and David Schreiber. "A "Chance" of Success: The Influence of Subcultural Capital on the Commercial Success of Chance the Rapper." *MEIEA Journal* 17, no. 1 (2017): 31, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fsearch.proquest.com%2Fdocview%2F1971713015%3Fac>.

³⁷ Best, Braile, Falvey, Ross, Rotunno, and Schreiber, 48.

Of course, most artists do not earn enough royalties to achieve financial success, but the potential is still there. The same Kevin Kelly who theorized that success could come from 1000 loyal fans had to conclude that his theory would not work for most.³⁸ Once again, a major part of this thesis is to provide enough information that the reader has realistic expectations.

There is one other concept which ties into the monetization of streaming and the is the medium-sized church becoming a publishing company. If a church acts as a label facilitating the recording, mixing, mastering, and releasing of original worship music it will only have rights to the actual sound recording. It will have no performance rights if the song was played on radio or any mechanical royalties if it was recorded by another party. Thus, if the song were to be picked up and recorded by a major label, the church would receive no royalties. In the United States the laws are written in such a way that only songwriters and publishers have performance and mechanical rights. Many if not most of the megachurch labels have at least partial publishing rights to the songs they produce. This is no doubt this is because these churches want to have a continuous income stream from the music they produce.

Traditionally, publishers enter into agreements with songwriters where the songwriters will give up part or all their rights to a song for a period of time in exchange for publishing duties. Publishers in turn receive *administrative rights* where they split royalties with the songwriters. For the most part, this split has been fifty-fifty percent.³⁹ In the past many songwriters have avoided becoming publishing companies because of a lack of knowledge of the business. For a church there would be a learning curve, and this would need to be weighed

³⁸ Meier, 125.

³⁹ Donald Passman, *All You Need to Know About the Music Business*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2019), 220-221.

against the potential for lost royalties if a song were to gain traction and become nationally popular. Today there are administrative publishing services which handle administration for a fee or part of the royalties. This makes it possible for an independent like an artist, songwriter, or church retain publishing rights without becoming a traditional publishing company.

Definition of Terms

Production- The catchall term for all aspects related to the business of creating music for public consumption. This would include songwriting, recording, mixing, mastering, live music, and publishing.

Independent or Independent label- Any organization which produces music for public consumption which is not connected or contracted with a major recording label. A church could be an independent label.

Music Publisher- An entity or organization which licenses, administers, and collects royalties for the songwriter.

New Digital Media- Anything associated with the digital methods of producing, marketing, and consuming music. Can include digital streaming, social media, digital downloads, music apps, and internet videos.

Mechanical Royalty- License paid to songwriter/publisher for permission to record a copy-written song.

Performance Royalty- License paid to songwriter/publisher for permission to publicly perform a copy-written song. This would include music played on traditional or “terrestrial” radio.

Music Modernization Act of 2018 (MMA)- A law passed by congress which standardizes mechanical royalty payments for streaming music.

Sound Recording- Any musical recording, digital or analog, produced for consumption.

Chapter Summary

The new digital media has disrupted the entire music industry and replaced it with a new model. The authors of *Streaming Music* write, “The development of music streaming has contributed to changing the structure of the music industry, introducing access-based subscription models and revenue transfers that differ from previous systems.”⁴⁰ In just a few short years the new structure of the music industry bears little resemblance to the old system. Lozic writes, “The convergence of the production and distribution system of media content shook the foundations of the “old” music industry.”⁴¹ These foundations were shaken because the power base was realigned with the record labels no longer having monopolistic control. Although this change may have brought upheaval to the industry, it also brought new opportunities to independent artists and by extension, churches. Streaming music takes a significant part of the cost of producing music away from the music creator, in particular the payment of mechanical licenses and the costs associated with printing CDs.

This new situation still leaves churches with challenges on the front end including qualified musical personnel, the cost of studio time, and production expertise. Although much of the cost on the back end has shifted to the streaming services themselves, churches are still

⁴⁰ Johannsson, Werner, Åker, and Goldenzwaig, *Streaming Music*, 1.

⁴¹ Lozic, 180.

responsible for writing musically excellent songs and creating a quality sound recording. These are issues which would need to be factored in. The situation is so new and in such a state of flux that little information exists about the new digital media as it applies to churches. Currently there are new companies forming designed to help the independent artists and labels. These services can potentially help churches not only with distribution but perhaps also such things as marketing and social media exposure. ⁴²

It is a fact that a relatively small number of songwriters produce much of the music sung in churches every Sunday. Unfortunately, there is pressure for these artists to produce hit singles and as a result some songs may be theologically shallow. Bob Kauflin writes, “Songs are de facto theology. They teach us who God is what He's like and how to relate to Him.” ⁴³ Medium-sized churches have an opportunity to fill in the gap. They certainly could produce music for their own congregations but with streaming there are national and global opportunities. Likewise, churches of international origin in North America can create contextualized and indigenous worship music which can be shared globally.

This moment in history is not the first-time churches have created homegrown labels to fill a need for new and relevant worship hymnody. Anna Nekola writes, “The Jesus People Movement, sometimes called the Jesus Revival, of the late 1960s and early 1970s, popularized charismatic theology and practice, especially with many young people who are looking for spiritual experiences and answers to social problems such as war and racism.” ⁴⁴ The church has

⁴² Homewood.

⁴³ Bob Kauflin. *Worship Matters: Leading Others to the Greatness of God*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 92.

⁴⁴ Nekola, 120.

always looked for ways to present the gospel in a way which is relevant to the time at hand.

Many would argue that taking advantage of opportunities create by the new digital media are keeping with approach used by Paul and other apostles of the early church.

Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel that I may share in its blessings. ⁴⁵

Ultimately, the objective of this study is to provide information so that churches desiring to start a recording label have information to make an intelligent decision and to help those already producing worship music to maximize their exposure. Essentially those in missions are in the business of exchanging shared experiences- communicating. The new digital media presents the church with opportunities to fulfill the Great Commission and present a missional approach to worship where missions, discipleship, and worship converge. David Wheeler and Vernon Whaley write, "Our mission to carry the gospel to a loss and dying world is the intent of the Great Commission, but at the heart of the Great Commission is worship of Jesus." ⁴⁶

⁴⁵ 1 Cor. 9:19-23, NIV.

⁴⁶ David Wheeler and Vernon Whaley, *The Great Commission to Worship: Biblical Principles for Worship Based Evangelism*, (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011), 131.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Overview

This research represents a convergence of digital media, music industry and business, church history and theology, and the methods of churches, particularly medium sized churches, with songwriting ministries. The goal is to create a foundation where church leaders considering a songwriting ministry can make an informed decision and churches already producing original worship music can discover strategies to maximize exposure. Much of the literature is less than five years old with many books and articles published within the last two years. This chapter will be divided into three sections: Music Industry and the New Digital Media, Theological Rationale for Songwriting, and The Methodology of Church Worship Music Production. The first section literature covers business aspects of the music industry with an emphasis on changes in distribution. The second looks at such things as the biblical rationale for songwriting and the need for diversity and strong theology. The last section has literature which discusses methods for successful music production.

Music Industry and the New Digital Media

It is the advancement of digital technology which has affected the music industry in such a dramatic and pronounced way. Just like the invention of the automobile was uncondusive for the blacksmith, advances in digital media have not been for the most part positive for the traditional record labels and music industry, although the industry is beginning to recover and adjust. In many ways, the issues which have impacted the traditional record labels over the past twenty years are like those which have impacted magazines, newspapers, and movie theaters. Any media where the model was based upon the sale physical product was affected. For the

independent artist and medium-sized church, the changes have brought new opportunities which did not exist in the traditional model, particularly in the area of distribution.

In his book *The Music Business and Digital Impacts: Innovations and Disruptions in the Music Industries*, Daniel Nordgård discusses the disruption of the music industry as the result of the new digital media. This book was written in response to a series of roundtable meetings he attended with music industry leaders and stakeholders from 2007-2011 when the industry was just beginning to react to the implications of digital streaming. He writes, “The initial ambition with the dissertation that this book builds on, articulated through a very broad and open research question, asking simply: Why do the music industries seem to have such difficulties adapting to a digital, online era?”⁴⁷ His writings underscore the angst endured by the industry leaders, their lack of preparedness for industry disruption, and their loss of control of music distribution. These same elements now provide medium-sized churches the opportunity to release new music.

Although the 2016 *Business Insider* article is short, the prediction made by the late David Bowie in 2002 speaks volumes as to the state of the music industry today. He correctly predicted that music would become like a utility like electricity or running water. He also predicted nonstop touring for many bands.⁴⁸ Bands now rely on live venues and merchandise sales rather than album royalties for much of their income. He did not mention that the new system would be advantageous to independents, but the concept of digital music as a type of utility is an important concept, particularly when discussing the monetization of streaming music.

⁴⁷ Nordgård, 2.

⁴⁸ Nededog.

Patrick Burkart's 2013 article "Music in the Cloud and the Digital Sublime., *Popular Music and Society* summarizes well the conflict between the old music industry and the listening habits of the younger generation. Like Nordgård, Burkart recognizes the traditional music industry's failure to adapt to the new digital media. His observations are from a time when the trends were just beginning to dramatically affect the music industry. Although the article is seven years old, it does outline the major issues resulting from digital streaming such as monetization, copyright disputes, and income disruption. Burkart also uses the term "celestial jukebox" when discussing music in the cloud.⁴⁹

Twenty years ago, few in the academy would have guessed that the new model would inspire an intergenerational conflict between young music fans who were born into a digital lifeworld and the old guard of the incumbent media industries who are technically incompetent and terminally suspicious of disruptive technologies. The cyberlibertarian backlash against the legal and technical regimes supporting the celestial jukebox reminds us how marketers, financiers, music lawyers, technology vendors, and politicians perpetuate the myths of techno-utopianism.⁵⁰

Although the new digital media reset the old paradigm, Josko Lozic demonstrates that the traditional industry is adjusting by focusing on intangible assets. He writes, "Instead of selling physical products, the 21st century strategy implies the sale of copyrights and other forms of intangible assets. Over the past three years, revenues from global music corporations have risen again despite the growing popularity of streaming platforms."⁵¹ The sale and licensing of copyrights underscore the need for independent church labels to consider publishing. Publishing is an important element in the monetization of streaming music. He also notes that the greatest

⁴⁹ Ibid., 393.

⁵⁰ Burkart, 405.

⁵¹ Lozic, 179.

shakeup of the old industry was the resetting of the distribution system. He writes, “The convergence of the production and distribution system of media content shook the foundations of the “old” music industry.”⁵² This statement supports the thesis position that the distribution of streaming music is perhaps the greatest opportunity for the music production of medium-sized churches because it provides worldwide access.

The book, *Streaming Music*, is a collaborative effort from three authors who teach at Södertörn University in Sweden and one who researches at both Södertörn and Moscow State University. These researchers have a firsthand view of streaming probably because Spotify is a Swedish company. This book is critical to the thesis because it examines several elements associated with the streaming phenomenon including monetization, technical aspects, and perhaps most importantly, the social implications of streaming music and how it affects interactive and listening behavior. For example, contributing author Sofia Johansson notes that streaming music can be tailored to a listener’s expectations. She writes, “While the listener/user involvement in streaming services can vary greatly, streaming is ultimately a user-generated experience, where the format invites users to actively take part in shaping their experiences”⁵³ This statement is significant because it not only demonstrates listener expectations, but also predicts an inevitable decline in terrestrial (AM/FM) radio.

Much like Josko Lozic’s observations, *Streaming Music* also discusses a reinvention of the traditional music industry. Contributors Johannsson and Werner note that the traditional industry is moving towards greater control of publishing rights. Most of the mega-church labels

⁵² Ibid., 180.

⁵³ Johansson, *Streaming Music*, 30.

such as Hillsong or Bethel Music have publishing companies and own either all or a part of the publishing rights of songs they produce. This is an option which could also be utilized by medium-sized churches which produce original music.

“Perceived by some commentators as a welcome disruption to a once all-powerful group of large corporations, which could give artists and consumers greater control (Lessig 2008), while lamented by others as a threat to the very core of music production, Rogers (2013), however, counters ideas of a sharp decline in the music industry as a whole. Drawing on interviews with music industry personnel, he provides an account of a more complex reconfiguration, exemplifying for instance how a global decline in record sales can be juxtaposed by a revival of music publishing and the live sector in a digital era, and thus arguing against earlier overall depictions of a singular industry in decline (cf. Arditi 2012, Rogers and Preston 2016).”⁵⁴

Contributor Patrik Åker notes the worldwide impact of Spotify. He writes, “In 2008, Spotify began operating in Sweden and five other countries. Less than a decade later, the streaming service was accessible in 60 countries and had over 100 million users – a success that has contributed to altering business models of the music industry as much as it has rendered streaming an important means of accessing music.”⁵⁵ This fact has a direct impact upon songwriting ministries seeking worldwide exposure and helps put forth the argument that a greater diversity of contextualized songs or songs in an indigenous language are needed; moreover, churches producing this music would have a stable platform.

“Promotional Ubiquitous Musics: New Identities and Emerging Markets in the Digitalizing Music Industry” is a PhD dissertation written by Leslie Meier in 2013. In terms of

⁵⁴ Johannsson and Werner, *Streaming Music*, 13.

⁵⁵ Åker, *Streaming Music*, 81.

digital advances, a document written seven years ago could be considered by some as ancient history but Meier's dissertation was well researched and reflects an understanding of the digitalization and marketing of modern music. Her research accurately demonstrates the advantage the new digital media has given the independent artist. She is currently a lecturer at the University of Leeds with interests in such things as the music industry and digital media.⁵⁶ Additionally, she has authored and co-authored several peer reviewed publications.

One of the items she mentions is the greater role of publishing in the digital age. This is because there has been a move away from selling physical product to selling the license itself. She notes that publishers have always been in the business of "exploiting copyrights" as opposed to the selling of physical product.⁵⁷ Her statement refers more to the issuing of synchronization (synch) rights for TV and movies by publishers but with the passing of the Music Modernization Act of 2018 underscores the need for publishers to consider becoming part of the music publishing business.

Digital Music News is an internet newspaper with daily updates pertaining to changes in digital music and media. Many of its writers and contributors are well-known stakeholders in the digital music age. It offers daily music news, but its focus is on issues related to digital streaming and synchronization, particularly copyright. The website is a consistent place for music industry statistics and data. It also offers advice and services for musicians, artists, and songwriters.

⁵⁶ Leslie Meier, School of Media and Communication, University Links, University of Leeds, accessed September 20, 2020, <https://ahc.leeds.ac.uk/media/staff/363/dr-leslie-meier>.

⁵⁷ Meier, 129.

Donald Passman is an entertainment lawyer whose bestselling book, *All You Need to Know about the Music Business* is considered a how to for many entering the business. The book itself is written in a humorous tongue and cheek manner; however, its contents are used by artists and songwriters around the world. Additionally, it is a commonly used textbook for many university music business classes. Originally published in 1991, it is currently in its 10th edition released in 2019. Of special note is Passman's information on the Music Modernization Act (MMA) of 2018, a law passed by congress which clarifies copyright and creates a system of royalty payments from streaming music. Passman writes, "The MMA solves the pending and unmatched problem by setting up something called the Mechanical License Collective (MLC.) This new organization, which the DSPS (digital service providers) will find, has the authority to collect all the mechanical rights money from the DSPS."⁵⁸ The Passman book is not only important to this thesis, but it would also be a "must read" for churches and worship pastors entering the area of music production.

Theological Rationale for Songwriting

As stated in chapter one, the creation of worship songs and hymnody is not only part of rich church history and tradition, but also biblical. Musical worship not only has a role in individual and corporate praise, it also can be used as a means of teaching theology and discipleship. For the Christian, singing in corporate worship is not an option according to the writings of Paul the Apostle. The goal of this part of the literature review is to help make the argument that there is a need for a greater diversity of hymnody, and medium-sized churches can play a role in bringing new worship music to the table.

⁵⁸ Passman, 240.

Megan Fowler's September article "Why Chris Tomlin Still Dominates Both Radio and Sunday Morning" from *Christianity Today* underscores the need for greater diversity of worship songwriting. Fowler writes, "Today's most-sung worship anthems come from relatively few songwriters—half are by top hitmakers (sic) Tomlin, Hillsong, Bethel Music, and Matt Redman."⁵⁹ She argues that the worship leaders receive pressure to play radio hits. She adds, "If a song is going up the charts, there's pressure on the worship leader to play that song," said John J. Thompson, who worked with Christian artists as creative director for Capitol CMG Publishing and now runs the website truetunes.com.⁶⁰ In discussing the hymn writing traditions of Isaac Watts or and the Wesley brothers she notes, "Tomlin, Redman, and the crews from Hillsong and Bethel Music have a much different context driving their compositions than their hymn-writing predecessors—especially as the constraints of radio play influence which songs dominate Sunday morning set lists."⁶¹

This article along with data from CCLI is critical to the premise of this thesis because it identifies the issue that the constraints of radio and playlists drive the type of songs composed. The sheer volume of licenses granted, songs streamed, and music synched translates into millions of dollars' worth of revenue. A smaller church producing music would not have these kinds of concerns. Its context would be different. A megachurch such as Hillsong or Bethel has an enormous financial need with millions of dollars required to just to continue basic operations. Without the financial pressure, a medium-sized church can produce music which focuses on

⁵⁹ Fowler, *Christianity Today*.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

themes which may not be popular. Fowler observes that topically, popular worship songs may be shallow. She writes, “Thematically, the songs tend to stay in the realm of praise and adoration without venturing too far into more complex themes like confession, doubt, and suffering.”⁶² Fowler’s article also discusses the idea that cultural and racial diversity is missing from popular worship songs. This idea also pushes forth the argument that smaller, music producing churches can assist in the area of contextualized worship music.

Anna Nekola’s article “‘I’ll Take You There’: The Promise of Transformation in the Marketing of Worship Media in US Christian Music Magazines” helps to demonstrate how marketing can drive the type of music produced by the worship music industry and sung by many congregations every week. She especially focuses on the marketing of transcendence, the idea that a person can be taken to another place mentally or emotionally by music. Her ideas help underscore the role of marketing in Christian music. She also discusses how the approach to corporate worship music changed with Maranatha and Vineyard labels of the 1970s and 80s. Nekola observes, “Christian popular music has often been discussed positively as a tool for evangelism, or as a positive clean entertainment alternative to secular popular musics (sic), but it is important to note that, for many, individualized listening is an engaged spiritual experience that helps them maintain and even strengthen their faith.”⁶³ Her article furthers the idea that the types of songs marketed in magazines have a specific objective of personal transcendence through sound. Logically, the pursuit of one aspect of individual or corporate worship through

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Anna Nekola, “‘I’ll Take you There’: The Promise of Transformation in the Marketing of Worship Media in US Christian Music Magazines, in *Christian Congregational Music: Performance, Identity, and Experience*, ed. Monique Ingalls, Carolyn Landau, and Tom Wagner, (New York: Routledge, 2016), 123.

marketing might be at the expense of others. This helps to make the case that medium-sized church music publishing is needed for the sake of diversity.

Wen Regan's dissertation "A Beautiful Noise: A History of Contemporary Worship Music in Modern America" provides a concise history of music and the Jesus movement of the late 1960s and early 70s. There are similarities between the need for new generational worship music during the early 1970s and the need for diverse hymnody today. Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa, California started a church label because there was a need for new worship music and hymnody for the new converts. Regan writes, "While Smith founded Maranatha as a tool for artist support, the Calvary Chapel musicians saw something else. 'For the artists,' Fromm recalled, 'it was something entirely different. They saw the company simply as a tool for evangelism. Because of the subcultural values they brought with them, they simply never thought of self-support, only supporting the [Christian] vision.' In the end, Maranatha was both, as it brought in a profit for the musicians and established a media company that could record and distribute the gospel in musical form."⁶⁴

Regan's work shows that music from the Jesus movement, particularly from the Maranatha label, had problems with distribution. He notes that in the very beginning, albums were sold out of the back of a car. There was not yet a system of Christian record stores and traditional Christian bookstores refused to sell the new genre of music. He writes, "Most of their sales were via mail order, scholar Bill Romanowski noted, as the new-fangled contemporary Christian music coming out of Southern California was still boycotted by most respectable Christian bookstores at the time."⁶⁵ These were the beginnings of the Contemporary Christian

⁶⁴ Regan, 177.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 178.

Music (CCM.) In many ways, the opportunities for smaller churches to produce and market its own work may be greater than that of Jesus People because of the unparalleled access to worldwide distribution through the new digital media.

Eric Metaxes and Stephen Marini are significant because they discuss the importance of music and theology in church history. Metaxes discusses Martin Luther while Marini covers the tradition of theology on American and English hymnody. It is important to keep in mind that the idea of theology in music was a foreign concept before the Protestant Reformation because the Roman Catholic mass was performed in Latin. Theology in music may have been a part of the ancient church but it certainly was not an aspect of Roman Catholic Church practices where the clergy, who could understand Latin, were spiritual intermediaries for the uneducated peasant masses. The Renaissance and the invention of the printing press brought about a desire for greater individualistic control and responsibility. It was this mindset which helped usher in the great Protestant Reformation.

Metaxes maintains that by taking down the wall between the secular and the sacred, Luther created a scenario where new songs and hymns could be written so that things preached in the pulpit could be reinforced through musical forms.⁶⁶ This attitude about music and arts permeated much of the Reformation and became a philosophical rationale for excellence in church music. Marini discusses the tradition of evangelical hymns in the early American experience and how it was assumed that hymns should have a theological function. In researching popular hymnbooks of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Marini observes that early Americans understood hymnody to be “a function of doctrinal teaching and church

⁶⁶ Metaxes, 376.

practice.”⁶⁷ These authors help to perpetuate the concept that theology in modern worship should be more than an afterthought. It should be thoughtful and deliberate.

John Witvliet is another author who helps to underscore the need for theology in music. Although he comes from a reformed background, his message about worship and biblical pattern is one that all Christians should consider. He believes that many aspects of traditional worship have been thrown out in the name of evangelism and that Christians are sometimes denied a chance to grow because the hymn topic is too narrow or may be written for popularity’s sake. He maintains that there should be a discussion about how songs are written and chosen for the modern worship service. There must be an aspect of edification for the local body. He believes it is the responsibility of the pastors and worship leaders, to ensure that their flock is nourished. This is the reason he uses a food metaphor. He writes, “As worship leaders, we have the important and terrifying task of placing words of prayer on people's lips.”⁶⁸ Smaller, medium-sized churches have the opportunity to fill in the theological and doctrinal gaps which may be left by popular worship music.

Hymns serve the purposes of Christian corporate worship. Though they have valued for personal devotional use, for humming on the streets, for serving as the basis for elaborate compositions for choir and organ, their primary purpose is to allow a gathered community to thank God, confession, ask for divine intervention, and express hope for the coming Kingdom of God. Music is one means of expression, like speech or dance, by which people accomplish certain actions.⁶⁹

Bob Kauflin’s book *Worship Matters: Leading Others to the Greatness of God* is considered by many to be a how to for modern worship. His book not only discusses the importance of using

⁶⁷ Marini, 131.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 282.

⁶⁹ Witvliet, 259.

music and worship to teach theology, it also helps ground the worship leader on thoughtful, common sense theology. It is most definitely a must have for a person seeking a theology, philosophy, and methodology of worship. Perhaps the most significant quote is one Kauflin borrows from Canadian theologian Gordon Fee. *Show me a church's songs and I'll show you their theology.*⁷⁰

Tom Wagner is an ethnomusicologist from the UK who has authored and edited several books covering the modern worship culture. His 2019 book *Music, Branding, and Consumer Culture in Church: Hillsong in Focus* looks at many aspects of the Hillsong phenomena. Hillsong is a template for any church wishing to produce and publish original worship music. Wagoner discusses its humble beginnings in the mid-1970s, to its “Shout to the Lord” release in 1993 which catapulted Hillsong to international fame, to its worldwide influence today. In describing the composition of “Shout to the Lord” Wagoner reveals a formula of sorts which has helped to guide the music of Hillsong. He writes, “This model of biblically grounded lyrics, formal balance, and relative technical simplicity has come to define Hillsong’s music and is one of the primary reasons for its success with congregations around the world.”⁷¹

There is much debate among theologians about the theological generality of popular modern praise and worship music. The ecumenical approach of popular Christian songwriters may leave out denominational doctrinal concepts such as eternal salvation for the Southern Baptists or divine healing for Pentecostals. Theologian Nelson Cowan of Boston University has written an article analyzing the theology of Hillsong’s music. He notes that as Hillsong has moved from local to global the theology has become more generalized. The leaders of Hillsong

⁷⁰ Kauflin, 101.

⁷¹ Wagner, 61.

believe that they have a responsibility to the broader church and have purposely chosen theological themes- a generalist theological foundation- which speaks to a wider Christian audience.⁷² Cowan's article does not criticize Hillsong for its generalized theological emphasis; however, it does show that a large church-based label will have different priorities because of the scope of the ministry. This fact helps to make the case that there is a potential niche or even need for original worship music which covers theological or denominational doctrine underrepresented in the worship music industry.

The 2014 thesis by pastor, songwriter, and arranger Travis Douchette expressed a need for an evangelical songwriting manual. Through his analysis and research, Douchette concluded that a songwriting manual focusing on such things as song form, style, and diversity was needed.⁷³ The thesis itself was based around key interviews with several influential worship leaders such as Paul Balouche and Bob Kauflin. From his research there seemed to be a consensus of certain themes, particularly in the area of theological accuracy. Douchette observes that "when analyzing the content of currently available resources on songwriting, very few resources spend little, if any time at all, addressing the theological considerations any congregational songwriter needs to soberly consider as they write for the church."⁷⁴

Although his research points to a need for an evangelical songwriting manual, it also illuminates the need for a diversity of songs which are theologically relevant. Several places in the thesis point towards a localization of songs where songwriters can compose songs closer to

⁷² Nelson Cowan, "Heaven and Earth Collide: Hillsong Music's Evolving Theological Emphases," *Pneuma* 39 (2017): 93.

⁷³ Travis Douchette, "An Analysis of the Need for a Congregational Songwriting Manual for the Evangelical Community," (D Min Thesis, Liberty University, Lynchburg, 2014), 80, Scholars Crossing, Liberty University.

⁷⁴ Douchette, 53.

the mission of the local church community. Through the new digital media these songs could be impactful well outside the parameters of a medium-sized church.

Roberta R. King is a leader in ethnomusicology and in particular, ethnodoxology. Like many in the area missions and arts, King espouses the idea of critical contextualization. In a missional context, critical contextualization is presenting the gospel in such a way that it can be absorbed by the indigenous person at a cultural level without the message becoming compromised in the process. Because internet access is becoming a necessity around the world, there is greater opportunity for churches in North America to create music in a specific language and vernacular and stream it worldwide. King's ideas stress and promote the importance of contextualized music and arts. She believes that in our haste to bring the gospel to the entire world we must also work to communicate at the deeper levels of a people group's worldview.⁷⁵ Her vision extends past music to such things as visual art, drama, and dance.

Missionary and anthropologist Paul Heibert coined the term critical contextualization in describing the process of presenting the gospel in a culturally relevant manner that does not compromise scripture or the gospel message. His ideas are foundational in the field of missions and ethnodoxology.

Maria M. Chow's early 1990s research of Chinese churches in America focused on issues related to hymnody, relationships, and negotiation among Chinese immigrant churches throughout the United States. Born in Hong Kong, Chow has extensively researched such things as Lutheran hymnody in Hong Kong and music's impact on Chinese national self-identity.⁷⁶ Her

⁷⁵ King, 38-39.

⁷⁶ Maria M. Chow, "Reflection on the Musical Diversity of Chinese Churches," *Music in American Religious Experience*, ed. Philip Bohlman, Edith Blumhofer, and Maria Chow (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), xv-xvi.

explanation of challenges in composing hymns and songs in Cantonese is pertinent to this thesis because it demonstrates the need for ethnic diversity in composing worship music. Music composed in one language does not always translate easily into another. Chow's research and article demonstrates the need for contextualized hymns and music for Chinese Christian worshippers, and by implication, believers from around the world.

Author Vernon Whaley is considered a leading expert in the topic of worship. He is the founder of the Worship Studies program at Liberty University and has authored several books on the subject. Perhaps his greatest achievement has been communicating the theology, philosophy, and methodology of worship. Many do not realize that there has in the past been conflict over worship versus evangelism with many theologians and church leaders believing that authentic worship and even discipleship has suffered in the name of evangelism. In discussing the revivalist traditions of America John Witvliet writes, "Seeker services, market analysis, popular music, informational preaching- these and many other current practices appear to be modern-day heirs to the revival tradition. Today's arguments for and against praise choruses recapitulate populist themes heard time and time again in the nineteenth century, wave after wave of homiletical theory proposes to solve the problem of engaging America's fickle audience."⁷⁷ Witvliet and many others believe that authentic worship can get lost in the sometimes-consumeristic nature of American evangelism.

In several of his books and lectures, Whaley argues that worship is obedience and doing what God wills or clearly commands is how believers honor God.⁷⁸ Because the Great Commission was a command from Christ, he argues that the act of evangelism is obedience

⁷⁷ Witvliet, 175.

⁷⁸ Whaley, 12.

which would make it a form of worship. Therefore, using available technology as a means of sharing the gospel would be a form of worship. This would be a significant reason for starting a songwriting ministry.

The Methodology of Church Worship Music Production

Carson Li is a worship leader at Koinonia Evangelical Church in Vancouver, British Columbia. Through consultation with his pastor, Li started a songwriting ministry as part of his master's level project at Liberty University. His project consisted of an EP of original worship songs composed, recorded, mastered, and released at his church and a written thesis. The thesis documents the entire process of song production from the initial concept to projected expenses and time investment to completion. Li admittedly is not a professional producer and used the thesis process as a learning opportunity. His approach is significant because it very well might the way any medium-sized church might approach its own recording project.

The approach to this EP will be more Do-It Yourself (DIY) and exploratory than industry-standard professional. This means that most of the arrangement, performing, recording, and production will be done “in-house” by myself or my team. The reason for this is because that will maximize my learning in this project. For example, rather than hiring a professional producer to produce these songs, which means I will not learn about how that production process might work, I will learn on the go and produce the tracks myself. This might not result in the highest quality product, but it will surely allow me to learn what to listen for and how to listen in the production stage.⁷⁹

Li's work is significant to the thesis for several reasons. First, it outlines a procedure for producing a worship EP. Li's process could be duplicated in any church wishing to start a songwriting ministry. Second, Li describes and promotes a theological sound formation of worship. He writes, “In this songwriting journey, then, I have placed heavy emphasis on the

⁷⁹ Li, 5.

lyrics and the theology that it communicates. I strive to write lyrics that are theologically sound and scripture-based.”⁸⁰ Without a strong sense of mission and theology there is little reason to have a songwriting ministry. Third, Li is focused on writing songs which can easily be sung by a congregation. Finally, Li has a goal of creating contextualized worship. His church has a Cantonese congregation. His plan is to compose songs in English and Cantonese. Because he plans on publishing these songs on streaming platforms like Spotify and YouTube, these songs will be available for international consumption.⁸¹

Li’s thesis mentions the one track at a time approach he took to recording. He noted that his church had a room treated for sound with previously purchased equipment.⁸² This approach is more time consuming and some would argue does not allow as much for a more organic creative process, but for churches beginning the songwriting process, may be the best strategy. For many churches, the cost of equipment and space may be the greatest hurdle for establishing a songwriting ministry. Some churches may designate a room as a recording space, but others may want to use the sanctuary platform to record. Traditionally studios have sought for acoustically dead spaces for recording, but some engineers insist that characteristics of certain rooms create a type of uniqueness.

The article “Acoustics for the Church Studio” from online magazine *Technologies for Worship* discusses opportunities and challenges for using sanctuaries for recording. The author, whose name is not listed, notes that sanctuaries have been excellent recording studios over the

⁸⁰ Ibid., 11.

⁸¹ Ibid., 7.

⁸² Ibid., 7.

years writing, “If the sanctuary sounds good, so will the recording.”⁸³ The article itself notes potential issues of consistency when using a room built for reverberating acoustics. This information might be critical for a church weighing the options of adding on space for recording, remodeling existing rooms, or making the sanctuary itself a recording space.

Because streaming music is not merchandised in a store, there are many creative options for marketing songs and albums. For many the gateway to hearing new music is through social media. A simple click on a Twitter or Facebook link can be the vehicle which transmits new music. There is an expectation that any entity desiring exposure must use social media to connect to the general public. The article by researcher and professor Young-Joo Lee researches the use of Facebook in modern churches. Her quantitative study identifies trends of churches which use Facebook and social media successfully. There are many facts and trends that Lee uncovers which might be utilized by churches seeking to maximize exposure of produced music.

Lee notes that the younger generation has a greater comfort level with digital media than the groups preceding them. She writes, “Members of the younger generation have spent their entire lives in digital environment and are more likely to be active users of and contributors to information technology than other generation cohorts.”⁸⁴ This statement speaks not only to the type of people who would be more apt to consume streaming music, but it also might help a church with older members, or an older target audience decide if it wants to produce and manufacture CDs.

Social media may be where new listeners discover original worship music. Lee notes that larger churches may have personnel dedicated to managing and maximizing social media. She

⁸³ “Acoustics for the Church Studio,” *Technologies for Worship*, February 24, 2014, accessed September 14, 2020, <http://tfwm.com/acoustics-for-the-church-studio/#>.

⁸⁴ Lee, 385.

writes that social media platforms “require staff who are responsible for maintaining, monitoring, and updating the social media.”⁸⁵ She even suggests that smaller churches seek denominational assistance to hire staff for the purpose of managing social media.⁸⁶ For many churches seeking to create a songwriting ministry, Lee’s research might provide valuable information as the leadership considers startup costs. For churches already producing music, her article might provide insight as to the success level of their outreach. Even if a church has no plans to start a songwriting ministry, social media is something that should be taken seriously. Perhaps nothing has underscored the need for social media church connectivity that the pandemic of 2020. For most churches social media was the link which kept the church community together. Many churches have increased their digital presence because of COVID-19 and there may be a group of people who will never again attend a physical church and participate completely online. As church leaders take social media more seriously, there may be no better time in history for a church to produce original worship music than the present.

Perhaps no artist understands and has utilized the power of the new digital media more than Chancelor Bennet or “Chance the Rapper.” Chance the Rapper is the first artist to win a Grammy with streaming only- no physical product.⁸⁷ His Grammy win was in 2017, the same year the article "A ‘Chance’ of Success: The Influence of Subcultural Capital on the Commercial Success of Chance the Rapper" was written. The article was written and researched by a professor and his students from Belmont University in Nashville. Chance the Rapper’s success and subsequent Grammy nominations was a shock to the music industry because it happened with no support from

⁸⁵ Ibid., 387.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 394.

⁸⁷ “Chancelor Bennet,” Grammy.com, accessed September 11, 2020, <https://www.grammy.com/grammys/artists/chancelor-bennett/19614>.

any of the major labels. The biography and data of the article is significant because both demonstrate a path of success for independent artists and labels.

This journal article is significant to the thesis on several levels because it speaks not only to changes in the industry, but also to the methodology of successful independent artistry. The article itself combines music business, technology, and ethnomusicological concepts to not only describe Chance's musical success but also his broader connection to his audience. In many ways the article adds credibility to the premise that the new digital media provides opportunities to independent artists and by extension, churches. The article also suggests that the listening habits of the younger generation are far different than that of their parents. It underscores the importance of playlists- or in the case of Chance the Rapper, "mixtapes"- over the traditional ten song album.⁸⁸ Interestingly, the authors use similar language as author Daniel Nordgård in describing Chance the Rapper's approach to music production and marketing disruptive. They write, "His decision to release music not only for free but exclusively on digital streaming platforms caused a notable disruption in the traditional music industry distribution model."⁸⁹

The recent prominence of online music streaming has caused noticeable changes in how music is discovered and how artists reach their fans (IFPI 2016). Streaming platforms such as Spotify, Apple Music, Sound-Cloud, and Pandora have substantially increased the accessibility of music with little to no distribution costs to artists and record labels (TuneCore2017). Furthermore, the internet, paired with recent technological innovations, allows for anyone to create, record, and distribute music online without the need for labels or professional studios (Jensen 2013, 8). Therefore, independent or "do-it-yourself" (DIY) artists are more prominent than ever (Jensen 2013, 13).⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Best, Braile, Falvey, Ross, Rotunno, Schreiber, 38.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 32.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 31-32.

Another significant point of the article is the concept of “subcultural capital.” This is a term which describes people attaining status in a subcultural domain by differentiating from the mainstream.⁹¹ Although the detailed exploration of this concept may be outside the scope of this thesis, churches desiring greater ministry and social impact should become familiar with anthropological ideas of social constructs and ethnomusicological concepts of musical meaning. Without the access to mass media major labels can provide, churches and independent artists must find unique and non-traditional ways of marketing new music. This article provides ideas a church could use to maximize success, and, in many ways, Carson Li has used some of the same strategies of Chance the Rapper, especially in the recording of the music itself. If Chance the Rapper was able to bring several elements together as an individual to create Grammy winning success, imagine what a medium sized church with a sense of holy purpose and well written mission statement could accomplish.

The new digital media along with the advent of streaming has not only given churches and independents production opportunities, it has also brought about new services once only available for labeled artists. The most obvious service is that of the digital distributors. Many of these distributors started as independent companies specializing in burning CDs but as streaming music became the norm these companies soon branched out as digital distributors. Ben Homewood’s article “Service Stations” from the UK publication *Music Week* discusses new opportunities available to independent artists. Homewood notes that the various companies offer a range of services⁹² which focus on things from distribution and sales to social media and branding. Homewood writes, “Every 'department' of a record label is now available as a

⁹¹ Ibid., 32.

⁹² Homewood, 2.

standalone entity allowing repertoire owners to get the best teams in each of these segments and put them together as and when needed.”

This article indicates the degree to which the role of the traditional industry has shifted with independents having the opportunity to utilize services which can maximize exposure and reach. Much in the same way a cottage industry developed because of smartphones, independent businesses have formed to assist independent labels. Once again, these items tie to distribution because original music on streaming platforms connects with potential listeners virtually rather than physically. The implications of these services upon individual church songwriting ministries are apparent and there are businesses right now dedicated to serve Christian artists and labels. Christian Music Marketing.com is a website dedicated to helping Christian ministries and particularly artists, achieve greater online traction. The site especially works at pitching songs to playlists. In many ways the streaming playlist is taking the place of terrestrial radio. Omarimc.com works with many different genres. Its specialty is helping artists gain success on specific platforms like Spotify or YouTube. Additionally, the site has artist management and creative support. There are several other sites with similar services in the United States and the UK.

For a church producing its own worship music it may be advantageous to become a music publisher. This would allow the church to have an ownership role with the songwriters. The laws in the United States primarily benefit the songwriter and publisher. Without publishing rights, a church might only have ownership of the master recording and receive no mechanical or performance royalty. Just like there are service organizations for music sales, there are also publishing administration companies which would handle the publishing admin only and allow the church to retain publishing rights. The 2017 article from Steve Harvey in the online tech

magazine *Pro Sound News* discusses the need for artists to become producers and seek publishing revenue noting that publishing revenue grew twenty percent from 2014 to 2016.⁹³

Interestingly, the article itself describes a need for a song database so that mechanical royalties can be paid. This problem was corrected, at least theoretically, by the Music Modernization Act of 2018 which created a separate company to manage a song database. This article underscores the idea that a church which produces original music should consider becoming a publishing company. Much of the literature speaks about the importance of copyright ownership in the new digital age. Copyright ownership has always been important but with the disruption of the music industry and the move away from the sale of physical product like vinyl or CD where album royalties suffered greatly, the ownership of the song itself is even more critical. It should be noted that many of the major church labels have their own publishing companies. Although the Ben Homewood article does not specifically mention publishing administration companies, it does promote the idea that companies have been established for helping the independent artist or a church assume a role once given to other stakeholders in the music industry.

⁹³ Steve Harvey, "As Production Music Expands, So Do Possibilities," *Pro Sound News* 39, no. 12 (December 2017): 20, <https://search-ebshost.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&AN=130763142&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

Chapter 3: Methods

Introduction

This chapter covers the research method and objectives. The thesis itself is qualitative with interviews. The reason for the need for interviews is a lack of literature dealing specifically with how churches are producing original worship music and what types of processes and methods are being employed. As previously stated, church music labels are not new and there have been several influential church labels over the years including Maranatha, Vineyard, and Hillsong. It is the entrance of the new digital media and disruption of the traditional music industry which presents the opportunity for churches to become independent labels and publishers. The researcher believes that the best way to discover how churches are reacting to this new situation is to interview worship leaders or other qualified personnel who are taking the producer's role in a church songwriting ministry. Chapter three includes method of discovery, interview questions, and question categories.

Method of Discovery: Recruitment and Consent

Because the thesis is a qualitative study there was no need for randomized recruitment. The goal of the interviews is informational not statistical. Based upon the professional knowledge of independent music production it was the researcher's opinion that every church music producer will have certain similarities and differences and discovering and recruiting random worship producers for the sake of randomness alone was not necessary. The researcher is an established musician in the Northeast Oklahoma area and has many musical and professional connections within the church and worship community; therefore, it was decided to use social

media, Facebook, to make initial contact. This early stage of recruitment was posted on the researcher's "wall" and asked for participants directly or referrals.

Participants who agreed to participate in the interview were sent a recruitment letter and consent form attached to the Facebook messenger or an email if they did not use messenger. Participants needed two qualifications. First, they had to be at least 18 years old, and second, they had to have a leadership role in a church actively producing original worship or Christian music. They needed to be willing to participate in an interview lasting at least 20 minutes. It was determined by the committee that ten participants would be necessary to get a wide range of perspective and information; however, the actual number of participants interviewed were five. The nature of the questions dealt with processes, methods, and procedures and was not of a personal nature. (See Appendix A) Participants could choose to have their actual names used in the study or be given pseudonyms. For the sake of confidentiality none of the churches were mentioned by name with the exception of Carson Li's church. He had mentioned its name several times in his master's thesis which was not only had public access but was also used in the literature review.

The risks in the study were very low and listed in the consent form as equal to what might occur in everyday life. There was no monetary compensation with interviews conducted on a strictly voluntary basis. The participants had the option of not answering a question for any reason. Additionally, if a participant decided to drop out of the study, all the data would be destroyed and not included in the study. Finally, all participants had the option of answering the interview questions online as opposed to a live interview.

The greatest area of consent lies in audio recording of the phone conversation. All participants were required to give permission for the interview to be recorded digitally and each participant was given a pseudonym. All digital recordings will be secured on password protected computer hard drive and saved for at least three years. There is chance that the data may be used for future studies and this possibility was listed on the consent form.

The Interview Questions

The purpose of the interview questions was to gather information missing from literature. Like many other technological advancements, changes in the way music is distributed and consumed is so recent that that many stakeholders have not has the opportunity to catch-up. In describing the approach to music industry disruptions caused in large part by the new digital media, author Daniel Nordgård writes that the industry quest for a new business model seems “gridlocked.”⁹⁴ The research has focused on changes and disruptions in the industry, the need for worship songs with greater diversity, and methodology of churches currently producing original worship music. The questions themselves focus on areas of interest based upon the larger focus of the paper. The goal of the questions is twofold. One, to reinforce the premise put forth by the hypotheses, and two, to provide information that might be helpful to churches considering creating a songwriting ministry, and help churches already producing worship music develop strategies for success. These areas of interest are mission and ministry objectives, producer’s role, songwriting process, recording facilities and methods, distribution and business, and sector services and publishing.

⁹⁴ Nordgård, 60.

Areas of Interest

Mission and Ministry Objectives

For a church, the mission provides the guiding principles for a songwriting and worship music production ministry. A church or worship team wanting to produce and publish songs must have a clear sense of divine mission and purpose. In the case of Carson Li, it was a prayer meeting with his pastor which nudged him in the direction of starting a songwriting ministry. A series of providential events occurred which convinced Li and his pastor that they should start a songwriting ministry. Li writes, “It seems that God has moved us four leaders to write worship songs for the church at the same time. When I realized that this was happening, my pastor and I prayed and prepared for the possibility of forming a songwriting team.”⁹⁵ Li’s efforts are guided not only by a sense of church mission but also a set of guiding principles.

Two of the questions deal with goals of the production ministry and target audience. The target audience may be the immediate congregation, or it may be more global. Hillsong is an example of a songwriting church where the emphasis has moved from local to global. In describing this trend Nelson Cowan writes, “Hillsong’s increasingly global presence plays the most prominent role.”⁹⁶ The objectives of a worship production ministry should be deliberate and spelled out. They should reflect the mission of the church and the leadership of the senior pastor. The interview process should help define this important step.

⁹⁵ Li, 4.

⁹⁶ Cowan, 92.

Producer's Role

Production may be a team process, but it usually requires one person in a leadership role to act as a producer. This may fall upon the worship pastor or there may be a key person in the church that has production experience. In some instances, the church may have to hire someone to produce. Medium-sized churches may not have the resources to hire or “farm out” the work; however, one of the benefits of the new technology is its accessibility by novice sound engineers. The traditional producer would oversee delivering the project within budget, but in a church setting, there may be someone else who has that role. In fact, there is a very good chance that every church worship label may have its own unique system which has very little resemblance the studios of Nashville or Los Angeles.

Traditionally, a record producer combines the role of director and producer in the motion picture field. He or She is responsible for bringing the creative product into tangible form (a recording), which means (a) being responsible for maximizing the creative process (finding and selecting songs, deciding on arrangements, getting the right vocal sound, etc.), and (b) administering the whole project, such as booking studios, hiring musicians, staying within a budget, filing union reports, etc.⁹⁷

Questions about the producer's role at a church label would be useful not only to churches considering starting a songwriting ministry but also those who may be discovering ways to streamline or improve their current production methods. The information could also have an impact on how churches budget particularly if a church songwriting team records on site then sends the recorded files to be mixed and mastered at another location. These are issues that any church producing regularly faces or will have to deal with at some time.

⁹⁷ Passman, 125.

Songwriting Process

Perhaps the most nebulous and misunderstood part of the production process is the composing of songs. There are many approaches to songwriting ranging from individual efforts to writing teams. For example, Hillsong has a policy of considering any song from the worship team but in reality, most songs come from a small core of worship leaders on salary.

Ethnomusicologist and researcher Tom Wagner, the aforementioned scholar who has performed extensive research on the Hillsong phenomenon, discusses how the church's global mission and branding affects the songwriting process. Regardless of one's opinion about the monolithic power of a megachurch such as Hillsong, Wagner's point does underscore the importance of the aggregation of church mission with the songwriting ministry and the production of worship songs. Interview questions about the songwriting process are intended to show how the church mission intersects with the creation and production of original worship songs as well as how the actual process takes place.

Hillsong's main songwriters are full-time worship pastors who draw a salary from the church. In contrast to most worship team members, who are volunteers and therefore spend the majority of their time occupied with other pursuits, Hillsong's core songwriting team has the time and institutional financial support to devote to writing songs for their church. They are also part of Hillsong's 'inner circle' and are therefore more intimately familiar with the church's vision at any given time. A strong brand is fluid, changing concomitantly with an organization as it evolves, and therefore the church's music needs to reflect that (Riches and Wagner 2012). From a branding perspective, then, it benefits Hillsong to maintain a core of songwriters who are deeply involved in the "life of the church." ⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Wagner, 133.

Recording Facilities and Methods

For many churches, the issue of facilities (equipment, instruments, recording space) may be the largest obstacle to starting a songwriting ministry. Many independent artists begin with a simple home studio. These days there are many resources online which can be purchased such as drum loops. Some recording programs such as Apple's Garage Band have all instruments and many loops as part of the app purchase. Keep in mind that Chance the Rapper's first mixtape was recorded at a free access recording studio in Chicago.⁹⁹ Carson Li took a similar approach to his first worship CD essentially working from computer as he essentially learned on the fly. His exception was recording the drums which were done in a studio. Even then, Li used the experience of recording drums at a professional studio as an opportunity to learn drum recording techniques.¹⁰⁰ It is the opinion of the researcher that Li's story may not be unique in that many church recording ministries have started small with a producer learning as he or she leads through the process of production.

Part of the interviews is to discover what church production teams are using for recording spaces. Some churches may use the actual sanctuary while others use converted rooms. A church with deeper resources may remodel a part of the building. Each choice affects how the recording will take place. Also, the choice of space will determine album concepts. If a church worship producer desires to record as a band to get a sound associated with a live venue, a larger space will be necessary where drums, amplifiers, vocals, and other instruments can be isolated from each other. This concept will require many potentially overlooked things like instrument and

⁹⁹Best, Braile, Falvey, Ross, Rotunno, and Schreiber 38.

¹⁰⁰ Li, 7.

microphone cables, internal PA/headset system, and a probably a cable distribution system with an isolated control room. These are all decisions a church will need to make if its leadership starts a songwriting ministry.

Distribution and Business

These are the questions which cover how the music is distributed and the business model of the church production company. The entire premise of the thesis is that the new streaming platforms make it possible for medium-sized churches to become essentially independent labels. The new digital media is what has disrupted the traditional music industry and opened the door for independents. The interviews are key in determining which streaming platforms and distributors churches are using. One key item that differentiates how music is consumed today from any time in the past is the inclusion of video. YouTube is considered a streaming platform but is very different because of its video aspect. Researcher Tom Wagner notes that YouTube is Hillsong's most utilized streaming platform and it is used as a means of connecting with both stakeholders and churches. He writes, "YouTube is probably Hillsong's most important social media platform for the circulation of its music among its stakeholders."¹⁰¹ Many artists and media personalities will create YouTube channels and try to enlist subscribers. This is not only an important part of musical exposure but also a means of potential income, especially of subscribers get into the millions as they have with Hillsong.

Another factor is that of the old media. There are still people who buy CDs. According to Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), CDs accounted for 5% of total sales for the

¹⁰¹ Wagoner, 55.

first half 2019.¹⁰² The RIAA is the company which collects music sales data for the recording industry determining when an album is considered gold or platinum. The printing of CDs (or vinyl) would be an expense a church would need to consider. It would not only involve the actual production of CDs, it would also require potentially the acquiring of a mechanical license. Of course, now CDs and other materials can be sold and drop shipped through Amazon.com, another company which is also part of the new digital media with its own video and music streaming platforms.

Sector Services and Publishing

This final area covers the use of services and publishing. The article by Ben Homewood shows that there is an emerging market of companies devoted to helping the independent artist, essentially giving an independent sector services which would have been available in a traditional label deal. Homewood says that artists have more options than ever when releasing music.¹⁰³ It is important to discover if any of these services are being used. In many instances church production ministries may not even know about these services because these services are so new. One of the goals of this thesis is to provide information for churches already producing original worship music so that they can have greater reach. It is vital to keep in mind that with the new model virtually all new music is discovered in non-traditional ways. In other words, a person does not browse for new recordings at the local record store. Discovery is made many

¹⁰² Paul Resnikoff, "U.S. Recording Industry Booms 18% to \$5.4 Billion In the First Half of 2019 — Here's the Complete Data," *Digital Music News*, September 5, 2019, <https://www.digitalmusicnews.com/2019/09/05/recording-industry-u-s-h1-2019/>.

¹⁰³ Homewood, 22.

times through social media or internet advertisement. Therefore, the use of a company that can boost exposure is something a church might explore or even consider.

As expressed earlier in this thesis, the new model no longer sells physical product but instead licenses and copyrights. Author and researcher Daniel Nordgård discussed the role of copyright and creation in the new digital media. He writes, “A second point I want to make here is that digitalization has stirred and fueled a growing debate around copyright from an economic perspective, one based on copyright as an *incentive to create and invest in new content* (italics mine).”¹⁰⁴ A church which creates sound recordings should consider becoming a publishing company as well. Keep in mind that a record label, including a church label, may own the copyright for the sound recording but probably not the rights to the song itself. These rights go to the songwriter who traditionally splits royalties with a publisher. In the United States only the songwriter and publisher have mechanical and performance rights. This means that if a song produced by a church is played on the radio or is picked up and recorded by another artists, the church would receive no royalty unless it was a publisher.

As also noted previously in the chapter two, there are administrative services for publishing companies much like the service sectors Homewood featured in his article. This means that a church can own publishing rights and allow another company to perform the traditional roles of the publishing company. Publishing is a complex business and many songwriters and artists have avoided learning about it because of its complicated and perhaps intimidating nature. The researcher hopes that information from this thesis will inspire churches to consider this part of the production business so they can have a role in the song if it ever

¹⁰⁴ Nordgård, 12.

becomes popular and makes it to terrestrial radio or is even covered and recorded by a popular Christian or worship recording artist. Questions about publishing are listed in the interview questions.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

Overview

The interviews gave great insight into the process of producing original worship music. Although there were differences between the various churches there were also many similarities. The greatest differences probably had to do with the mission of the church along with the goals of the production team. The churches themselves ranged from Methodist, Baptist, Pentecostal, and non-denominational. Some of the churches were bilingual with one having almost completely non-English speaking services. There seemed to be a team building aspect with all the interviewees which helped foster a type of closeness adding a special meaning to Paul's admonishment to the church of Ephesus that they "sing and make music from your heart to the Lord."¹⁰⁵ The participants had the option of having a live interview or filling out a questionnaire with the same questions as the interview. Most definitely the live interviews yielded the most detailed answers. With the exception of Carson Li's church, none of the churches are mentioned by name. This is because the Institutional Review Board recommended they be omitted unless permission had been granted by the senior pastor. There was not enough time to get in contact with every single pastor. Carson Li mentioned the name of his church in his thesis which is listed in the literature review and used as supporting research.

As stated in the previous chapter, the questions themselves were designed to shed light on six areas of interest: mission and ministry objectives, producer's role, songwriting process, recording facilities and methods, and distribution and business. Chapter four is divided into these six areas which are used to help disseminate the information given by the participants. The

¹⁰⁵ Eph. 5:19, NIV.

information itself has been aggregated with the issues stated in chapter one covering the challenges facing churches starting a production ministry and ideas and opportunities for creating greater success. It is the belief of the researcher that the ideas, processes, and viewpoints given will be of help to churches which may be considering a songwriting ministry.

Mission and Ministry Objectives

Paul the Apostle used the term “body of Christ” as a metaphor for how Christians function as a whole in the service of Christ. *For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.*¹⁰⁶ It could be postulated that just as individual Christians have a specific role within the church and with each other, so do various corporate bodies. Each church should have a specific mission as well as a group dynamic or culture. Some churches may have an emphasis on outward missions. Others may emphasize personal worship or transcendence. For many churches, the goal may be spiritual growth of the body and discipleship. Others may focus on community outreach.

Adam Heare is a worship leader at a Methodist church in a suburb outside of Tulsa, Oklahoma. He has produced two worship albums over the past few years. He says that both albums were produced with his local church community in mind. He indicated that he and his team had no aspirations that the songs would be heard anywhere outside of the congregation,

¹⁰⁶ Rom. 12:3-5, NIV.

although since they are available through most of the streaming platforms, they can be heard anywhere there is internet available. These are songs written in the church with the purpose of being introduced and sung by the local congregation.¹⁰⁷ In many ways this concept of edification is congruent with the ideals of the Methodist church which has a tradition of community emphasis. By writing and producing songs primarily for the local congregation, Heare is carrying on a tradition and practice which can be traced back to the Wesley brothers whose songs emphasized the compassion of God and were crafted for congregational singing.¹⁰⁸

Arthur Wesley is a worship and production associate at a church in the St. Louis area. He is a recent college graduate with a bachelor's degree in music production and his role in his church is quite diverse. In responding to the interview question Wesley indicated his many duties.

CB: What are your position and job duties?

Wesley: I am a worship and production associate. My duties include essentially anything you can think of that might be involved with worship production. Currently I'm overseeing lighting, our recordings, I'm the MD/band lead, I oversee our worship tech, participate in the filming of worship and sermon. I'm a video editor, content creator, volunteer trainer and recruiter, and many, many other miscellaneous things.¹⁰⁹

Wesley's answer indicates the growing role of technology in the modern church and the need for somebody to act as a producer every Sunday morning. Although most churches will probably never produce original worship music, very few of them can avoid the need for new technology.

¹⁰⁷ Adam Heare, interview by author, Tulsa, November 6, 2020.

¹⁰⁸ Elmer Towns and Vernon Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages: How the Great Awakening Shapes Evangelical Worship*, (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2012), 123.

¹⁰⁹ Arthur Wesley, interviewed by author, November 6, 2020.

The new digital media is not an option. Wesley may be more of a behind the scenes person, but his absence would leave a void that would affect all aspects of the church service and production. Just like society will hopefully never go back the time where there was no mass transportation, churches will more than likely always be dependent on digital technology and media at some level.

Wesley's church is racially and ethnically diverse and is a representation of the community in St. Louis where it serves. Over the past few years and as recently as the summer of 2020, St. Louis and the suburb town of Ferguson has seen much racial strife along with rioting, looting, and vandalism. The values and goals of the church represent a desire and mission to bring Christ's love and healing to the surrounding community. This mission is reflected in the original worship music written and produced. Wesley speaks of the diversity of the church noting that the goal of the songwriting production ministry is "to create original music and arrangements of existing music to not only reflect the diverse style of our church, but also to help bring those both in our church and outside together with God through music and worship."¹¹⁰

In the western part of the country of Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, is a large population group known as the Zomi. This people group was divided up by the British after World War II with some of this group becoming part of Bangladesh and India in addition to Myanmar. Myanmar recognizes Buddhism as a state religion. A significant number of the Zomi are Christian and have endured much persecution and hardship. Additionally, many Zomi or "Chins" desire independence from the Myanmar government, and have had instances of armed rebellion since the 1950s. In the early 2000s thousands of Zomi fled Myanmar as refugees and

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

immigrants seeking a new life in the United States and other countries. Many of these people settled in Tulsa, Oklahoma. As of 2016 there were as many as 5000 Zomi making Tulsa the highest concentration of Zomi outside of Myanmar.¹¹¹ Since most of these people moved to the United States for religious freedom, many Zomi churches have sprung up around the Tulsa metroplex. A number of these churches not only serve Zomi but also the Burmese who speak a different dialect.

Sian is a worship leader at a Pentecostal Zomi church in Tulsa. Many of the Zomi group are Pentecostal or Charismatic and were drawn to Tulsa because of the large number of full gospel churches as well as places such as Oral Roberts University and Victory Bible Institute. Sian oversees all things pertaining to worship and media. He also schedules and plans everything related to the creative team. His church is actively involved in social media with all their services live-streamed on Facebook and YouTube. The church also archives many of the worship services on its main website. For their growing congregation, Sian's church uses as much of the new digital media as it possibly can. As noted by researcher Young-Joo Lee, social media are increasingly important tools in "communicating with congregational members and the public."

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It is important to note that a Sian's church is like a type of satellite sending hope and comfort back to western Myanmar where brothers and sisters in Christ and also blood relatives

¹¹¹ Kristi Eaton, "Zomi USA: How a City in Oklahoma Became Home for an Ethnic Group from Southeast Asia," *NBC News*, December 6, 2016, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/zomi-usa-how-city-oklahoma-became-home-ethnic-minority-southeast-n692046>.

¹¹² Lee, 394.

are potentially enduring persecution and hardship. This specific dynamic means that the Sian's goals as a songwriter and producer are very different that of Adam and Author.

CB: What are the goals of your church's songwriting production ministry?

Sian: The goals of the church's songwriting production ministry are to help the local church with songs that they can understand and engage in worship, to introduce the contemporary worship songs in Zomi churches around the world, to uplift and encourage the discouraged people in through music and songs, and to reach the people around the world with good news. ¹¹³

Sian's goals are encouragement and evangelism, particularly for the people still living under persecution. In many ways these objectives are like the time when Jesus read from Isaiah shortly before His ministry. *The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free.* ¹¹⁴ Sian's story and that of his expatriates in the United States reminds us that there are still many who are suffering for the sake of the gospel. This adds a degree of urgency to the production of original worship music in a language which can be understood. It also important to add that the Zomi language is not as common as other Asian languages such as Hindi or Mandarin, making Sian's ministry of creating new worship hymnody in the Zomi language significant and necessary.

Carson Li, whose research is included in this thesis, graciously consented to be interviewed. His work is significant because his master's thesis documents the process of creating a songwriting ministry. In his thesis, Li outlines how God can speak to individuals and

¹¹³ Sian, interviewed by author, November 4, 2020.

¹¹⁴ Luke 4:18, NIV.

with that message permeating the mission of the local body. He notes that he and three other worship leaders were separately moved to write at the same time.¹¹⁵ This providentially inspired grassroots movement eventually received the approval of the pastor becoming a recognized songwriting ministry. Like many worship leaders Carson's roles are wide and diverse. Besides being the worship leader, he also acts as songwriting producer, worship team leader and sermon deliverer. Additionally, he is responsible for developing the online service production.

In many ways Li's situation is like Sian's in that both have ties to Christian communities overseas. Li's church is bilingual with Sunday morning services in Cantonese and English. Cantonese is spoken primarily in the southeast part of China, particularly in Hong Kong where many of Li's parishioners have ties. Mandarin is the predominant language spoken in most of China. This situation presents challenges to the Cantonese Christian community, especially in the area of hymnody. The lack of Cantonese hymnody and worship music is one of the motivating factors for Li starting a songwriting ministry.

CB: What are the goals of your church's songwriting production ministry?

CL: To write worship songs for our Cantonese congregation. Cantonese worship scene (in Hong Kong) is much slower to develop than the English contemporary Christian music scene. There has been a lot less Cantonese worship music that is released. Because of this, a lot of Cantonese churches are forced to pick either 1) really old Cantonese worship music (nothing wrong with it, but the style is really outdated), 2) traditional hymn (that was written originally for Mandarin), 3) Mandarin worship songs, 4) or English worship songs. Our church led worship in this way for a good period of time. One or two of our members would write Cantonese worship songs for us to sing. It is only until the beginning of this year that we officially formed a group to write songs together and release it formally under the church's name.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Li, 4.

¹¹⁶ Carson Li, interviewed by author, November 6, 2020.

Lack of Cantonese hymns is not a new challenge because there are issues with setting the Cantonese language to already written melodies. Unlike most western languages, Cantonese is tonal which means the pitch of a word as it is spoken has a direct correlation to its meaning. Ethnomusicologist and researcher Maria Chow made this observation during her research of Chinese churches in the United States from 1992-1994. In her study she found that the Cantonese language had challenges unique unto itself making it difficult to create original hymnody or worship songs.

As a tonal language Cantonese has more tones than most other Chinese dialects; different characters bearing totally different meanings are often pronounced with the same sound but with different tones. To sing in Cantonese a Chinese song not intended to be sung in that dialect often results in serious tonal errors and, therefore, makes the lyrics aurally incomprehensible. To avoid the musical restrictions imposed by the dialect's tones, composition of Cantonese songs usually begins with the melody; when the melody is completed the lyrics are written in such a way that the Cantonese pronunciation of each word matches each musical pitch.¹¹⁷

Chow noted that in the past, hymns had been translated in Cantonese without regard for its tonal aspects making the song awkward for congregations to sing.¹¹⁸ Chow's observations written almost three decades ago seem to parallel Carson Li's explanation of the challenges facing his and other Cantonese congregations today. Like the Zomi of Myanmar, the Cantonese Christian community needs worship songs written in its common dialect. Although it seems that Li and his team are taking on a worldwide challenge, he notes that the songwriting production focuses on the needs of his church first. He resists the temptation to make his focus worldwide noting that

¹¹⁷ Chow, 302.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 303.

“God has called us to serve our local church first.” He adds that if “He (God) delights in our serving, He will bring our offering to other churches.”¹¹⁹

As Carson Li and Sian both know, western songs and even music from various parts of Asia cannot easily be translated and converted into their specific languages. Unlike Adam Heare and Arthur Wesley who produce songs in English, Carson and Li are not only creating songs for the purpose of glorifying God and building discipleship, but they are also creating music that will be culturally relevant for their local congregation as well as worldwide. The idea of making the gospel more culturally relevant is known as critical contextualization, a term coined by missionary and anthropologist Paul Heibert who believed that for the gospel message to be effective it needed to be communicated in proper cultural context. He believed that cultural and historical contexts had to be taken seriously with such things as language, cultural practices, and history given serious consideration.¹²⁰ The new digital media makes it possible for Li and Sian to potentially reach the world market, even if it is only a secondary goal.

Producer’s Role

In many ways, the modern worship leader is much like a television producer, especially on Sunday morning. However, the job duties of a record producer are different than a stage or TV producer. The record producer is responsible for ensuring that the project is finished in timely manner within a certain budget allotment. Donald Passman writes, “Traditionally, the music producer combines the roles of director and producer in the motion picture field. He or she

¹¹⁹ Carson Li, interviewed by author, November 6, 2020.

¹²⁰ Paul G. Hiebert, "Critical Contextualization," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 11, no. 3 (Jul 01, 1987): 110, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fdocview%2F1299977119%3Faccountid%3D12085>.

is responsible for bringing the creative product into tangible form (a recording), which means (a) being responsible for maximizing the creative process (finding and selecting songs, deciding on arrangements, getting the right vocal sound, etc.), and (b) administering the whole project, such as booking studios, hiring musicians, staying within a budget, filing union reports, etc.”¹²¹ Some churches are fortunate in that they have a person such as Arthur Wesley who has a degree in music production but in many instances the “producer” will be a person like Carson Li who has passion, a desire to learn, and the patience to learn the skill of mixing recorded sound and producing from a rough idea to total completion.

Of course, the traditional producer will usually have a budget, but many, if not most, churches have limited financial resources, especially for something which might be seen by a church board as exploratory. Adam Heare noted that there was no budget allocated for his two church worship recording projects. They used equipment already available, local church musicians, and digital distribution.¹²² Perhaps the greatest obstacle to producing and distributing original music is lack of financial support. A church producer may need to record piecemeal one instrument at a time.

In his thesis, Carson Li details the entire process of recording his first original worship project. He was more of a performer with very little production experience. Li writes, “The approach to this EP will be more Do-It-Yourself (DIY) and exploratory than industry-standard professional. This means that most of the arrangement, performing, recording, and production will be done “in-house” by myself or my team. The reason for this is because that will maximize

¹²¹ Passman, 125.

¹²² Adam Heare, interviewed by author, November 6, 2020.

my learning in this project. For example, rather than hiring a professional producer to produce these songs, which means I will not learn about how that production process might work, I will learn on the go and produce the tracks myself.”¹²³ For many churches other than financial issues, finding qualified personnel to act as producer may be the biggest challenge. A key person may need to learn on the go.

Jameson Reynolds is worship pastor at a large church in the Tulsa/Broken Arrow Oklahoma area and supervises its six campuses. His role is much different than Li’s because he acts as an executive producer with a worship pastor from one of the campuses acting as the hands-on producer. Reynolds has final say in music produced and released.¹²⁴ His church has not only a large presence in the northeast Oklahoma community, but also a large footprint in social media. Much like Hillsong or Bethel Worship, this church has fostered a culture of worship songwriting. An executive producer like Reynolds must take the role of instilling the unique values and mission of the church he or she is serving. In writing about Hillsong’s corporate culture researcher Tom Wagner notes that Hillsong invests much energy and effort in inculcating its value system into the worship team. He writes, “The reason that Hillsong invests so much energy into inculcating its musicians into its corporate culture is that, once that culture is successfully established among its core participants, it is likely to radiate outwards to other stakeholders.”¹²⁵ Like Jameson Reynolds, producers at smaller churches will most certainly also have the final say. They will have to uphold the mission, values, and culture of church they serve as they oversee the production of original worship music.

¹²³ Li, 5.

¹²⁴ Jameson Reynolds, interviewed by author, November 4, 2020.

¹²⁵ Tom Wagner, 163.

Unfortunately for most producers in smaller to medium sized churches, they will not have an executive producer like Jameson Reynolds to make the hard decisions when it comes to selecting which songs will be on a future release. Both Adam Heare and Carson Li spoke about the awkwardness of cutting a song from a final project. Professional songwriters often have a scientific approach to their writing, almost playing a numbers game in hopes that their song becomes a hit.¹²⁶ In a church setting where the entire worship team is made up of volunteers and not professionals, it may be difficult to tell an aspiring writer that their song will not be making the cut. Heare notes that the songs become their “babies.”¹²⁷ Li sees this as a potential problem noting that “one of the bigger obstacles is to learn to say no to a song that is written by a teammate.” He has the painful duty of communicating this potentially discouraging information. He goes on to say that “it is difficult to be very objective when critiquing songs, and it is certainly challenging to feedback a songwriter on their song. Thankfully, our team has built up a trust throughout the years that we can give each other honest comment and feedback without sacrificing our friendship and teamwork.”¹²⁸

Probably the most critical role the producer takes is the actual recording of the songs as well as the mixing and mastering. A church just starting a songwriting ministry will probably have to use members of the worship team. In his thesis Carson Li outlined the process of recording calling his method a “DIY (do it yourself) approach.”¹²⁹ He used resources available at his church but recorded the drums at a professional studio. For most start up studios, the issue of

¹²⁶ Many professional songwriters write at least once a day. Many write several hundred songs before one ever gets picked up by a successful artist.

¹²⁷ Adam Heare, interviewed by author, November 6, 2020.

¹²⁸ Carson Li, interviewed by author, November 6, 2020.

¹²⁹ Li, 5.

recording is probably the greatest challenge to be overcome. Drums require isolation because of the volume they produce, and most churches will not have proper soundproofing. For Sian, previous projects have been recorded in private studios. Although this process is quite expensive it does show the church's commitment to produce original Zomi language worship music. Using outside studios also means that as producer, Sian must be more diligent in staying within budget with the worship team being rehearsed enough to record in as few takes as possible since the studio is probably being rented by the hour.

Mixing and mastering is a highly technical skill and is as important as the actual recording itself. Mixing is the process of blending the recording in such a way that there is a balanced presentation. Mastering is the finalization of the sound recording and preparing it for public release. Additionally, metadata which is needed for streaming music because it provides important information related to titles, publishers, and songwriters is usually added at the mastering stage. Carson Li performed this task himself using advice from a studio engineer and personal research.¹³⁰ With his degree in music production, Arthur Wesley can mix and master. Currently he mixes at the church facility and masters at his home studio. Adam Heare also performs all the mixing and mastering.

In the end it is the producer who will manage the project probably with limited funds ensuring that it is complete on time using the best songs the team can write with the highest quality possible. Sian's comments perhaps sum up best the role of the church music producer.

Production is a very long and worth doing journey. The process is very different here in America from Myanmar. I learned from my past experiences that production needs very good planning and preparation. Having friends in the production world would be very helpful. If one needs a quality product, he needs to take time (not rush) for every step (tracking, mixing, designing, recording,

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

etc...) of the process. Above all, everything we do, we do it for the glory of the Lord and for His kingdom. That is my only purpose of doing this.¹³¹

Songwriting Process

Warren Petit, director of the Contemporary Music Center in Nashville, once said “Songs are the raw fuel of the music industry.”¹³² Songs not only have a biblical mandate from the writings of Paul to the churches in Colossus and Ephesus, but they also have a rich place in church history. The process of songwriting is of course vital to a church worship production ministry and the process is unique to everybody who composes original music. The people interviewed for this thesis are no exception with some ministries using one primary writer and others strictly collaborative. All of them have made songwriting a priority and have some type of routinized system. Churches with well-known successful songwriting ministries enjoy that success because they give songwriting priority and even financial resources. For example, the core songwriters at Hillsong are salaried staff members and pastors and are given the time and financial support to write songs; in fact, Hillsong has an entire writing process where new songs are filed tested at a satellite campus where they are either shelved, developed further, or used in future album projects.¹³³ Hillsong’s musical success is not an accident but instead is goal oriented, purposeful, and deliberate.

Adam Heare’s process is relatively simple: someone brings in an idea and as a group, the team collaborates. A system like that is quite organic and, in many ways, fits the ideals and

¹³¹ Sian, interviewed by author, November 6, 2020.

¹³² Warren Petit, “CMC Meeting Wrap-up,” (presentation at CMC Summer Conference of 2017, Nashville, TN, June 10, 2017).

¹³³ Wagner, 132-4.

mission of the Methodist church Heare serves. His goals are largely to serve the needs of the congregation. The values of the Methodists focus on the congregation and local community. It is the Methodists who often sponsor local outreach or benevolence. Other churches may focus more on evangelism or global outreach and write which reflect that emphasis. Heare's ministry is grassroots with all his singers and musicians volunteering. His songs are not intended to go very far past the walls of his church and even though they are on streaming platforms, Heare is not concerned that they will stay local.¹³⁴

In almost complete contrast to Heare, Sian wants his songs to be global, wherever Zomi people reside. His music is for his local church and the Zomi who live in the Tulsa area, but his goal is to create worship music that can impact people worldwide. Unlike everybody else interviewed, the songs produced by Sian's are all written by him. Sian's inspiration for songwriting came from watching Hillsong videos. Later, he started translating worship songs and teaching them to his youth choir. Eventually he began to write his own songs for his youth choir and church worship. He usually starts with a melody then adds lyrics later. Most of his ideas come to him during his private worship time.¹³⁵ The global nature of the internet and streaming probably benefits a person such as Sian the most because he can create a worship hymnody which almost instantly can benefit Zomi Christians living thousands of miles away. Although there is a financial burden at the front end of production, the new digital media provides access which is relatively inexpensive. David Schreiber and his research team note, "Streaming

¹³⁴ Adam Heare, interviewed by author, November 6, 2020.

¹³⁵ Sian, interviewed by author, November 4, 2020.

platforms such as Spotify, Apple Music, SoundCloud, and Pandora have substantially increased the accessibility of music with little to no distribution costs to artists and record labels”¹³⁶

Songwriter, pastor, worship leader Travis Douchette makes an important observation about a church’s unique calling and mission. That mission will drive the type of songs written and even the process.

Every congregation has a unique personality, gifts, and way about them that sets them apart. Composers who are connected to a church that excels in mercy ministries may find themselves composing songs related to the justice of God and need to reach the poor. Another congregation may excel in preaching and produce songwriters who compose prophetic songs declaring the character of God. Each church is different, and the personality of the church is what sets its local theology.¹³⁷

Perhaps the idea of congregational mission is why writing as a group or team is favored by many church worship song producers. It gives the writers the opportunity to reflect the vision and mission of their local church community. Probably the most routinized songwriting system of all the interview participants is the one under executive producer Jameson Reynolds. It is purposefully collaborative although like many songwriting ministries an original song may start with an idea presented to the team.

CB: Describe your songwriting process.

JR: We have a very fluid songwriting process. Sometimes individual worship pastors bring songs that they have been working on privately in for collaboration, and we decide if it is a song that we want to continue to craft together or not. We also have group writing sessions throughout the year. But it is very collaborative, and most songs end up being “touched” by 3 to 4 different people at minimum.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Schreiber, 31.

¹³⁷ Douchette, 65.

¹³⁸ Jameson Reynolds, interviewed by author, November 4, 2020.

Collaborative songwriting or songwriting sessions are effective ways to write because it gives writers a means of completing their ideas. One person may have a wealth of musical ideas, another person lyrics, and perhaps a third the overall form or arrangement. Corporate ownership can also help with the issue of awkwardness if the song is not developed. It is easier for a producer to tell a group of people their song will not make the cut rather than one person.

Probably the most important aspect of worship songwriting other than the musical aspects of the song itself is the content. Travis Douchette identifies five needs in the church related to evangelical songwriting: songs that chronical the life of a church and birthed out if community, scripturally, theologically, and grammatically accurate, songs that serve the overall visions of the pastor's sermon, songs written from a congregational rather than individual perspective, and singable.¹³⁹ Writing as group can help keep these ideas in focus as well help further the mission and culture of the church. The five needs Douchette lists could be a good starting point when crafting songs which fit the mission of the local church as well as the body of Christ; however, the producer, with input from the pastor and church leaders, must ensure that songs written meet established guidelines.

Emphasis on local ministry versus global can directly impact the verbiage and subject matter use used in a song. For example, as Hillsong made the shift from a local church in the suburbs of Sydney, Australia to a global brand and presence, the local qualities of its brand fell away from its songs in favor of a more generalized theological approach. Ethnomusicologist and researcher Mark Evans wrote about this in an interview with the head of Hillsong Music Publishing Steve McPherson. Evans recorded, "I do believe we initially set out to write music for our congregation but as time went on and we saw the impact our songs were having across all

¹³⁹ Ibid., 50-57.

denominations, we became more and more aware of the responsibility and the privilege to be speaking into the broader church, and I believe our songwriting changed accordingly. Our focus went from being purely local to global.”¹⁴⁰

Carson Li is very aware of this emphasis because he and his church have a direct global connection. He knows that his ministry has an international impact which with the popularity of the internet and streaming platforms such as YouTube or Spotify, could potentially go viral among the millions of Cantonese worldwide. Li and his church have made it clear that the church’s mission and values start local and should be reflected in the songwriting.

Our audience is always our church congregation first. We have shared with our song writers that our primary goal and target audience is always our own church. We write specifically for the needs of our church, not for Hong Kong or for the whole world. It is tempting to imagine the possibilities and the popularity that the ministry might end up with, but we share with our team that we must remember God has called us to serve our local church first. If he delights in our serving, he will bring our offering to other churches.¹⁴¹

Carson’s statement and the goals of all the participants and respondents illustrates how important the mission of the church in the production and distribution of original worship songs. Every situation calls for different songwriting processes and emphases. The individual mission and function of each church represented in the body of Christ helps make the argument for the development of individual songs.

Recording Facilities and Methods

Like the songwriting process, recording facilities and methods vary with each and are often tied to the church’s financial means. All the respondents had some means of recording

¹⁴⁰ Cowan, 92-93.

¹⁴¹ Carson li, interviewed by author, November 6, 2020.

either at the church or on some type of church property or campus. None of the respondents indicated that they recorded in the sanctuary; however, this could possibly change because the recent 2020 pandemic. Many churches are moving to an audio setup more conducive for high quality live video streaming where congregants who chose to remain home can enjoy quality audio and video. This move out of necessity to better isolate the stage instruments, especially the drums, could, for some churches, solve the issue of recording space.¹⁴² The creation of a studio space is the greatest financial challenge because it usually involves some degree of remodeling, soundproofing, and the acquisition of equipment. All the respondents indicated that their churches were at various stages of studio facility development except for Jamison Reynolds. His church has a full studio on campus.

Arthur Wesley's church is in the beginning stages of full-scale production. They record much of their projects in their church studio but are not equipped to handle vocals or drums. Those are recorded off campus at a private studio.¹⁴³ Wesley's situation is not uncommon. Many of the respondents are forced to record piecemeal rather than all at once with a full band. This type of recording is not uncommon with rap/hip-hop artists who often use drum loops and keyboards as opposed to drums, basses, and amplified guitars. Chance the Rapper's original mix-tape recordings were performed in a free access studio in a Chicago library when he was still in high school.¹⁴⁴ Computer based digital studios make it possible for a relatively high-level recording to be accomplished with minimal equipment, especially when compared to the days

¹⁴² When "Quality Live Streaming for Churches" was Google searched it return almost 50 million results. There is a new industry growing related to live streaming because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

¹⁴³ Arthur Wesley, interviewed by author, November 6, 2020.

¹⁴⁴ Schreiber, 38.

when everything was recorded to reel-to-reel rather than a computer. At this point Wesley records at his church and home studio. Like many churches at the beginning phases of developing a production ministry, many of their ideas are still in the planning and development stage.

Carson Li's facilities are also in the development stage. His thesis documents the process a producer with minimal financial resources might use to create a songwriting ministry. For his first project Li used equipment already used by the church, which already produces numerous videos and has a church and worship YouTube subscription page.¹⁴⁵ Even with the already acquired equipment Li still had to record the drums at an off-site private studio at an unforeseen extra cost.¹⁴⁶

In his thesis, Li discussed conversations he had with his pastor about starting a songwriting ministry. At the same time, it is apparent that Li's church already uses digital media to send out its message since the church pre-records all its worship services. Producing original songs is a logical step. In his interview Li discussed his current facilities and recording situation.

CB: Do you record in-house or at a private recording studio?

CL: We do our recording in house at the moment. Since all of our worship services are pre-recorded in our church office, we do our song recordings in-house as well.

CB: If at a private recording studio, does the church plan on building an in-house studio?

CL: We do have a rehearsal space that we use also as a studio. We did up the walls with some sound-proofing panels, but it is not a professional studio by any means. We have some basic recording gear to produce our music.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ As of the writing of this thesis November 15, 2020, the relatively new KEC Worship YouTube Channel has 150 subscribers. Koinonia Evangelical Church Channel which primarily features sermons has 1.23k.

¹⁴⁶ Li, 7-8.

¹⁴⁷ Carson Li, interviewed by author, November 6, 2020.

Li's church is starting small using equipment already available and investing in soundproofing. This may be a viable strategy for others considering a songwriting ministry. Keep in mind that even the largest church worship labels started small. Hillsong's original songwriter Geoff Bullock joined the church in 1978, a year after it was founded. By 1987 he was worship pastor and began deliberately writing songs which became the first album.¹⁴⁸ This was at least six years before the 1993 release of "Shout to the Lord" which propelled their name across the global Christian landscape.¹⁴⁹

Sian's projects have been recorded in private studios which has created his greatest challenge. Sian was producing original music when in Myanmar before he emigrated to the United States. He was surprised at the cost of renting a studio in Tulsa as opposed to Myanmar.

CB: What was the biggest obstacle for starting a songwriting ministry/production company?

Sian: Financial would be a big one. It is expensive to do production in America comparing to Myanmar. And not having a private studio would be another because every minute spent in the studio is being charged

His statement not only addresses the challenge songwriting ministries face, but also the commitment his church leadership has to their vision of reaching Zomi worldwide. For them, the production of worship music is not a luxury. Much like Li and Wesley, Sian's church is gradually building a studio.

CB: Do you record in-house or at a private recording studio?

Sian: We recorded in private recording studios.

CB: If at a private recording studio, does the church plan on building an in-house studio?

¹⁴⁸ Wagner, 60.

¹⁴⁹ Cowan, 78-79.

Sian: Yes, the church is planning to have in-house studio. Also, we have our studio rooms ready to use but we are raising funds for the equipment.¹⁵⁰

Distribution and Business

As noted in chapter 1, it is the changes in how music is distributed which is the greatest advantage to songwriting ministries. Unless there are specific reasons for producing CDs such as an aging demographic or a projected audience with limited internet access, most of the distribution will be through streaming platforms like Spotify, YouTube, or Apple Music. The design, printing, and mechanical licensing of CD's, tapes, and LPs could be as expensive as the actual production itself. After a church printed several thousand CDs or vinyl albums, there was no place to sell them because the church lacked distribution. Adam Heare noted that he still had CDs left over from his first album project. One of the first contemporary Christian labels- Maranatha- initially had to sell albums from the trunk of cars, eventually using mail order to distribute their first records since most established Christian record stores during the late 1960s refused to stock Jesus People music.¹⁵¹ With the new digital media and streaming technology, anybody can distribute.

Demographics and geography may determine if CDs are printed. Jameson Reynolds congregation is a comparatively young group, mainly millennials and generation x.

CB: Who is your target audience?

JR: Our target audience is our 6 local campuses with the main demographic being 18 years to 45 years old.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Sian, interviewed by author, November 4, 2020.

¹⁵¹ Reagan 177-178.

¹⁵² Jameson Reynolds, interviewed by author, November 4, 2020.

There is probably a good chance that an 18-year-old may not even own a CD player, much less a CD. For that age demographic, Instagram, Tik Tok, and YouTube might be where they consume much of their media. Additionally, sites such as YouTube give stakeholders the potential to interact either by comment or video/song production. Ann Werner makes the case that younger listeners expect to interact with music and other media they consume. She writes, “YouTube makes this relationship between professional and user-generated content fast, direct and symbiotic. Thus, YouTube’s greatest successes in terms of spreadability involve both professionals and so-called participators.”¹⁵³

Reynold’s church itself is connected by simulcast and streaming services. Its congregants already have a certain comfort level with recent technology and popular streaming platforms. This may explain why Reynolds and his team produce no physical product.

CB: Are you 100% streaming or do you still produce CDs?

JR: We are 100% streaming and do not produce any physical copies.¹⁵⁴

There are several companies which distribute digital music for a set fee. They essentially have taken the place of the truck which use to loads of albums to a record store. A few of these companies are Tunecore, CD Baby, and Distrokid. These companies can distribute digital music to all available streaming platforms. They also perform additional services such as sending out lyrics, collecting monies, and marketing data. There are several other distributors in the market besides the three listed with strong competition between them. Jameson Reynolds uses Distrokid which then distributes the music he produced to all platforms served, which is quite a few.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Werner, 142.

¹⁵⁴ Jameson Reynolds, interviewed by author, November 4, 2020.

¹⁵⁵ According to the Distrokid website the fee for unlimited distribution for one band/artist is \$19.99 a year.

Adam Heare made it clear that his church had no aspirations about making money or even breaking even. Since his goal is to strengthen and edify the local body, he has no global expectations. For someone like him, streaming would be the best option. Also, as mentioned earlier, he receives no budget for song production so with the equipment acquired a few years ago, any new song production would be strictly for edification of the body of Christ. Heare also indicated that his church had no interest in collecting royalties.¹⁵⁶

Carson Li and his church extensively use YouTube. His church is an obvious commitment to developing and interfacing video and original worship music.

CB: What streaming platforms are your songs on?

CL: As of now, all our songs are on YouTube. We do have a plan to release them on Spotify and other streaming platforms later¹⁵⁷

A distributor is not needed to upload videos to YouTube so Li has no distributor; however, he indicated that they would eventually release their music other streaming platforms and planned on using Distrokid for distribution.

For Li, the idea of waiting on distribution may go back to his commitment to stay focused on the local body he serves. He indicated that the width and depth of the songwriting ministry is a question and challenge for him.

Another obstacle that we are facing recently is the challenge of growing the ministry. We have started our ministry quite well, and our team is able to continue to release new songs consistently. However, our question at this moment is how to grow the ministry in depth (impact of the songs) and in width (reach of the song). This is something that we are still exploring at the moment.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Adam Heare, interviewed by author, November 6, 2020.

¹⁵⁷ Carson Li, interviewed by author, November 6, 2020.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

Many startup songwriting ministries may have similar questions and challenges. Where Li's ministry will be in three to five years might be a compelling topic for a future study.

Sian's church songwriting ministry still produces CDs and DVDs although he produces his own music outside of the church and it is all streaming. For his own releases Sian uses Distrokid for his distribution.

CB: What streaming platforms are your songs on?

Sian: I am streaming on iTunes, Apple Music, Spotify, YouTube, and Amazon.

CB: What distributor do you use?

Sian: I use Distrokid and Tunecore. But I am about to cancel Tunecore.¹⁵⁹

The fact that Sian is cancelling Tunecore speaks to how competitive the market currently is and how the changes in the new digital media have given independents a high degree of freedom and options. Donald Passman discusses "niche artists" and how they can use social media and digital distributors to bypass the record labels. He writes, "If you're a niche artist and you're happy staying in your niche and selling to a small group of fans, you may not need or even want a record deal. It's possible (though outfits like TuneCore) to get your music to iTunes, Amazon, Spotify, Pandora, and other digital outlets, and you can make a living doing gigs, promoting yourself directly to your fans, and selling your tracks."¹⁶⁰ Of course, Passman is not directly addressing worship music but in many ways, this is Sian's personal strategy and probably also that of his church in that both are servicing and appealing to a niche audience, the Zomi.

Although Sian's church still produces physical product, he did indicate that the church plans on moving to streaming. It is important to note that not everybody has internet access. With

¹⁵⁹ Sian, interviewed by author, November 4, 2020.

¹⁶⁰ Passman, 72.

that in mind, Sian's church may still continue to produce CDs/DVDs to reach as many as possible.

We do plan on streaming the productions in the future. We were not familiar with the online streaming yet when we started. Zomi in Myanmar have internet access but not everyone can afford that yet. They can get Spotify, YouTube, iTunes, etc. and as much I understand, they use another online streaming service called Joox. I don't see Spotify that often in Myanmar. For the other Zomi people around the world, they are familiar with Spotify, iTunes, Apple Music etc. Until now, YouTube has been the most used and popular streaming service. ¹⁶¹

Sector Services and Publishing

As mentioned in chapter 1, sector services are private companies performing services once provided by record labels for signed artists but instead cater to independents. They do things like create a greater internet presence or help artists maximize social media. Keep in mind that internet presence is similar to having an album in a record store. Quoting an industry expert Ben Homewood writes, "Label services as a sub-sector is no longer just a distribution route with a couple of extra perks, it has become a complex system built to allow repertoire owners to focus entirely on their creative mission and have very little entry barriers to the industry." ¹⁶² At this point, none of the respondents are using sector services as described in the Ben Homewood, although some plan on using them for future projects.

Carson Li's church has contacted a Cantonese worship group in Hong Kong to promote its music there. As Sian's church moves to streaming, it plans on utilizing more internet services.

In the United States artists and record labels have no performance or mechanical rights. These belong exclusively to the songwriter and publisher. In a sense, any church which uploads a

¹⁶¹ Sian, interviewed by author, November 4, 2020.

¹⁶² Homewood, 23.

song to any streaming platform is publishing but it is not the same as setting up a publishing company and entering into a publishing agreement where the publisher and songwriter split royalties. Without a music producing church becoming a publisher, it will never receive any mechanical or performance royalties, including those from CCLI. This is why most of the major church record labels have publishing companies.

It is possible these days to create a publishing company and have a third party administrate it. This situation is very similar to the sector services in that it would allow an independent to maintain publishing rights while the administration company handles such things as licensing and certain royalty payments. All the churches interviewed publish but only one, Jameson Reynold's church is currently in the process of establishing a publishing company.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Overview

The purpose of chapter five is to present a summary and conclusion to the research. Included in this chapter is a summary where the results of the study are interpreted and aggregated with the literature. Next is the significance of the study which discusses its importance and significance with other research and literature in the field. After that the limitations of the study are discussed. Following limitations are recommendations where applications of the study are presented. Finally, chapter five will end with a conclusion.

Summary

The study itself utilized literature emphasizing music industry, theological rationale for songwriting and methodology of songwriting and recording and focused on interviews with a small group of worship leaders taking a music production role. There were several premises which drove the study. First there was a need for greater overall diversity in worship songwriting. This was based upon the *Christianity Today* article by Megan Fowler which noted that half of all worship songs produced came from only four sources: Chris Tomlin, Matt Redman, Hillsong, and Bethel Music. The CCLI (Christian Copyright Licensing International) list of top 20 songs confirmed Fowler's premise. Fowler's article questioned not only racial diversity but also the shallowness of topics. She wrote, "Most of the songs on the list were written by Caucasians. Thematically, the songs tend to stay in the realm of praise and adoration without venturing too far into more complex themes like confession, doubt, and suffering."¹⁶³

¹⁶³ Fowler,

Another premise was the fact that changes and disruptions brought about by the new digital media presented opportunities for churches to produce new worship music. There is a great amount of literature and research which discusses disruptions in the traditional music recording industry along with opportunities for independents. This opportunity came primarily with the changes in distribution which simultaneously wrested control from the major labels and gave the independent, or in the case of this thesis, church songwriting ministries, worldwide access.

Moreau's argument, however, is that while former technological innovations like radio (1920), vinyl records (1948), audiocassettes (1962) and the CD (1982) did not have any impact on distribution, the innovations through the Internet and the ICTs (Information and Communications Technologies) did (Moreau 2013: 23). Not only was this a change in distribution, but also a dislocation of distribution, as it moved outside the recorded music industry and therefore its control. As Moreau demonstrates, *one of the great powers the major record companies had was their control of distribution*. And with new digital formats and online communication, distribution migrated to external actors (fields), rather than remaining within the field of music. And through the prism of this historical context, an important question then seems to be whether the theories of disruptive technology/innovation still apply. (italics mine) ¹⁶⁴

Changes in distribution is at the core of the thesis and is the primary reason why the digital media presents churches with opportunities. Churches, even medium-sized ones, become stakeholders and can potentially become serious contributors in the production of original worship music.

Another point in the thesis is the need for greater theological and ethnic diversity in worship music. Two of Fowler's points in her article was that the drive for popular worship music composers to write hits was potentially causing songs to be composed with shallow

¹⁶⁴ Nordgård, 42.

themes. Her other point was a lack of ethnic or racial diversity. This is especially true when viewed from a global perspective where artists like Chris Tomlin and Hillsong have a large international footprint. Literature from John Witvliet, Maria Chow, and Roberta King all point to the need for theologically and cultural diversity in worship.

Although there is ample literature on disruptions in the music industry and a greater variety of worship music, there is very little information about churches which currently have an active songwriting ministry. The exception is the research and thesis written by Carson Li on creating a songwriting ministry. His work documents the process of starting a songwriting ministry and includes such items as church mission, budget constraints, method of production, and distribution choices, Li's thesis indicates that he uses YouTube to distribute his music. The literature indicates the importance of YouTube not only as a streaming platform but also means of social participation. Ann Werner writes that YouTube is "invaluable to musicians wanting to reach their audiences, and to audiences communicating with musicians and each other, or starting their own music careers."¹⁶⁵ Even though this statement pertains more to secular artists, it can be applied to church songwriting ministries which could be compared to independent artists or labels. The overarching point is that the new digital media can be used to benefit all artists-secular and religious- because it allows for direct access to streaming platforms.

There were five worship leaders who participated in the interviews. All of them had various roles in the production of original worship music. Additionally, all of them were using streaming platforms exclusively except for one, Sian, with many stakeholders in his target audience in Myanmar unable to afford internet. Sian's ministry though his church still produces

¹⁶⁵ Werner, 128.

CDs and DVDs although he uses digital distribution and streaming for music he releases privately. For most interviewed, the greatest challenge was financial with their churches taking the strategy of starting small and building from there. This approach is not unusual for independents, secular and religious, with limited resources. A similar strategy was employed by Grammy winner Chance the Rapper who used a public access studio at a minimal cost for his first release.¹⁶⁶ Literature about Chance the Rapper's success was important to this study because in many ways he became a symbol of industry disruption in that he achieved great success without releasing a CD or support from a major label.

Although each participant gave different reasons for why their church was producing original worship music, Sian and Carson Li's motivations were perhaps most compelling. Both write and produce worship music for non-English speaking congregations. For Sian, it is the Zomi, a people group from Myanmar and for Li it is Cantonese speaking people at his home church in Vancouver and also Hong Kong. The literature reviewed bears out the need for indigenous hymnody which can be understood by those singing it. Li's description of challenges for writing music in the Cantonese language were confirmed by Maria Chow's early 1990's research of Chinese churches in North America. Chow's research noted that "For some Cantonese speaking members among the Chinese congregations, nonetheless, especially the younger generations, a perfect match between the music and their dialects tones is an essential part of their singing experience."¹⁶⁷

Chow's research as it pertained to language and dialect has implications well beyond the object of her study and into the language and cultures of all nations and people groups. It

¹⁶⁶ Schreiber, 38.

¹⁶⁷ Chow, 303.

illuminates the need for greater diversity in worship hymnody and provides a rationale for songwriting ministries, particularly those who minister to the underserved. When Chow conducted her research, the internet was in its infancy; however, with the changes in the new digital media and the worldwide access it provides, people like Li and Sian have opportunities which have never existed before.

Nearly all participants had reasons related to the mission and corporate culture of their church. For some, like Adam Heare, it was for the edification of the local body. For Arthur Wesley, whose church is in St. Louis, it was more for unity and reconciliation within the church and among the community it serves. Although each participant discussed challenges to facilitate a songwriting ministry, they all knew the purpose of their ministry and its importance. Four songwriting groups, as skilled as they may be, cannot address all the needs of the entire body of Christ. It is up to the local body to see needs and address them. With the new digital media and the opportunities it presents, churches can fill in the gaps left by popular worship music. Although there are many challenges to starting a songwriting ministry and producing original worship music, this research demonstrates that there is a need for it and now there are means to produce it more effectively.

Significance of the Study

The study is significant for several reasons. First, the disruption in the industry has helped the independent artist. In this thesis, the case is made that a church production and songwriting ministry functions like an independent or “indie” artist. This is primarily because of changes in distribution. These changes mean that music produced can be uploaded to a digital distributor and played on multiple streaming platforms. Almost all the interviewees were using a distributor except for Carson Li who currently uploads new music content directly to YouTube. Significant

also is how the various types of digital media can be combined to create a bigger market footprint. This is especially true of Jameson Reynold's church which has a large digital presence, particularly on social media. Researcher Young Joo-Lee notes that there is a close relation between social media adoption and social marketing activities.¹⁶⁸ Her study implies that the adaptation of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, or even YouTube may be necessary for a church's survival. For greater outreach of new music social media may be the best way to convince listeners to stream a new release.

The study is also significant because it shows that there is a need for new worship music written by a more diverse pool of songwriters. The seeds of this observation started with the *Christianity Today* Megan Fowler article where she suggested that the small pool of worship music songwriters wrote songs which focused more on catchiness rather than theological and thematic ideas. She also noted that the music did not represent the ethnic diversity of the body of Christ. Bob Kauflin notes that relevance is often local saying, "relevance looks different from one geographical area to the next. One church will become more informal, another more ordered. A large church in the city might add a jazz band and use the internet for all its communication, while church in rural Tennessee may add a dobro to the worship team and stick with the Sunday bulletin."¹⁶⁹ A local songwriting ministry can address some of the thematic or theological issues because it will probably not be as motivated to write a hit. Kauflin's statement is more applicable when compared to the goals of Adam Heare and Arthur Wesley. Both are writing and producing songs which address the needs and concerns of their local worship communities, fulfilling a niche or need which might be overlooked by the worship music industry.

¹⁶⁸ Lee, 383.

¹⁶⁹ Kauflin, 192.

The study also presented evidence that as Fowler suggested, songs written by the most popular songwriters do not necessarily address racial or ethnic diversity. In his theory of critical contextualization, Paul Heibert warned that in the past “cultural foreignness was a great barrier to the spread of the gospel.”¹⁷⁰ There is always a tendency in a foreign mission’s situation for the dominant culture to give inadequate attention to the cultural norms of the host country. Heibert’s ideas are extended by ethnodoxologists such as Roberta King who makes the point that music is not a universal language with many factors needing consideration when hymnody is selected or created.

While everyone can engage in singing or performing a song, its meanings are not universal. Meanings differ depending on the culture and context. In other words, the same song will have different meanings to different people, both within a given culture and especially across cultures. So, music is found universally and travels worldwide but does not communicate in the same way as it travels. Each person processes it on his or her own terms.¹⁷¹

These concepts give greater significance to the interviews of Sian and Carson Li. Both are creating and producing original worship music in their native languages. Both are also using the new digital media to transport their music globally. Although the two worship leaders have many reasons for starting and directing a songwriting ministry, it was Li who discussed some of the challenges of composing worship songs in the Cantonese language. His observations were echoed by the research of Maria Chow.

Chow’s fifteen-month research from 1992-1994 of Chinese churches in the United States was detailed and extensive. Her research focused not only on demographic trends but also issues and challenges Chinese immigrants and American-born Chinese had in American protestant

¹⁷⁰ Heibert, 106.

¹⁷¹ King, 46-47.

churches. This research revealed that Chinese congregants in the United States from various Chinese speaking regions such as mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and even parts of Vietnam each had issues related to culture, language, and dialect needing attention. For example, she noted that in creating a Chinese/English hymnal the publisher not only needed “specialized knowledge in music, theology, hymnology, and English poetry, but also a perfect command of the Chinese dialect involved.”¹⁷² From Chow’s writings and Li’s interview it can be assumed that converting English language songs into Cantonese, or any of the other Chinese dialects, is exceedingly difficult. There is little doubt this factor plays a major role in Carson Li’s motivation to write original Cantonese worship hymnody. The modern digital technology and the new digital media helps facilitate the creation of new music by giving Li almost instantaneous access to his stakeholders, in Canada, Hong Kong, and abroad.

Another significant factor is the mission and culture of the church and its role on the creation of a songwriting ministry. This mission usually extends from the vision of the pastor. Bob Kauflin calls the pastor a church’s primary worship leader.¹⁷³ Carson Li’s thesis outlined the meeting he had with his pastor before launching the songwriting ministry. A songwriting ministry cannot be successful without the support of the leadership, especially the pastor. Additionally, the ministry should reflect the mission of the church. Researchers Tom Wagner and Nelson Cowan have researched and discussed the alignment of Hillsong’s songwriting with the emphasis of the church. Cowan specifically discussed the shift from a local to global. He notes the shift in theology writing, “This theological shift, as expressed in the hymnody, is

¹⁷² Chow, 298.

¹⁷³ Kauflin, 250.

embedded in a larger shift in Hillsong Church's vision: from the local church level to a self-replicating global community."¹⁷⁴ Similarly, each participant interviewed had a distinct emphasis unique to the specific mission of their church. These ranged from a local emphasis in the case of Adam Heare, to a more global perspective in the case of Sian.

That none of the interviewees and their churches are using sector services or publishing administration services is also significant. The interview questions only asked if they used these services or not, not why they did or did not use them. This may be because sector services are relatively new. Jameson Reynolds church was in the process of setting up a publishing company. Reynold's church was by far the largest and as such has the most to lose if a song went viral and the church had no publishing rights. Daniel Nordgård, writes, "Digitalization has stirred and fueled a growing debate around copyright from an economic perspective, one based on copyright as an incentive to create and invest in new content."¹⁷⁵ All the large church labels such as Hillsong, Bethel Music, Elevation Worship, and Gateway Worship have publishing companies. This ensures that they will have a financial stake in the licenses granted. Smaller churches making the move from a small songwriting ministry to one which gains national or global exposure would want to consider creating a publishing company.

It is also significant that none of the participants churches were record labels. Like the creation of publishing companies, the creation of a label may be for larger, more established church production ministries.

¹⁷⁴ Cowan, 78.

¹⁷⁵ Nordgård, 15.

The fact that most of the participants noted finances as the greatest challenge is another significant point. At one time, producing and releasing music was expensive at all phases of production- recording, mixing/mastering, printing CDs, and distribution. These days the greatest expense is recording and mixing/mastering. Except for Jameson Reynolds, most of the participants were recording piecemeal or one at track at a time. Li recorded drums at a private studio and finished the project using equipment he and the church already owned. He called his initial project a “DIY approach” and learned how to produce through consultation and literature.¹⁷⁶ Arthur Wesley moved tracks from his church campus to his private studio. Sian recorded everything at a private studio which he lamented was much more expensive than the studios he used when he lived in Myanmar.

For churches considering starting a songwriting ministry, the greatest challenge would be the initial investment. This may be the most significant part of the study. The interviews and literature bear this out. Besides equipment which can cost in the thousands, there is also the issue of instrumental and vocal isolation. Without isolating instruments while recording, tracks can bleed into each other so that the sound of the drums might be in the guitar track, or acoustic guitar may be heard in the vocal track. This is one reason why Li had to record the drums separately. Chance the Rapper’s first album was recorded at a public access studio no doubt using prerecorded drum loops rather than live drums. The bright side is that it appears that churches can take a start small approach. Li, Sian, and Wesley are all in the process of slowly building an inhouse studio where they eventually can do all recordings. If the church can figure out a way to get past this initial hurdle, the rest of the production is more affordable because of the new digital media. CDs no longer need to be printed. Companies like Distrokid, CD Baby, or

¹⁷⁶ Li, 7.

Tunecore can take care of distribution for a relatively small annual fee. Finally, the responsibility for paying mechanical licenses fall on the streaming services. In the past, this is an expense a church would need to cover in advance.

Limitations

This study contains limitations much of which can be attributed to the more subjective nature of qualitative studies. The researcher recognizes that these limitations exist and hopes that by accounting for them, the reader will take them into consideration especially if his or her intent is to apply some or all these findings.

First, the pool of interviewees is small. The intention was to interview ten people rather than just five; however, time constraints combined with lack of response caused the researcher to interpret the data that was available. The reader should understand that these interviews are for informational purposes only and should not be considered normal or even statistically significant. The reader should instead consider information obtained by interview as professional advice and continue to prayerfully research the topic of church music production before starting a songwriting ministry.

Second, even though it is true that streaming music is monetized in such a way that a songwriter/publisher/artist can earn income immediately, the reader must understand that thousands and even millions of streams are needed before significant income is reached, depending on the streaming platform. Throughout the thesis the researcher has attempted to convey the difficulty of independent artists making significant cashflow through streaming original music. It is not the intention of the researcher to imply that producing original worship

music will generate significant income. It more than likely will not. A songwriting ministry should be started for reasons other than income potential.¹⁷⁷

It should be understood that the researcher teaches a music industry class in a music department at an evangelical university. Although the researcher has every intention of maintaining objectivity, he probably has a certain bias in favor of churches producing original songs. As a result, the tone of the thesis might perhaps convey a degree of enthusiasm that could be considered unrealistic. Readers should understand the financial and spiritual commitment involved in undertaking the creation of a songwriting ministry. Like any new ministry a church may undertake, all aspects of implementation should be prayerfully researched before any type of decision is made.

Although the researcher focused on medium-sized churches, there is at least one which would not be considered medium-sized; in fact, it might even be considered a “mega-church.” Jameson Reynold’s church has six campuses around the Tulsa area. The church probably has significant financial resources which might not be available to a congregation of less than four hundred members. Even without great financial resources a smaller church can learn from and implement many of Reynold’s ideas, especially his system of consistent songwriting. Keep in mind that with the new digital media, everybody has access to the same distribution.

Recommendations for Future Study

As the limitations suggest, there is need for future study so that there can be better understanding of church worship music production. Like many studies, this thesis has left

¹⁷⁷ According to Digital Music News, Napster is the highest paying streaming platform paying \$.019 per stream. To earn a monthly minimum wage in the United States, an artist would need 77,474 streams. The lowest paying is YouTube which pays \$.00069 per stream. To earn a monthly minimum wage in the United States an artist would need 2,133,333 streams.

questions which require answering. A major quantitative study of a large cross section of evangelical churches producing original worship music could be beneficial.

A study over a cross section of evangelical churches could ascertain a percentage of churches producing original worship music. This same study could also determine the reasons why certain churches start songwriting ministries. There could be a myriad of reasons, but it might be beneficial to the people who write many of the more popular songs and the entire industry to understand what the needs of churches are at the local level. A study such as this could also look at such things as language, age, and racial make-up. For example, Jameson Reynolds described his congregation's main demographic as being 18 to 45 years old and Arthur Wesley says millennials are his target audience.¹⁷⁸ ¹⁷⁹ A broad study could show an age demographic correlation for churches which produce original worship music as well as correlations between languages and ethnicities.

If the only reason for composing original worship songs was to serve languages which are underrated, it would be a worthy reason. A follow up study or article to this one could focus on Sian and Carson Li and perhaps a few others not listed in the study. Much like the topic of this thesis it could focus on how the new digital media is helping bring new songs to underserved people groups in the world like the Zomi of Myanmar. Such an article might inspire other potential expatriate songwriters to produce worship music for their homeland. From the interview with Li and the research of Maria Chow, it is clear that translating an English song into a foreign language may not always produce the desired result. The world needs Christian

¹⁷⁸ Jameson Reynolds, interviewed by author, November 4, 2020

¹⁷⁹ Arthur Wesley, interviewed by author, November 6, 2020.

songwriters to compose new songs in all languages and dialects and utilize the streaming services to distribute their songs globally.

Another object for future study would be Jameson Reynold's church. His church has the most established song production program and is probably closest to potential national success. It would be useful and interesting to chronicle the journey from the time when they began producing original music to the time when they potentially receive national exposure and success. For Reynold's church, songwriting and production is a continuing and ongoing process. As it stands now, they do not use sector services and are just beginning to create their own publishing company; however, knowledge of how the reach and exposure of the ministry will evolve as they publish would help other ministries at a similar juncture make an informed decision. Also, if they decide to use a sector service for marketing, will it result in positive results and give them traction and momentum? Reynold's experience as this part of his ministry moves forward would be helpful for other churches seeking ideas to improve the exposure of their song production.

Applications

Certainly, the experiences of the interview participants might inspire a reader to consider starting a songwriting ministry. Carson Li's thesis is available on the world wide web for anybody to read. Although the thesis was part of a graduate level project for Li, it is a "how to" for anybody wanting to start a songwriting ministry. For most of the people interviewed, their ministries are still pieced together from several sources. Until the end of the 1990's most artists recorded to some type of magnetic tape. These days a fast computer, interface, microphone, and a few other pieces of gear is all a person needs to create a demo level recording. Most churches probably have (or can acquire) those things and build from that starting point. Perhaps the

songwriting ministry starts with a series of demos with new church songs and grows from there. Even simple demos could be uploaded to YouTube and shared with the local worship community. Those songs could then be integrated into the church worship set. The beginnings of a songwriting ministry could start with something simple such as that.

The study may also be a motivation for those looking to expand their songwriting production ministries to consider using sector services. These services can extend a ministry's reach by expanding their digital footprint. In several places the thesis made the comparison between internet presence and record stores. Expanding the internet presence could be compared to putting CDs and records on a prominent display in a record store back when that was the way music was distributed. Both serve a function of creating more visibility.

It is hoped that this study could be a motivation for reaching an underserved people group with worship songs in their native language. One of the roles an ethnodoxologist plays is that of song facilitator. They will often go on the foreign mission field and help indigenous people develop their own hymnody; however, the ministries of Sian and Li shows that songs can be developed thousands of miles away from a country and streamed on YouTube or Spotify. Li's focus is on his local church first, then the Cantonese speaking population in Hong Kong. But outside of Hong Kong there are millions of other Chinese who speak Cantonese, at least 60 million. And in China as a whole at least 400 million people, or about 30 percent of the country, do not speak the official and dominant Chinese language, Mandarin.¹⁸⁰ It is estimated that there was approximately 90 to 100 million Christians in China in 2019, or 6 to 7 percent of the

¹⁸⁰ Felicia Sonmez, "China is Forcing Its Biggest Cantonese-Speaking Region to Speak Mandarin," *Business Insider*, April 25, 2014, <https://www.businessinsider.com/china-is-forcing-its-biggest-cantonese-speaking-region-to-speak-mandarin-2014-8#:~:text=Cantonese%20is%20spoken%20by%20more,may%20fall%20by%20the%20wayside>.

population.¹⁸¹ With the growing Christian population in China and around the world, there is a need and plenty of opportunity for people like Sian and Carson Li to utilize songwriting and the new digital media to reach parts of the world that have been underserved or have yet to be reached.

Conclusion

There are several ideas which tie the thesis together. First, the disruption in the industry has created an opportunity for independent artists and by extension, churches, because of changes in distribution. The arrival of new digital media means that music uploaded to streaming platforms can be consumed anywhere on the globe where there is internet service. Second, because most of the newer worship songs written and sung in churches today are composed by a small group of songwriters, there is a need for greater diversity in worship music produced. *Christianity Today* writer Megan Fowler identified weaknesses in the area of theological themes and ethnic or racial diversity. The purpose of the paper was to identify challenges in starting a new songwriting ministry in a medium-sized church and identify strategies for helping churches which currently have songwriting ministries improve.

The research was qualitative with interviews. The interviews provided key insight as to how churches went about producing original worship music. Each producer had different goals as defined by the pastor or leadership of the church with some focusing on the local body and others focusing on Christians (and non-believers) globally. Each producer had their own process and methods of recording, but most had to record part or all their projects outside of the church

¹⁸¹ Tobias Brandner, "A Besieged Boom: Christianity in China," *Theology Today* 76, no. 3 (October 2019): 196, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040573619859015>.

campus. This process demonstrates that a songwriting ministry may have to creative piece recording equipment together to create and produce a worship release.

There were several recommendations for future study and applications of the research. Perhaps the greatest was the use of the new technology and streaming services to reach Christians worldwide in their native languages.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

These questions represent the five major areas identified in chapters 3 and 4 and were used for both live and online interviews.

1. What is your position and job duties?
2. Who acts as producer of the sound recording projects?
3. What are the goals of your church's songwriting production ministry?
4. Who is your target audience?
5. Describe your songwriting process?
6. Do you record in-house or at a private recording studio?
7. If at a private recording studio, does the church plan on building an in-house studio?
8. What was the biggest obstacle for starting a songwriting ministry/production company?
9. Does your church have a record label?
10. Are you 100% streaming or do you still produce CDs?
11. What streaming platforms are your songs on?
12. What distributor do you use?
13. Does your church use any external services for greater market reach?
14. Does your church publish? If so, does it use any of the publishing administration services such as Tunecore or CD Baby?
15. Is there anything about production process you would like to add?

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval**LIBERTY UNIVERSITY**
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

November 2, 2020

Christopher Brown
Zeb Balentine

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY20-21-170 The New Digital Media: Opportunities for Church Sound Recording, Songwriting, and Music Publishing

Dear Christopher Brown, Zeb Balentine:

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46: 101(b):

Category 2. (iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research

Research Ethics Office