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Plugging into Worship: How Contemporary Christian Music Is Impacting Church Musicians

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**Plugging into Worship: How Contemporary Christian Music
Is Impacting Church Musicians**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelors of Arts in Religious Studies from
The College of William and Mary

by

David Michael McClendon

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Table of Contents

Introduction 4

 The Arts in the American Religious Marketplace 9

Heaven Above as a Medium of Involvement 15

 History of Contemporary Worship at Springhill 15

 Plugging into Worship: Getting Involved and Staying Involved 21

 Being Part of a Group 33

Making Music a Religious Experience 42

 Consequences of Playing Worship Music 42

 The Musical Connection: Unity through Song 49

Conclusion 59

Bibliography 62

Appendix I 65

Appendix II: PHSC Approval 69

Introduction

We're waiting for the early service to let out. I can see through the glass doors that the early service is almost finished taking communion. It's already 10:15am. We have to start playing in fifteen minutes. Jess is already getting her music out of her binder and arranging it in the proper order for the service. Keith is searching anxiously through the music in his folder. Carol, Kelly, and Paul are discussing how the pastor needs to keep a better track of the time during the service. Kim comes rushing in from the cold November morning and, upon seeing that the first service had yet to end, exclaims, "Well, if I had known that then I wouldn't have rushed out of the house!" Kelly asks Kim how her daughter is doing. Kim says that she has finally gotten over her fever. As they embrace, the doors to the sanctuary open and the voices of a hundred people enter the foyer. We all grab our instruments and swim upstream.

Guitars tuned. Amps on. Batteries charged. Music out. Volume set. "I'd like to ask everyone to remain standing and join us in song as we praise our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ," Terry speaks to the crowd, effectively ending the Passing of the Peace (the time during which the congregation greets one another). Jess hits the first chord, followed closely by the thunder of the drum set. "*There is no Rock! There is no Rock like our God!*" Kim and Terry split into harmony for the chorus while Kelly continues to lead the congregation with the melody. I forget that I'm playing guitar – I'm soaking in the moment. The congregation is singing, the pastor is singing, I'm singing. The tempo drags. Beth misses a key change and quickly recovers. I look back at Jess. She's looking at Beth but then looks at me. We make eye contact. We're back on track. "*Rock of Ages! Jesus is the Rock!*" The chorus comes again and we play louder and

stronger. Terry raises her hand during the last repeat and we hold the last chord on cue. The cymbals are still ringing as the congregation claps and shouts, “Amen!” The piano keeps playing softly. The pastor leads a prayer while Jess and I put our guitars down.

Later in the service, after the sermon ends, the focus shifts back to our side of the stage as Kim stands to sing “Mercy Seat.” The congregation remains seated. Some people are watching Kim, some have their eyes closed in prayer, and others are coaxing their children to be silent. I’m still on stage but I’m not playing guitar during this song. Kim hits the highest note in the song and makes it soar over the congregation. I notice that as her second hand goes up to her microphone, her legs and arms are shaking ever so slightly. After she finishes the song there is mostly silence in the congregation. A few people give a resounding, “Amen!” while others timidly clap. The pastor comes forward to begin communion. Every row goes up to the front and receives the bread and the wine. As the last person sits down, the pastor puts down the elements and asks us all to stand and hold hands. Paul comes out from behind the drums and everyone in the congregation grabs someone else’s hand. The pastor leads us all in a prayer as we bow our heads. The musicians are hand in hand with one another – hand in hand with the congregation.

When most people outside the Christian community think of Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) they do not think of the experiences I just described. They usually think of the infomercials that come on in the middle of the afternoon that splice together footage of overly joyous white people at stadium revivals and have scrolling text of song titles like “Awesome God,” “Come Let Us Worship and Bow Down,” and “Lord

"I Lift Your Name on High." Some may remember Amy Grant and her cross-over hits from the 1980s. Others might know friends who own albums of current Christian artists like Caedmon's Call, Third Day, or DC Talk. The commercialization of Christian music has been a hot topic for both the media and scholars. In the recent documentary, *Why Should the Devil Have All the Good Music?* (2004), Christian artists and producers defend CCM from secular producers and critics who claim the message of Christianity is being cheapened by the mass production of mediocre, Gospel-infused music.

Sociologists Jay Howard and John Streck (1999) explore the Contemporary Christian Music scene in their book *Apostles of Rock* and analyze both the diverse approaches artists have taken to mixing rock music with the Christian Gospel and the effects these approaches are having on American Christianity.

While many Christians are concerned about some of the same issues and have similar images in their minds of CCM, something else is brought to mind when they think of CCM: the contemporary worship service at their own church. CCM, now a multi-million dollar industry, started in the local churches of California as part of the Jesus Freak Movement during the late 60s and 70s (Beaujon 2006). It continues to impact the worship experience of Christians across the country. Worship bands, with their guitars, amps, and sound systems, are a normal presence in a growing number of congregations across the country. Many church leaders are adding contemporary services to their Sunday schedule because they see it as a way to reach a new generation of believers – a generation that is trying to connect with some type of spirituality but is not touched by the hymns that tied their parents to the church (Wuthnow 2001).

This change in Christian worship music has given lay musicians new opportunities to get involved in the work of the church. As a former church musician, I wanted to look specifically at how CCM has impacted the church musicians that are rehearsing and performing this music for their congregations every Sunday. I chose a worship band called Heaven Above from a local Methodist Church, Springhill United Methodist. I chose Heaven Above for a number of reasons. First, I wanted to study a group that was part of a Mainline Protestant church. More Evangelical churches and mega-churches certainly use CCM but their worship tends to be more charismatic in nature. I wanted to see how traditional mainline denominations were using CCM to adapt to the changes in American religious life. Second, Heaven Above was a high quality worship band. I found out from their website that the music director (who is also the leader of the band) had a professional career in music for most of her life. After attending a few services and hearing the band, I decided that this was the band that I wanted to study.

I contacted both Pastor Collier and Terry Kaplan, the music director, and asked them if Heaven Above would be interested in participating in my study. I initially asked only to observe the band, but once Terry found out I played guitar, she invited me to join the band as a temporary member. At the first practice, I explained my project to the group and they were all happy to help out. Over the next few months, I attended rehearsal and played with the band on Sundays. During this time I also interviewed eight members of the band for at least an hour each using a prepared interview guide (see Appendix I). Everyone was promised confidentiality, therefore, the names, including the name of the church and the band, have been changed. My analysis in this paper draws

heavily from both the interviews and my record of my participant observation with the group from July 2007 to January 2008. I used an inductive, systematic, grounded theory approach, coding for major themes in a way that allowed my participants' voices to shape my analysis (Corbin and Strauss). I continued to be involved with Heaven Above after January 2008 as I analyzed my data, making sure that my findings represented the experience of the musicians in the group.

I will begin my analysis with a brief examination of the changes that have occurred in American religion since the 1960s, specifically the privatization of religiosity and decline of denominational loyalty. We will see how churches have begun to tap into music and the arts to speak to congregations in a new way. Keeping these larger scale changes in mind, I will show how CCM has been a medium of involvement for the musicians in Heaven Above at Springhill. We will see how CCM has attracted musicians to not only attend church but to get involved in Heaven Above. We will hear from the musicians about how they became involved in the band and the impact it has had on their experience at Springhill. We will also look at how the group dynamics of the band compare with those of a small group, specifically at how it creates spiritual intimacy and supports individual autonomy as the group comes together to serve the congregation. Next, we will delve deeper into the specific issues that arise from leading worship music on Sunday. We will explore how these musicians balance the inherent distraction in making music with the power that music has to connect musicians to each other, to the congregation, and to God. We will bring all these components together and look at how CCM is providing churches a way to meet the needs of church musicians as they try to connect musically with new generations of believers.

The Arts in the American Religious Marketplace

In the 1960s, sociologists such as Harvey Cox (1966) and Peter Berger (1967) put forward what came to be known as the secularization theory: that the rise of science and the disestablishment of religion would soon make it impossible for religious traditions to keep their ideological hold on people of the modern world. By the 1980s and 1990s, however, while the era of denominational loyalty had certainly passed, churches in the United States had adapted to the changes in American culture and were thriving. Stephen Warner (1993) proposed a New Paradigm for studying religious institutions in the United States that accounted for these institutions' abilities to stay relevant and meet the needs of the American public. What I want to explore is 1) the changes in American culture that churches are responding to, and 2) the role that the arts, specifically music, have in addressing these changes.

It is important to remember, as Warner points out, that the American religious landscape has always been characterized by some degree of individualism. The cattle ranger pushing westward, the business tycoon rising from the depths of poverty, the rebel taking a stand against injustice – these images are central to the American psyche and have always affected the way Americans view religion. Often when we talk of the privatization of American religion and a “Religious Marketplace” as a new phenomenon, we forget that mainstream denominations like Methodist and Baptist churches began as sects responding to the individual needs of the public through the Great Awakenings of the 19th century (Warner 1993: 1079). Individualism is nothing new in American religion.

However, since the 1960s, the privatization of religion in America has reached new heights, threatening religious institutions' relevancy in many Americans' spiritual lives. In his study of the religiosity of the baby boom generation entitled *A Generation of Seekers*, Wade Clark Roof (1993) examines the profound impact that the tumultuous decade of the 1960s had on that generation's relationship with organized religion. Even though previous generations also believed that religious identity should be determined by the individual, Roof points out that baby-boomers were more inclined to distrust religious institutions after living through the political and social upheavals of the late 60s and early 70s. Influenced by the counter-culture movement and Eastern religious traditions, the baby boom generation saw religion as a personal and private matter in a more significant way than any previous generation.

The term "Sheila-ism" has become a stock phrase used to encapsulate the degree of privatization in American religion, thanks to Robert Bellah, et al (1996), in the landmark study of American individualism, *Habits of the Heart*. Sheila Larson, interviewed for the study, builds her religion, which she calls "Sheila-ism," around ideas of God and self-actualization, apart from any sort of religious institution. Bellah admits that this religious individualism is not new to American religion (he cites Anne Hutchinson as an example) but what *is* new is the prevalence with which we find this degree of individualism among Americans. This hyper-individualism, combined with the social revolutions of the 1960s, has placed churches in a tenuous position. No longer can churches expect the sort of denominational loyalty from congregants that they could in the 1950s. By using Warner's New Paradigm, we can see how churches are negotiating

with this new American ethos and the various ways in which they are adapting to it in order to meet the needs of new generations of believers.

Bellah also points out in *Habits of the Heart* that amidst this intense individualism, Americans are seeking and finding ways to become involved and be a part of community. This spirit of involvement in public life, whether through religious, political, or humanitarian organizations, has always been a facet of the American mind; Tocqueville noticed it in *Democracy in America* and Bellah confirms it, declaring, “The United States is a nation of joiners” (167). *Habits of the Heart* addresses the inherent tension between individualism and civic responsibility that has been present throughout American history. Traditionally, Bellah writes, “Civic republicanism and biblical religion remind us that being an individual – being one’s own person – does not entail escaping our ties to others” (ix). The central thrust of Bellah’s book, in fact, is a communitarian exhortation to preserve a sense of civic responsibility in the face of radical individualism.

What Bellah and many other sociologists have found is that a number of Americans have found new ways to preserve their radical individualism while still getting involved in community organizations. Wade Clark Roof addresses this issue in his discussion of why baby boomers are returning to church. Many who dropped out of organized religion after the 60s and 70s are returning because they want to belong to a community. Roof finds that despite the boomers’ staunch belief that being religious does not necessitate belonging to a formalized religious organization, they have a deep yearning to belong to some type of community. Roof points out that “many look on

religious groups as special, as groups deal in something that secular organizations cannot match” (160). A community is still seen as a pathway to the sacred.

The small group movement in American churches is a popular way that Americans are keeping religion private and yet experiencing it with others. In his book *Sharing the Journey*, Robert Wuthnow (1994) frames the small group movement in the context of the privatization of American religion and suggests that small groups are a way Americans are responding to the tension between radical individualism and their desire to be involved and belong. He suggests that small groups have changed the way we conceive of being a part of a religious community. Instead of conforming to the beliefs of the community, group members are encouraged to express their private beliefs. Small groups also provide individuals with an intimate community of people with which they can share and better their own personal lives. They often give people the feeling of community without the burden of obligation and the loss of autonomy. This new type of religious community is often written off as group narcissism, but for Wuthnow it is a significant way that churches are adapting to the growing privatization of American religion.

There are other ways that churches have responded to the changing needs of the American public and one of the most pervasive has been in the area of the arts, specifically music. The rise of Contemporary Christian Music in church worship services has put an end to the monopoly of traditional hymnody. By infusing worship services with rock n’ roll, churches are trying to adapt the medium of their message to the taste of congregants and offer a modern alternative to the tradition-bound liturgy of the past. In *All in Sync*, Robert Wuthnow (2003) argues that the incorporation of the arts into modern

churches is a major way that churches have addressed the fundamental changes in American religious culture and is a reason why church attendance has remained stable despite predictions to the contrary. For Wuthnow, the arts are connected in the American mind with personal spirituality and cosmic experience. The arts have become a vehicle through which churches can appeal to their members' desire for an individual, spiritual experience. Instead of occurring on a yoga mat, this spiritual experience can be had in a religious community. In short, the arts are bringing people back to church. By giving a modern twist on traditional liturgy, churches are making Christianity relevant to the individualistic and "spiritual" American.

While Wuthnow sets the stage for my study, he does not go far enough in his discussion of music's role in contemporary worship. Stephen Warner (2004) points out that Wuthnow treats music as just another part of the overall picture of the arts when in fact his own study shows it to be the most important component. Warner writes that, according to Wuthnow, "Listening to a record or performing the same piece, singing or playing an instrument, and doing so alone or with others are effectively the same. The power of making music together, alluded to in the interview from which the book's title is taken, goes unexplored" (990). Wuthnow seems to take for granted the power that music has in uniting the congregation and shaping the sacred experience of worship.

I would add to Warner's critique that Wuthnow's discussion of music centers on the congregants' experience and leaves out the experience of the church musicians that are making the music. Worship-making unites musicians in ways that are not apparent to the congregant who, in mid-chorus, is lost in Durkheim's (2001) "collective effervescence." There is a complex web of communication and meaning-making going

on between the musicians both on and off stage. In addition to the musical bonds created between musicians are the spiritual and emotional connections that grow out of the time spent together serving the church. I want to push Wuthnow's thesis further and examine how Contemporary Christian Music is meeting the needs of 21st century Christian musicians and is getting them involved in the church in new ways.

Chapter One: Heaven Above as a Medium of Involvement

History of Contemporary Worship at Springhill

“I would consider us to be a big little church,” Kelly told me as she was filling out a church survey before the service, “We’re a small-knit group of people but we’re capable of doing big things.” Located in the Southern United States amid the suburbia that surrounds a town of about 12,000 people, Springhill United Methodist has a small but affluent congregation. The sanctuary can hold around 150 people but on a typical Sunday there are 70-80 congregants at each service. The congregation is overwhelmingly white and has a wide range of age groups, from young families to retired individuals. They are able to cater to both older traditionalists and the younger generations by holding a traditional service at 9am and a contemporary service at 10:45 am each Sunday morning.

The church leans toward the liberal end of the political spectrum, meaning that a spirit of love and acceptance is emphasized. Couples of all sexual orientations are welcomed without judgment, if not explicitly then at least in practice. The only overtly political message I witnessed was a Sunday night showing of *An Inconvenient Truth* followed by a discussion of a Christian’s responsibility to the environment. That being said, the central theological tenets presented by the pastor and other church members are not radical by any means. Springhill would be considered a liberal congregation in relation to the surrounding church communities but the basic Mainline Protestant beliefs are still in tact: the salvific power of faith in Jesus Christ, the doctrine of the Trinity, and the liturgical tradition of the Methodist church.

The current pastor Rick Collier inherited the large and diverse music program at Springhill. Springhill currently has seven active music groups for both adults and children. For adults there is an Adult Choir, two contemporary praise bands (Heaven Above and Wondrous), and a handbell choir. For children there are nursery-age and grade-school age choirs, as well as a youth praise band. This diversity allows Springhill to have two distinct services on Sunday that each has its own musical group and musical style. In the contemporary service, the addition of a second praise band also gives the musicians a chance to be a part of the congregation for two Sundays out of the month.

Springhill's contemporary music program began under the previous pastor in the mid-90s. Prior to that time, Springhill only had one traditional service with a very small adult choir. Influenced by the new types of worship formats being tried throughout the country to reach the younger generation, the pastor wanted to start a contemporary service that met on Saturday nights and played contemporary music. To start this contemporary movement at Springhill, the pastor hired the current music minister Terry Kaplan and charged her with starting a contemporary group. Terry and her husband Rob began collaborating with other musicians in the congregation and formed a band piece by piece called Heaven Above. Although the Saturday night service did not catch on, a contemporary service was soon added to the Sunday morning schedule. Over the next fifteen years, Terry helped turn a small adult choir into a vibrant, multi-group music program that continues to attract people to the church.

The addition of a contemporary service brought the typical, physical changes that are required for a CCM worship band. In order to pull off the rock n' roll sound, Springhill needed a more diverse group of specialized musicians - a drummer, a bassist,

guitarists, keyboardists. These types of musicians also required new and more advanced technology. Amps, mic stands, and drums now accompany the grand piano and the chairs for the choir. Another major addition is the sound system. A worship band may have a number of vocalists, but as the number of instrumentalists and total volume increase on stage (especially with the addition of drums), microphones are required in order to hear the vocalists. This required Springhill to make a financial investment in the music program. These are just some of the many changes that a contemporary band brings.

The term “contemporary” is applied to a vast array of song styles in a worship service. There are two predominant types of contemporary songs that are played by Heaven Above: songs classified as “praise music,” and songs classified as “special music.” They differ both in function and in musicality. Praise music has the congregation in mind. Two or three praise songs begin the service each week and are designed for participatory worship. As a result, these songs are usually simple and anthemic, allowing the congregation to sing along easily. While many of these songs are upbeat, slower songs often make it into these praise blocks. Special music, on the other hand, is a time when the congregation is seated and the musicians are performing. At Springhill, a special music song usually follows the sermon. Heaven Above tries to choose a song with lyrics that fit thematically with the sermon so that it functions as a way to musically reinforce the day’s message. Special music songs are usually slower and more contemplative. They tend to be songs that are more complex and would be harder for the congregation to sing. The special music is also an opportunity for Heaven Above to play a wide variety of musical genres. While praise music doesn’t stray far

from the participatory, light-rock anthems, special music is a time when the band can try out new musical styles or play original material.

Springhill's music program has quite a reputation around the area. A local church conducted a study of the town's church music programs and gave Springhill the title of "best contemporary music program." Springhill's praise band Heaven Above has played at the annual United Methodist state conference on three separate occasions. Heaven Above also plays out in the community for holiday events such as an office Christmas party and the town's New Year's Eve celebration. The congregation itself treasures the quality and diversity of the music program. This is seen not only in the enthusiastic praise the musicians receive after every service, but also in the large investment the church was more than willing to make in the new sound system. After a committee lets out, church members will often come into the sanctuary on a Thursday night and listen to the band rehearse.

The group that I studied, Heaven Above, has always been in flux, but currently the band has three female vocalists, rhythm, lead, and bass guitars, two keyboardists, and a drummer. Terry Kaplan began her musical career singing in a church folk trio in the 1960s and has been singing professionally in rock bands for most of her life. Rob Kaplan, Terry's husband, has also been in bands with Terry and plays lead guitar for Heaven Above. Kelly Newport, one of the original members, sings in the group in addition to leading the Adult Choir. Jess Morse, another founding member, plays rhythm acoustic guitar, sings, and writes a good deal of original material for the group. Carol Anderson has classical training in both piano and French horn and plays keyboard for the group. The other keyboardist, Beth Fraser, has less formal training than Carol but, in

addition to being in the band, she is also the Programs Director at Springhill. The other three members have joined the group in the last five years. Paul White began filling in for an unreliable drummer but has now become the permanent drummer for the group. Keith Burgess joined the group about two years ago as a male vocalist but soon learned to play the bass and now mainly fills that role. Kim Sullivan is the newest addition to the group, joining last April as a vocalist after leaving a church where she was choir director. Kim is the youngest member of the group at thirty years old. Paul and Keith are both in their mid-thirties while the rest of the group is in their late forties and early fifties.

Before we explore how and why Heaven Above has gotten musicians involved in and attached to the religious community of Springhill, we need to learn a bit about their conceptions of faith and community and see how these beliefs are reflective of the broader changes in American religious thought. There was an underlying assumption on the part of many of the musicians that one's faith is personal and that it is the church's job to bring people together, not to unify their beliefs. Paul told me, "To me, you need to differentiate between your own faith and church. To me, faith is something that's very personal." Jess distanced herself from the Evangelical movement, saying, "I pray, I believe in God, I believe the Bible is the word of God, but I'm not a fundamentalist, Bible-thumping evangelist. I'm more of a 'this is what guides me, motivates me, and keeps me grounded.'" It is Springhill's spirit of acceptance that Terry finds most appealing. Talking about the pastor before Pastor Collier, she told me, "I valued her ideals and that she was all-accepting, didn't judge people – like if an inter-racial couple wanted to worship here or a gay couple wanted to worship here, she was all accepting, and that's what I loved about her. Because I don't think as Christians, whether we

believe things are right or wrong in the Bible, we should set ourselves up as judges. We're supposed to be all-accepting and all-embracing and loving to people and it's up to God to judge."

While the personalization of faith was prevalent among these musicians in our discussions, none of the members of Heaven Above characterized their faith in such an extreme way as Bellah's Sheila, emphasizing, instead, that being a part of a community of believers is an important part of their faith. Kelly told me that when she looked back on her life, the times she felt that her faith was the strongest were when she was a part of a church community. For Kelly, being part of a church meant being active and involved with the people of the church. Before attending Springhill, Kelly told me, "I just attended a large church on a military base... unless you took the time to connect yourself, there wasn't an intimate connection." Other members echoed Kelly's sentiments, telling me that before becoming a member of Springhill, they had lost a real connection with a church. Jess said, "I stayed active in the church in high school but once I came to college, ya know how you drift away, you just never go back... I didn't really connect again with a church on a regular basis until Springhill." These accounts are consistent with Roof's (1993) findings about the baby-boomer's mass exodus and current return to organized religion. The musicians in Heaven Above feel that their religious beliefs are private matters and yet they desire to experience religion in a community.

Plugging into Worship: Getting Involved and Staying Involved

A central question we must answer is what brought these particular musicians to Springhill and what role did the music program have? It was evident from the first few weeks of my study that, as Kelly told me, “Music is important to this church and it always has been and it draws people here.” After talking with each musician individually, however, I found that there are a number of ways in which the music program at Springhill drew them to the church. In order to understand this complexity, we need to lay out the different ways that music attracted these musicians to Springhill and eventually encouraged them to become involved in Heaven Above.

The most basic reason that the music program attracted many of the musicians to Springhill was that the musicians enjoyed the style and the quality of the music being played. Beth told me, “I started to come here mostly to listen to the band. I was a band junkie at that point.” The “praise music” style of Heaven Above connected with many of the musicians, in the same way that it does with non-musicians, and got them excited about attending Springhill. “Praise music” is the term used to refer to the participatory CCM that Heaven Above plays when leading the congregation during the service. Kim said, “I just love the lively, upbeat praise songs where people can kind of just be who they are when they’re singing.” While Terry has respect for traditional hymns, she said she prefers praise music because, “it speaks more to my personal taste.” The style of the music, then, as Wuthnow suggests in *All In Sync*, is a factor in attracting musicians to church.

But the musicians did not come to Springhill because they wanted to be entertained; music is also an important part of their religious experience. We will explore

the various accounts of the musicians' transcendent musical moments of Durkheim's (2001) "collective effervescence" in the next chapter, but for now it is important to recognize that music's ability to enhance religious experience was another pull factor for these musicians when they were considering joining Springhill. The high quality of Springhill's music program was not only enjoyable but it also enhanced the spiritual experience of worship for these skilled musicians.

The ability of churches to attract members by incorporating new artistic mediums into worship is the heart of Wuthnow's (2003) thesis in *All in Sync*. What Wuthnow fails to adequately address is how these new opportunities for artistic expression affect the experience of artists who are in the congregation. For musicians, the incorporation of these new types of music has an almost inevitable consequence: they want to participate in the music-making process. Before that, though, there is a degree to which an initial group of artists *must* participate in order for the artistic medium to exist in a church. There is a birthing process that takes place when any new art form enters the worship service, a negotiation that must take place between the artist, the pastor, and the congregation. I already described how the contemporary band began at Springhill: the pastor wanted a contemporary service and so she recruited musicians to form a band and that band, in turn, got other musicians interested in joining the group.

I want to stress that CCM provides a *new* opportunity for involvement in the worship service. A worship band may serve the same function in a contemporary service that a choir does in a traditional service, but the types of musicians who can be involved are very different. CCM is unique in its demand for a wider variety of musicians. In a traditional service, the only musicians involved in the music-making are the singers in the

choir and a piano/organ accompanist. CCM, however, allows for a plethora of musicians to be involved. Guitarists, bassists, drummers, mandolin players, and keyboardists can all be a part of the music-making process in a contemporary service. With the addition of a sound system, non-musicians are also needed to operate technological equipment, opening up even more opportunities for involvement. Many of these individuals do not have much to offer to a traditional worship service and CCM allows them to use their musical abilities in worship.

Unfortunately, while a worship band opens up more opportunities for different types of musicians to get involved, it also limits the number that can be involved. A traditional choir needs certain parts to be filled (bass, tenor, alto, soprano) but the size of a choir is virtually limitless. The doubling of parts in a worship band, however, is more problematic. Thanks to the vast array of synthesizer sounds on a modern keyboard, Heaven Above can use two keyboards in a very musical way, but the fact of the matter is the band only needs one bassist. A very skilled bassist may join the church and want to become a part of the group but, unless he plays another instrument, Heaven Above cannot use him. In the same vein, if a person without a strong or beautiful voice wants to join a large choir, there is a good chance that he or she could still join and be drowned out by the stronger singers. In a worship band, where every instrument is distinct and integral to the overall sound, the band cannot afford to accept musicians of questionable ability.

Musical ability is one of the few defined qualifications for being accepted into the group. Terry, as the leader of the band, is the one who has to make the decisions about membership in the group. She has often had to turn away unnecessary or inadequate musicians but she recognizes that she has an instrumental role in finding people a place to

get involved in the church. She told me, “You have to find where their niche is... you ask them what else they like to do and try to plug them in that way.” She had to be very critical of the musicians she hired on the road as a professional musician but she acknowledged that she had to be much more careful in how she included and excluded people in the music program. She was aware that people wanted to get involved in the church and that the music program was a major way that some people were trying to do that. She told me, “This is people wanting to give their gifts to God... When you plug people in, that’s when they’ll stay... People want to feel like they’re of value and that they are participating.”

Terry touches on the primary reasons that musicians want to get involved in the music program at Springhill: they do not just want to sing from their pews, they want to actively contribute to the music during worship. There are two types of motivations that the musicians in Heaven Above had for wanting to participate in the music program: 1) being involved in the music-making is personally fulfilling and is a way that they can be more directly involved in worshipping God and 2) they want to contribute to the church in a way that utilizes their talents. It is important to remember that these are not mutually exclusive categories. Each musician in Heaven Above had a different mixture of these two motivations when they decided to become a member of the band. Once they became involved, a number of the musicians felt that their involvement had given them a stronger and more intimate connection to the church community. Involvement in the band also led many members to see their participation in Heaven Above as a ministry to the congregation; the musicians see themselves as church leaders that have a responsibility to bring each congregant closer to God through music. These aspects of involvement get

added to the mixture of motivations that continue to make the musicians want to be involved in Heaven Above.

In his study of a multi-ethnic congregation in Los Angeles called Mosaic, Gerardo Marti (2005) offers an interesting look into how a church music program can reach out to artists by providing new ways for creative individuals to participate in the work of the church. Mosaic incorporates a wide variety of artistic mediums during the worship service: creative movement, drama, film, and expressive painting. By offering these new types of artistic expression in the context of a community of faith, Marti suggests that Mosaic has created an “artistic haven” for creative Christians “who escape from isolationist, ‘world-fearing’ churches and find refuge for their passion for film, art, dance, drama, and multimedia” (8). Marti found that the artistic projects in which these members were involved strengthened their bonds with each other and with the larger church. In this way, Mosaic is reaching out to its artistic members, both current and potential. The inclusion of new artistic mediums in worship enhances their experience as a member of the church by giving them a creative outlet. Now they can participate and contribute in a way that is both exciting and personally fulfilling.

Although Heaven Above is not as radically artistic as the groups at Mosaic and is not catering specifically to a disenfranchised, artistic community, the band plays a similar role at Springhill for musicians. Heaven Above is a vehicle for these musicians to express their faith in a way that utilizes their musical abilities. This aspect was crucial in Kim’s decision to join the group. She told me, “Like I’ve been saying for the past couple years, ‘I don’t have... I need an outlet. I don’t have my musical outlet.’ That’s the way that I really center myself and I felt like I just really didn’t have it. And since we’ve been

at Springhill, I really feel like it's back, like the hole that was there has been filled." For Paul, involvement in Heaven Above has often been the only motivation for attending church. When I asked Paul why he had wanted to join Heaven Above, he said, "I enjoy playing music and at that time that was one of the only things that was going to keep me in church... I knew I needed to stay but I was having a hard time finding reasons to stay... That's what's kept me in church."

Creativity is also highly valued in the band. The three songwriters in the group, Jess, Rob, and Carol, often bring in original material that the entire band works on and makes their own. Paul told me, "I like when somebody brings something in and I can add to it and they like it... I like being a part of that." Kim enjoys the personal touch that original music has, saying to me, "You're sharing a song that comes from the faith of your group and not just somebody like Michael W. Smith has written for you based on his faith." At concert performances, Terry would always credit the songwriter after they played an original song, telling the audience that the group was "so blessed to have such talent in the group." By offering the musically-inclined members of the congregation an opportunity to express themselves in an environment where personal creativity is also encouraged, Springhill is reaching out to musicians and providing a similar "haven" to the one at Mosaic. This was a significant pull factor for the musicians when they decided to become involved in Heaven Above.

An interesting discovery that I found in talking with many of the musicians was that they did not enjoy much of the music, specifically the praise music, that the group played during the contemporary service. Beth told me, "I think generally speaking as a band, and we've talked about it, we don't care for praise music. It is repetitive and it's a

little boring and we worry that we play things too often.” Jess echoed these sentiments, “I hate praise music! I really do... I play it, but it doesn’t really do anything for me.” These musicians still enjoyed the contemporary “special music” that the group performs by themselves after the sermon, but they did not like playing or singing much of the participatory praise music. Their dislike of this praise music, though, was based on musical taste and not on any theological concerns over the validity of praise music as a worship style. Kelly, who connects more with hymns than with praise music, emphasized this point: “I think any music that has the potential to draw people closer to God, I think has value... I wouldn’t try and take that away from anybody.”

Disliking the style of a majority of the songs seems to run against the idea that the main motivation for joining Heaven Above was the need to find an expressive outlet and instead suggests that a desire to contribute to the work of the church played a larger role for these particular musicians. Enjoyment and connection with the specific type of music seemed to be secondary to the desire to serve the church with their musical abilities. Carol compared the role of Heaven Above with other non-musical contributions to the service, saying, “It’s the same way *servicing* communion, I feel like I’m *servicing* music.” Even for musicians who connected with praise music, the opportunity to contribute to the church in an active way was a major factor in wanting to be a part of Heaven Above. Paul said, “I always tell my wife, I say, ‘Church is useless unless you’re putting into it.’ And that’s my way of putting into it.” Keith told me, “It keeps me coming back. It’s something that I enjoy doing and I am giving *something* to the congregation and doing and contributing to the church in some way and it’s in a way that I, ya know, I feel like I have *some* gifts in this area and at least I get to use them.” CCM, then, by utilizing

different types of musicians to make worship music, is creating new opportunities for church members to use their talents to be an active part of the church community.

But what is motivating these musicians to want to use their musical talents to serve their church? The discourse of “God’s will,” of feeling “called,” was used by many of the musicians in their discussions of why they had wanted to be a part of Heaven Above. Jess talked to me more generally about why worship is necessary during the service. She said, “I think we’re called to worship, first of all. I think that even the days we don’t really feel like we’re worshipping – we’re supposed to be there.” Musical talent was also framed by many of the musicians as a divine gift. This puts musicians in a unique position in the congregation. A musician, blessed with a talent from God, must decide for himself or herself how he or she is supposed to utilize this gift. Beth told me, “I think God has given us these gifts and ya know, we have decided that this is how we want to give back to the church.”

Others were not as sure that leading worship was what God had in mind for their talents. For some, it took years of prayer, patience, and encouragement from peers to finally feel like being a part of the music program was how God intended to use their musical abilities. Kelly resisted involvement in the music program when she first joined Springhill. Her experience with music at the collegiate level had left her feeling like “The joy from the music was gone.” Once she started coming to Springhill, everyone who heard her voice told her she should be in the choir (she started attending prior to Heaven Above’s existence). When she finally joined the choir and then Heaven Above, she realized, “God was working through those people and talking to me and I wasn’t listening.” Terry had a similar experience. She now admits that “He (God) planned on

us being one of the builders of Contemporary Christian Music” but initially she did not want to be the music minister. Having spent most of her professional career as a secular performer, Terry felt that leading worship on Sunday was “like working a room.” She elaborated, “I didn’t *feel* that then. I felt like I was giving my gifts to the Lord and I felt good about that but to get up there and be a worship leader – I didn’t feel called to do that.”

Terry’s initial trepidation was not with contributing her musical gifts to the church but was instead with the idea of leading worship, of being a part of a ministry to the congregation. “Ministry” is a word that came up often in my conversation with the musicians. The term was used to describe both giving of one’s time and talents to the church and leading the congregation in worship. While these two roles seem to the musicians to fall under the heading of “ministry” (and for all practical purposes they *are* the same thing – a person contributing their musical talents in Heaven Above is required to be on stage leading worship) I think there is a distinction to be made. The distinction has less to do with the actual behavior and more with how each musician views the service they are providing. “Leading worship” implies that the musicians are responsible for bringing the congregation to a place where they can commune with God. As Kelly put it, the goal is “to connect people more closely to their faith, to their beliefs... I use the word ‘elevate,’ and I don’t know if that accurately describes that closer connection to God but that’s how I see us functioning.” I believe that this aspect of involvement in the music program, that of leading and shaping the congregation’s worship, did not play a part in the decision to join Heaven Above for the majority of the musicians. They wanted to give their gifts to the church but it did not become a “ministry” until after they were a

part of the group. Viewing Heaven Above as a ministry has a big impact on the musicians' worship experience and, therefore, I will return to this issue when we explore the consequences of worship-making for the musicians.

Most musicians found that when they joined Heaven Above, their involvement in the work of the church strengthened their tie to Springhill. As a consequence of investing their time and talents, they felt closer to the rest of the congregation. Kim, the newest member to the group and to the church, reflected on how her involvement has given her a sense of belongingness at Springhill: "I think it's really easy if you just go to a church and you just go every Sunday. People are going to be nice to you and they're going to say hello but if you don't get involved you don't really learn about the church and the people within it... I think certainly that being a part of the music ministry has helped to sort of get a foundation there." When Kelly thinks about stepping down from her position in the church, "I realize that for me, what I would lose inherently would be a feeling of connection to the people, particularly the people here at Springhill, because it does make me feel connected." These feelings of connection and belongingness as a result of involvement are consistent with Gibson Winter's (1961) findings. He writes, "Common activity toward a common goal develops unity and loyalty in a group; this is as true in neighborhood organization as it is in church; in fact, when people participate in the work of an organization, they feel that they belong" (92).

For many of the musicians, involvement in Heaven Above led to other non-musical involvement in the church. Terry has seen a number of musicians become involved in other parts of the church after they join the band. She told me, "Even though it's (Heaven Above) the vehicle they came in on, they've gone on to become a valued

part of the church, the core of the church.” At least for Terry, involvement in other areas of the church outside of Heaven Above seems to indicate a deeper connection to the church, one that stems not from the enjoyment of playing music as much as a desire to contribute to the church. Beth came into the church through Heaven Above but now also works as Programs Director, a staff position at the church. Carol was “slow to becoming a member” of the church but after joining Heaven Above, “I started doing stuff like being on the council or staff-parish relations.” Kim volunteered to direct the children’s Christmas pageant and admitted, “I don’t think I’d be doing the things that I’m doing if I hadn’t started out with an invitation to be a part of the music ministry.”

This highlights what I see a CCM worship band acting as for church musicians: it is a medium of involvement. As a medium of involvement, it attracts people with a specific skill set to an organization and offers them a way to use those skills to contribute to the organization. As a result of their involvement, each person’s sense of belongingness to the organization is strengthened, encouraging them to be involved in other parts of the organization. As we’ve seen, Heaven Above gets musicians involved at Springhill by offering them both a way to express themselves and their faith musically, and an opportunity to serve and contribute to the church. Their involvement in Heaven Above strengthens their bond to Springhill, and for many, it makes them want to contribute to the church in a variety of other ways.

Heaven Above also works to strengthen each musician’s sense of belongingness to the church by acting as a smaller social and emotional community within the church through which close bonds of friendship can be formed. In the next section we will look at how the group makes an intentional effort to infuse rehearsal time with spiritually

meaningful dialogue and we will hear why they feel that this effort is important. In addition we will compare Heaven Above with the larger small group movement in American religion and explore the ways in which a task-oriented group like Heaven Above is doing a better job at balancing corporate responsibility with individual autonomy.

Being Part of a Group

The group makes an active effort to create a communal spiritual time during rehearsal. At the end of every practice on Thursday nights, after all the instruments are packed up, the group gathers around in a circle, holding hands, and prays together. Terry first asks everyone if they have any prayer concerns or joys and then, after everyone has shared, she compiles all those concerns into a prayer and prays it aloud as we all bow our heads. This prayer circle gives rehearsal a more explicitly religious dimension and reminds the musicians of the reason that they have gathered for rehearsal. Keith told me that, “prayer circle can kind of bring it back home from the purely technical.” Paul seconded this idea, saying, “Obviously the rehearsals focus on music because that’s what we’re trying to get right, but I think prayer circle brings it back to, ‘Hey! This is why we’re doing it.’” For Kim, praying together as Christians is what makes the experience of being in Heaven Above authentic. She told me, “Prayer time is really important because it reminds us that we’re there, that the reason why we’re there and also helps to sort of connect that we are not just Heaven Above, I am not just the person who shows up on Thursday nights and goes through the song and then is there on Sunday.” After a rehearsal full of technical glitches and endless repetition, the prayer circle brings the focus back to God and, in doing so, it allows musicians to relate to each other on a spiritual level – they are a community of believers, holding hands and praying.

This prayer time also allows members to share their lives with each other and connect on an emotional level. I asked Jess about how prayer makes the group closer. She said, “If we pray together, if we express concerns and joys with another, I mean, automatically you’re sharing on a level that most people don’t ever share on.” Kim, the

newest member to the group, said, “That’s been a real area where I have been able to learn a little more about them and they’ve been able to learn a little more about who I am in that time of prayer as a group.”

I’ll tell one particularly moving time around the prayer circle to illustrate the type of emotional closeness it can facilitate. One Monday night in early December, after an especially long rehearsal full of Christmas music, we gathered around and began expressing our concerns and joys. Kim updated us on her cousins who a few months earlier had been homeless and living in a campground. To the group’s delight, they had found a new home. Terry, however, was having a bit of a crisis in her family. Her son-in-law had recently told her daughter, Margaret, that he was leaving her. To make matters worse, the couple and their two young sons had just moved into a new house. Terry was upset about her daughter’s possible divorce but what she was most concerned about were her grandsons. Margaret was already having a rough time running her own business and unpacking their belongings in the new house, and now this added even more strain to her life. Terry was worried that her grandsons would have a terrible Christmas that would forever taint the holiday season for them. Many of the musicians knew Terry’s daughter and were shocked by the whole ordeal. Jess and Beth immediately offered to lend a hand. Terry, much like her daughter, seemed unusually stressed with this crisis as well as with her responsibilities at Springhill. Jess and Beth offered to get a group of us together to go over to Margaret’s house on Thursday night and decorate it for Christmas. Terry was almost in tears by this point and was touched by the gesture (We actually did end up decorating Margaret’s house later that week). We all held hands and prayed together and afterwards, several people came up and gave Terry a hug.

This is a degree of emotional vulnerability that may not get explored at a secular band practice. Jess, who plays in Terry's secular group, *Déjà vu*, was struck by the difference between the two rehearsals. She said, "It's funny because if we have a *Déjà vu* practice, at the end of it I'm like "uhhh, oh ok. Well, bye!" It's a different feeling altogether, even though it's many of the same people." I even began to feel close to the members of the group as I learned more and more about them during the prayer time. They, in turn, learned more about me, and frequently asked about things going on in my life. It is a time when each musician is free to let the group into his or her world, to share in the joys and the sorrows. And because the group is so small, everyone receives the individual care and attention that is sometimes lacking in corporate worship. Diane put it this way: "That time where we can share our concerns and our joys really helps the group grow and connect... People have been there for each other when they needed it. Kelly's house burned down, ours had a tree through it, people have lost parents or significant relatives and we've sort of been there for each other." The emotional investment each member puts into the group binds the group together to create a community.

While the prayer circle is the most explicit way these bonds are formed between members, another more subtle way they are formed is by spending time together as a group. Kelly remarked, "There were just things that happened, you know, when you're on the road together, little jokes, little things that happen and they just kind of connect you. We're good friends. And I would say friends in the respect of life-long friends." Kelly and other members who have been with the group a long time told me many of the same stories about these special times of togetherness. One time in particular was a trip that six of the members made up to New Jersey for a performance. The memories they

had were not of that particular performance but were instead of the friendships that were made that weekend. Jess recalled, “We called ourselves the Sacred Six... that was a lot of time together and it certainly bonded us together.”

The group also makes a point of getting together outside of rehearsals and performances. The two times that I was able to interact with them outside the context of rehearsal was when we decorated Terry’s daughter’s house and when the band had a Christmas party. I got to see how each member acted outside of church and we had the chance to discuss other issues besides worship on Sunday. Paul had similar feelings: “You get to see everybody in a different setting and you get to talk about things other than church and music, which is nice. You get to know people better. You get to see people in their home environment rather than in a church environment.” Many of the members also see each other at church events but it is the times when the group gets together that are really important to the group’s cohesion. Jess told me, “We’ve always gotten people together. We used to have people out to the river in the summer and just those shared experiences.” Members of Heaven Above work together, worship together, and socialize together. Being a part of a group is a central component of involvement in Heaven Above; it is not just a group serving the congregation through music, but a group that can act as a small community for musicians.

Although Jess was the only member to use the term “small group” to describe the closeness that the band facilitates, I do not think the other members would disagree with its usage. Jess said, “Heaven Above *is* a small group, in the small group sense of the word, meaning Bible study, or a mission team, or ya know, something... it’s the small groups, especially in the larger churches, it’s the small groups that kind of bring you

home and kind of give you a connection and a camaraderie and a fellowship that is personally valuable.” I am weary to use this term to describe Heaven Above because while the band does act in similar ways for the musicians, there are a number of features of the band that distinguish it from the small group movement and allow it to meet similar needs without the stereotypical narcissism associated with small groups.

I already briefly mentioned Wuthnow’s (1994) study of small group life *Sharing the Journey*, and I’d like to bring it up again here. Wuthnow wants to make it clear that small groups within the Judeo-Christian tradition are nothing new. Small, meaningful groups within a larger community existed in the prayer meetings of 19th century Baptists, in the private home meetings during the Reformation, even, in some sense, in the tribes of Judea. In America, congregations in the 1950s and 1960s had groups that divided the congregation, like Sunday school, by age and gender. A distinctive feature of the small group movement starting in the 1970s, though, is the conscious effort to create small support communities that emphasize self-expression as a means toward personal growth. Instead of being based on age or gender, these small groups often focus on one issue or one type of person; people fighting addictions, single mothers and fathers, specific lifestyles. Group meetings are communal, not authoritarian, encouraging everyone to speak up rather than listen to the message of a leader. Wuthnow suggests that small groups attempt to recreate meaningful communities where we are “admitting our fears, discussing our deepest anxieties, or sharing our most basic dreams and aspirations” (34). Small groups nurture the individual by providing an open and loving community where members can grow spiritually.

Wuthnow's survey of small groups shows that they seem to be providing members with a sense of community and also enhancing their spirituality. However, a major criticism is that small groups require so little commitment on the part of the individual and emphasize the personal to such a degree that they run the risk of creating groups of narcissists, not communities. Critics say that the central message behind small groups is, "Come if you have time. Talk if you feel like it. Respect everyone's opinion. Never criticize. Leave quietly if you become dissatisfied" (6). Wuthnow points out that despite this potential for narcissism, small groups try to balance members' need for both community and individuality. For example, they may emphasize the personal growth of the individual but this growth is often to develop personal skills that focus on helping others, on living in community. Small groups certainly challenge the more traditional notions of community (self-sacrifice, for example) but that is the reason that they are becoming so pervasive. For Americans who want to be part of a community but do not see traditional religious institutions as a relevant pathway towards spirituality, small groups provide individuals with a community of support whose central value is personal autonomy. Small groups respect every member's right to hold their own private beliefs but this is done in community with others.

There are many ways that Heaven Above is like a small group but there are many important ways in which it is not. Heaven Above does provide members with a personal community. Members are encouraged to share the joys and the struggles of their lives with the group and, in the process, form friendships based on intimacy and trust. Keith told me about how the prayer circle time opens his eyes to other people's struggles and turns his focus off of himself: "I'm just thankful, like I said, to get in that group and have

somebody remind me that there are other things going on than me.” These emotional bonds lead to action, as well. We helped decorate Terry’s daughter’s house for Christmas, members help take care of each other’s pets, they provide comfort and care for each other in times of crisis – this is a personal community that cannot easily be found by just attending the church. Certainly, musicians have ties to other people in the congregation and may even offer to help unfamiliar church members in times of need – Christian ethics make an explicit call on the believer to love and help one’s neighbor. What is unique about Heaven Above, and what makes it similar to a small group, is that members help each other, in large part, because of the emotional bonds that they have formed by spending time together and being open with each other about their individual needs and concerns.

Another similarity is that individual autonomy is preserved during these group times. Members are free to reveal as much as they want to about themselves. There is no standard they must live up to, no teaching they must learn. The group is there to listen and to support, not to judge and correct. Emotional vulnerability is also not a requirement to be a member of the group; support is there for those who want it. Kim, the youngest member of the group, has a three year old daughter and has another baby on the way. She told me that she has yet to develop strong relationships outside of rehearsal with other members partly because she is concentrating on her own family right now. She said, “Lots of them spend time with each other outside rehearsal and church and that’s just not something I’ve become a part of, not something I feel like I *need* to become a part of.” Just like a small group, the level of emotional involvement and participation in the group is determined by the individual.

While Heaven Above provides its members with a supportive community, this aspect of the group is secondary; the main purpose of the group is to lead worship on Sundays. It only happens that because the group spends time together serving the congregation they are also able to pray together and form relationships with one another. Wuthnow (1994) makes a distinction between small groups and “task-oriented gatherings.” Task-oriented gatherings, like Heaven Above, are first and foremost about meeting the needs of the church – teaching Sunday school, planning the worship service, organizing fellowship activities. The purpose of small groups, however, is to give members the opportunity to express themselves and connect with other people in the comfort of a tight-knit community. Because of the task-oriented nature of Heaven Above, it takes an intentional effort, sometimes, on the part of Terry and other group members to create situations where members are encouraged to open up to one another and deepen those bonds of community.

However, a result of Heaven Above being a task-oriented gathering is that individuals have more responsibility to the group. Heaven Above has to provide the larger church with music on Sundays and it takes the participation of its members to make that happen. Being a part of the group, then, means that you show up to rehearsals and performances. Each musician’s life, either their job or their family, might prevent them from playing on a Sunday or rehearsing on a Thursday night and that is allowed. When this happens, though, the individual is aware that the group will have to adapt to his or her absence. In addition, if job or family conflicts become more frequent, that individual either leaves the group or the group finds a replacement. For example, the group used to have a mandolin player but his job changed such that he was no longer able

to come to practices and performances. As a result, he left the group. Before Paul played drums for the group, the drummer in Heaven Above had become so unreliable that the group asked Paul to fill in for him. The responsibility of leading worship makes the cost to the individuals in Heaven Above greater than for members of a small group.

It is this responsibility placed on the individual musician that also makes a task-oriented group like Heaven Above more effective at encouraging members to be involved in the larger church. Wuthnow points out that while churches normally see small groups as a gateway through which people will become involved in the larger church, this does not seem to be the case. Most small group members who are involved in the larger church were already involved in the church before joining the small group. While a few of the members were involved in other aspects of the church before joining Heaven Above, a major reason was that Heaven Above had yet to form. For musicians who started attending after its inception, Heaven Above *was*, as we saw before, a medium of involvement for them at Springhill. One of the reasons Heaven Above can be this medium of involvement is that provides the support of a small group while also maintaining ties to the larger congregation through its contribution to worship on Sundays.

Chapter Two: Making Music a Religious Experience

In this chapter we will explore the impact that leading worship in Heaven Above has had on the musicians' worship experience at Springhill. Although involvement in the music program has helped to make musicians feel more connected to the church, there are also consequences, both negative and positive, that stem from playing music during the service. We will see how the musicians deal with the distractions inherent in worship-making, and how new tensions are created as a result of seeing their role as a music ministry. In addition, we will look more closely at the power of music and how leading a congregation in song, while at times distracting, has a unique ability to unite human beings with each other and, in this case, with God.

Consequences of Playing Worship Music

If things don't go well, it's a distraction to the point of it knocks me right out of the worshipful attitude and that's when I get most frustrated is when the nuts and bolts of what we're doing isn't working, whether it's the sound system or somebody's out of tune or you were hitting the wrong chords or the mic breaks or, ya know, something's not right, the sound isn't right or we're off timing-wise, or we're not together and that makes me, that really frustrates me and gets me... eh, angry is not the word but I get really geared-up about that and it just sends me to a very black place. So when it's right, it's wonderful. But when it's bad it's almost like I just want to shut my case and say, "That's it! I'm done!"

While the benefits seem to outweigh the costs for the musicians in Heaven Above, as Jess just described, the negative consequences of playing music during worship still have a powerful effect on the worship experience of musicians.

Worship is fundamentally different for musicians because, unlike the congregants who show up on Sunday and stumble through the melodies of the praise songs, the musicians leading worship are, in some sense, working and performing while they worship. The seamless flow of worship that the congregation often experiences is the product of the stress and worry on the part of the people on stage. Beth likened it to “putting on a play.” Whether it’s rearranging music in between songs, putting equipment away during a prayer, thinking of how the next song goes, or deciding what time to begin the opening music, the mechanics of worship - the behind-the-scenes details – alter their experience of worship. Keith shared his thoughts on the distraction that worship-making poses for him during the service: “It is a different experience... it’s kind of a balancing act of you’re getting too obsessive or get too concerned about the details of pulling off my little portion of the hour of the service for two minutes of singing, but a lot of times I find myself thinking about what I’m going to do or what’s coming up and sometimes I end up missing the message that week when I have something to do.”

It is important to remember that all the ritual actors on stage, including the pastor, liturgist, and other worship leaders, have their worship experience affected by their leadership roles. Musicians, though, have the added pressure of working together to create music. They are less worried about the transitions between the sermon and prayer or the time and flow of the service, and instead are focusing their attention on the musical cohesion of the group during the songs. When the group is together and the songs flow,

leading worship can be a fulfilling, worshipful experience. Jess told me, “The better we perform something, the better we know something, the better I know something, the more spiritual it can become.” In these cases, leading worship can actually expand the spiritual potential of worship for the musician. However, if the band is out of sync during a song, the experience is anything but spiritual. Paul commented on this, saying, “If a song starts going bad, I’m not focusing on the words anymore, I’m focusing on trying to hold it together. So the words are out the window and I’m listening for the guitar or for the bass to make sure we’re together and we’re making eye contact to try to keep it together. It draws you out of the spiritual into the physical.” Being prepared and well-rehearsed hopefully keeps these kinds of situations from happening but they cannot always be avoided.

When leading worship devolves into the mechanical side of keeping the song afloat, the musicians often described the experience as “performing” not “worshipping.” The danger of worship becoming a performance was a central issue for the musicians of Heaven Above. “Performance” is ultimately defined by who is getting the attention. When the musicians are paying attention to the specifics of the music, as we saw earlier, they are not focusing on God and, thus, no longer feel that they are worshipping.

Another danger of “performance” is that playing a song well will fill the musicians with pride, will make them focus on the good work that they have done, and prevent them from worshipping authentically. If they are praising themselves and not God, they feel that they are effectively making themselves idols. As Paul told me, “You gotta check your pride at the door with church work because it’s not about you.” Humility is praised as a virtue because pride really is a temptation for church musicians.

After nearly every Sunday service we played, at least one member of the congregation came up to one of the vocalists and told her what a great job she had done. People even came up to me after the service and thanked me for a job well done. Kelly, who grew up performing publicly, told me that when the band performed for the Methodist state conference in the big downtown arena, she had to, “try real hard not to get too wrapped up in it... I don’t ever want it to be about me getting up and singing and them standing up and clapping and that’s why I’m doing it.” The musicians have to avoid the trap of pride that is inherent in performing music in order for them to feel that their musical performance is a form of worship.

The most prominent fear that the musicians had about worship becoming a performance was that the band would become a detriment to the congregation’s worship. What Terry told me on many occasions and what was reiterated by all the musicians, was that Heaven Above tries to be “Spirit-led, not performance-based.” They want to lead the congregation in worship, not act as a detriment or a distraction for the congregation. They want to lead people to worship God, not the band. This attitude shaped how many of the musicians viewed congregational applause. Keith said, “I almost feel like it’s praising the people who are doing the music instead of praising God at that moment.” Beth asked, “Are they clapping because they think that it was just a nice song and we did it well... or are they clapping because they’re praising God? I don’t know but the initial feeling is like ‘Ugh! It’s not about us.’” She hoped that, “if they’re clapping, it’s because the Spirit has moved them through the song, not because we performed it well.”

Others did not view applause as an indication that the band was becoming an idol for the congregation, but they still felt that applause took the attention away from God

and cheapened the spiritual moment. Lori told me, “There’s a lingering beauty to just letting it lie, and that letting it just sit in your heart... clapping stops that for me. It breaks it for me.” Applause makes many of the musicians feel that they have caused the congregation to become distracted. This feeling is also present when the band messes up a song during the service. Keith told me, “I don’t want to do something that detracts from the service. I just hope to not make it a bad experience for anyone [laughs], and hope that maybe it’s a positive experience for them, ya know, like it was for me.” The musicians do not want their mistakes to interrupt the worship of their congregants. Paul laid out this feeling succinctly: “I think the songs that flow better, the congregation gets more out of... If a song is awful, I feel we’ve hurt people’s worship. If the songs flow, I feel we’ve brought them closer.”

The concern that these musicians have with the effect their music has on the worship of the congregation reveals how they view Heaven Above’s role in the church. The musicians see themselves as leaders of worship who are responsible for playing music that enhances the worship of the congregation. They feel that the primary purpose of Heaven Above is to serve the congregation, to help them worship, to “elevate” them, as Kelly said. This awareness of their role causes many of the musicians to be very concerned with how their music is being taken in by the congregation. Their worries do not even have to be grounded in actual negative feedback from the congregation. Paul told me about his fear that he is a distraction when he plays a drum part incorrectly: “But that’s from the perspective of a musician. It may not affect the congregation. Me as a musician it affects terribly.” Because the musicians are aware that their job is to enhance the congregation’s worship, they allow themselves to be occasionally distracted so that

the congregation will hopefully never be distracted. Beth said simply, “I pray that what we are presenting is worshipful to others.”

I’ve been emphasizing the negative aspects that leading worship has on the musician’s worship experience but this is a skewed depiction. There are several parts of leading worship that impact musicians in ways that make their involvement personally fulfilling. This is a bit of a paradox: while leading worship has ways of distracting musicians, it also keeps them more intimately connected to the worship service. They may be shuffling lyric sheets during the prayer or frustrated with the tempo during a praise song, but they are also aware of how the music connects to the sermon and have a vested interest in the outcome of the worship service.

Kelly spoke about this paradox, saying, “In some ways it’s a distraction that you’re involved in it and in some ways it makes sure that you don’t get overly distracted. You’re very aware of why you’re there and that’s to worship.” For Keith, leading worship on Sunday keeps his mind on God during the week: “In preparing for it during the week, it keeps me more in touch from that angle where it’s easy to call it up in day-to-day life.” Diane has always been amazed by the connection between the music they choose and the message on Sunday. She told me, “That’s always an exciting thing on Sunday to see how it all fits. And because I think because I know the music so well, maybe I’m making an even deeper connection than the people.”

For the musicians in Heaven Above, being active in worship is very important. Although their roles can be distracting sometimes, active participation is their preferred method of worship. Paul put it this way: “If I’m up there a part of it, I feel like I’m active into it... You can’t just sit there and absorb it.” For Terry, her experience leading

worship has changed the way she thinks about the purpose of worship. She told me, “So many people come into worship expecting to get something *out* of it. To me, worship is *us* putting something *into* it.” Involvement in the music ministry gives musicians a way to get up from the passivity of the pews and be active participants in the service. Even though it may distract from worship, leading worship is ultimately an enhancement for the musicians in Heave Above. It connects them to the worship of the service by allowing them to contribute to it in a concrete way.

The Musical Connection: Unity through Song

In talking with the pastor, he described how involvement in the service connects him to the service in a way similar to the musicians. However, leading music connects musicians to each other, to the congregation, and the God in ways that go beyond the effects of being active in the service. Robin Sylvan (2002) addresses the connection between musical experience and religious experience in his study of the religiosity of popular music, *Traces of the Spirit*. For Sylvan, music has a strong bond with the spiritual realm. He cites phenomenologist Rudolph Otto (1923) who writes, “Musical feeling is rather (like the numinous) something ‘wholly other’” (48-49). The physical and emotion states that music creates in humans are analogous to those one has when encountering “the sacred” of Eliade (1959); both share the same irrational but ultimately undeniable power to transform human experience. Sylvan cites examples from non-Western religious practices that suggest an even stronger bond between music and the spiritual realm. For many Hindu practitioners, music is a vehicle through which the divine cannot only be expressed but can also be accessed. Sylvan argues that music is able to accomplish such a feat because music affects us on multiple levels simultaneously. The rhythms and melodies not only affect us physically and emotionally, but music also creates its own realm with its own rules, time, and symbols. Music creates a state that “is a unique phenomenological and ontological mode of being-in-the-world in which the subject-object, body-mind, and spiritual-material dualities are transcended in a unified field’ (Sylvan 2002: 43). In a group setting, music acts as a conduit for people to connect to each other and, in a religious context, to God. Music also creates multiple levels of subjective meaning that shape how both an individual and a group experience a

musical performance. Music's power to connect and create meaning is central to the experience of leading church worship.

CCM holds the same spiritual power. For those who enjoy and identify with the style of CCM, praise music can be a relevant way to experience God on Sunday morning. Music not only unites the believing individual with the divine but it also unites the congregants together, creating a virtual world where participants share in what ethnomusicologist Steven M. Friedson calls "an intersubjective experience" (1996). As we discuss the phenomenology of musical experience and the sociology of music, I will be drawing largely on the work of Alfred Schutz (1964), Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990), and Matthew Lawson (1999), as well as Robin Sylvan's (2002) introductory material to these fields. I will only touch on these scholars' theories because, while music's connective power is an important aspect of the experience of the church musician, my focus here is on how this power enhances the musician's involvement in the music ministry and connects them to the church in a way that involvement in other ministries does not.

The basic level on which music connects with the individual is the physical and psychological level. Sylvan (2002) cites examples from African possession rituals of music's power to link body and mind in a trance state. Sylvan also discusses studies by Andrew Neher, Gilbert Rouget, and James Mursell on the effects that rhythm, tempo, and dynamics have on bodily processes in both possession rituals and Western classical music. On the psychological level, music has the power to evoke strong and often unexplainable emotions in the individual. Sylvan uses Freud's language to discuss how

music “relieves” the ego of “it’s dominant position” so that “other parts of the self, such as emotions and feelings, can come to the surface to be experienced” (25).

While modern psychologists might cringe at Sylvan’s Freudianism, I think the image it conjures, that of “losing oneself,” is supported by more modern theorists. Mihalyi Csikszentimihalyi’s (1990) study of “flow” experiences is useful in thinking about these kinds of transcendental experiences that music can produce in the individual. While Csikszentimihalyi focused on autotelic activities such as rock-climbing and dancing, selflessness and limited sensory input are among the characteristics of “flow” experiences (Neitz and Spickard 1990). Music has a similar physical and psychological impact on the individual and perhaps, as ethnomusicologist John Blacking writes, “has an advantage over many other ways of heightening human experience” (1987: 29).

The questions that the musicians in *Heaven Above* had the most trouble elaborating on during our interviews were those dealing with the powerful physical and emotional experiences of participating in church music. Part of this might have been the way in which I framed my questions but I think a lot of their struggle to fully describe their experience stems from the mysterious power that music has to alter our body and emotions. Nonetheless, their descriptions provide some insight and are worth quoting here. It is also important to remember that these descriptions deal with varying degrees of transcendental experience. Many of them deal with generalized feelings that are fairly common while other descriptions are of specific, once-in-a-lifetime experiences.

One way the musicians talked about these powerful experiences were through physical descriptions. A number of them said that it feels “like goosebumps.” Terry told me, “It’s almost like there’s flesh.” Kelly called it, “almost a palpable, physical

presence.” Kim had the most unique account of the physical impact of performing music. She related this story to me:

Kelly asked me if I would sing a song with the choir. They had a piece they wanted to do that was a solo for most of the song... we did it in June and I shook the entire time. And we're not talking a little bit. Literally, we're talking like my whole body was shaking... When you see my second hand go up to the microphone, you know it's starting. And literally, it wasn't just my hand - it was my whole body shaking. Lori said that she was watching my legs and she was ready to catch me. So I really think it's just my body, it's just the way that I'm responding to that worshipful moment... this is how my body chooses to feel the music. This is how my body chooses to worship.

Another way that the musicians described these experiences was, as Jess put it, “extreme connected-ness.” Alfred Schutz (1964) gives us a framework with which to think about the social relationships formed during the performance of music that the musicians in Heaven Above are referring to when talking about “connectedness.” Schutz begins by dividing the performance of a piece of music into two temporal realms: inner and outer time. During inner time, the realm that the song creates and embodies, the performers and the audience are brought together and engage in a communicative process which he calls the “mutual tuning-in” relationship. As the music unfolds, the performers and the audience tune-in to one another and, as Schutz puts it, “are living together through the same flux, are growing older together while the musical process lasts” (175). Music takes individuals out of real, or outer, time and binds them together in the “vivid

present.” For the performers, the line between inner and outer time is more blurry. While they are “tuning in,” they also are communicating with each other in outer time as they adapt to each other’s performance. They tap into each other’s immediate experience and connect to one another. The song itself, then, connects to performers and audience while the act of playing the song connects the performers to each other on a different level.

There are limits to the degree to which Schutz’s analysis reflects real life. Certainly this “mutually tuning-in” relationship does not always occur, and when it does occur, it may not occur for everyone involved. However, the ways that the musicians in Heaven Above talked about their connectedness to each other and to the congregation verify much of Schutz’s theoretical claims. Diane told me, “there’s that musical connection and when it’s going well I can feel it connecting to the people in the congregation and it just feeds on itself in a very positive way. And ya know, it just feels like this is... there is some inspiration going on here at all different levels. And it’s a powerful experience that’s going on in this room.” Keith spoke about the power of the collective, saying, “It’s a simple, pretty dry song in my estimation but just having everybody singing it just felt like a much bigger experience.” This musical exchange of energy that brings people together seems to be what Schutz is getting at.

Many accounts suggested that the reality of the connected-ness in the room is realized when the individual receives confirmation of that feeling from others. Keith followed his comment on the power of the collective by saying, “And somebody else shouted, ‘Amen’ after it and I thought, “Yeah! Somebody else felt that, too.” Terry told me, “I just get a feeling over me that I know. And after it’s done, other people share the

same thing so I know it's not something that's in my mind. They say, 'Did you feel that?' and I say, 'Yeah.'" I asked Beth to describe her most powerful worship experience. She told me about a prayer service she went to and described it like this: "I have no idea what mindset I was in but I do remember feeling very connected at that moment to God and the Spirit ... I was just very much deep in prayer and connected. And when we had the sign of peace, the woman next to me said that she felt it. And that really blew me away." The knowledge that others are sharing in the connected feeling of the moment seems to add meaning to these musicians' experience, but why?

Schutz's framework is unable to help us answer this question. Schutz's theory is designed to address all types musical performance and does not consider how specific contexts change the meaning of that connected experience and shape the way that the participants describe that experience. For the musicians in Heaven Above, this connected feeling was understood to be the working of the Holy Spirit. Feedback from others confirmed that this had not been a personal experience but a shared one. This shared experience led them to believe that God had gotten involved. Jess described to me a time during her childhood when her entire church sang in tongues: "It was just the most beautiful, angel-like sound I've ever heard. And it went on for about five or six minutes. And it was the most... it was like hearing angels sing... it was extreme connectedness, peace, a sense of community larger than ourselves, connectedness with God."

Musical experiences like this one are so powerful because the Church has a vocabulary for talking about them. In his study of Charismatic Catholic prayer meetings, Matthew Lawson (1999) suggests that scholars can talk about "the Holy Spirit" as a "manifestation of a learnable pattern of social interaction" (341). He argues that "these

patterns of interaction are based on a particular stance toward interaction on the part of individuals” (342). The musical connected-ness experienced by the musicians in Heaven Above is similar to the “conscience collective” (Durkheim 2001) created by Lawson’s Charismatics when they open themselves up to be inspired by the Holy Spirit. The connected-ness is given a specific meaning in the religious context of the worship service. Performers and congregants do not just feel connected to each other but simultaneously feel connected to God. “The Holy Spirit” is the name these musicians (and Christians in general) give to this connected feeling. Whether they say “you can feel the Spirit moving through you” or that “the Spirit completely touched me,” the discourse of “the Holy Spirit” allows the musicians to attribute spiritual significance to the connective power of music.

God is also made an active agent in the “tuning-in” relationship in this discourse. The congregation is not just connecting to God; God is also contributing to the experience. The musicians talked about God and the Holy Spirit in a way that almost made God a member of the band. They most often talked this way when a song was performed much better during worship than when it had been practiced during rehearsal. Paul told me, “We’ll muddle through a song at rehearsal, not get it quite right but we’ll get it ok, and then on Sunday it’s fine. And, to me, that’s not people rehearsing or getting together and getting their stuff straight, it’s God’s blessing it.” Keith summed it up perfectly when he exclaimed at practice one night, “God plays a lot of bass!”

The Holy Spirit is also a source of inspiration for the musicians. In between songs, especially at concerts, Terry asks other members of the band to introduce songs and give a short testimony to the audience. I was able to attend a number of concerts

where these introductions occurred. While they lacked the spontaneity of Lawson's Charismatic prayer meetings, the idea was the same. Terry told me about the time she first asked the group to do individual introductions. She told them, "I'm not ever going to make anybody. It has to be something that God moves you to do.' And He did. Many times. But sometimes people try to put it in a box and you can't put the Spirit in a box. When He moves you He moves you and when He moves you to speak you can't limit it to one minute, two minutes, or guarantee you're going to talk for ten minutes – you don't know." Heaven Above comes to worship well-prepared but Terry emphasized to me that they try to "to leave room in a program for the Spirit to move when given the opportunity." Allowing things to happen in the moment, letting the power of the music and the group inspire individuals – the musicians see this as an opportunity for God to get involved. These unique musical experiences, these times of "collective effervescence," are significant to musicians and congregants because they allow both the individual and the church to interact with God. This independent entity created by collective action is endowed with the spiritual significance for the believer, making music a powerful way to experience God.

Music can also have personal meaning for the musicians making it. It is often the message in the lyrics that touches the musician in a personal way. Paul told me that a song Kim had been singing recently was providing him with a lot of comfort. He said, "The words to that song help me out a lot. I was stressing on a big project and the whole song's about God carrying you through and how all's going to be good and how you just gotta come to Him and see. And that song was ringing in my head through the whole project." Sometimes, however, it is the very act of performing a song, along with the

emotional state and personal history of the performer, which gives a song meaning. Kim said, “There have been a few times in the past where, songs in my former church, where I can remember the emotion being so overwhelming that I couldn’t even continue. Like my old pastor wrote a song for my daughter for her christening.”

While a song may have personal significance for the musician, other people can be touched by those authentic emotions being expressed through the music. Terry shared a story with me about a song that was tied with the memory of her mother. She said, “I couldn’t sing that song for ten years because I’d cry every time I’d sing it. That’s where I went to be with my mother.” After a few years with Heaven Above, Terry wanted to try to sing it at a worship service. A man named Robert was visiting Springhill for the first time and was so touched by her performance that he decided to join the church. He later said to her, “I’ll never forget the first Sunday I came here and you did that song. I’ll never forget that.”

A personally revealing performance can also help form stronger bonds between band-mates. Beth described a performance of Kelly’s and its significance for her. She said, “I just know that the song is just very important to her so that I think I probably felt the connection to the song through her... it’s a connection with Kelly.” Kelly told me about this same performance. Here’s how she described it:

We were going out to another church to perform, and Terry asked if those of us in the group would offer some witness as a part of what we were doing. Which was very unnerving to me because public speaking and singing are so different and I didn’t know Terry that well then, and it was probably in the first of when we were together as a group. And so I was like, “Ok, I’ll do this.” And what I talked

about was my road away from my faith and particularly the music aspect of it and then the road back... my relationship with Terry, and Heaven Above, and Springhill, too, as a *part* of that walk back. And the song was called, “I Will Listen.” It’s a Twila Paris song. And it was just one of those nights, too, for me, with Heaven Above where I felt like it was one of the first times we came together as a group, in that little church down in Hampton that night.

This story illustrates how music can be tied to powerful memories and the power it has to bring those memories back to the surface – but this story also encapsulates all of the major themes present in this study. It highlights how involvement in Heaven Above renewed Kelly’s commitment to a church community, made her feel connected to the people at Springhill, and gave her small group of musicians to work with and with whom she formed lasting bonds of spiritually meaningful friendship. It is also important that this story is remembered by Kelly through the performance of a specific song. The power of music to connect people and translate emotions through melody and rhythm makes involvement in a worship band like Heaven Above a unique form of involvement in church.

Conclusion

In an age when the sacred seems to be retreating inward – when individuals can encounter the divine through the headphones of their iPod – we often forget the possibilities that music has for connecting people together in community and endowing those connective moments with spiritual meaning. In this study, I have tried to address the role that music has had in redefining what it means to be involved in a Christian community in the 21st century. Although Heaven Above is only one worship band among thousands, we have seen how the addition of CCM into the worship services at Springhill has brought these musicians into community with each other and with the larger congregation and yet supported their individual autonomy and creativity. We have also heard about the tensions musicians feel when leading worship and how these feelings shape both their own worship experience and the way that they view the role of Heaven Above. We have explored how the musicians have been able to transcend those tensions and unite with each other and the congregation to commune with God in song, making their bonds of friendship with each other even stronger.

I would like to conclude by addressing something I have yet to bring up in this study: intentionality. I do not mean to imply in this paper that churches are adding contemporary services *because* they want to create new and meaningful ways for musicians to get involved in their communities. What is most interesting about the CCM worship band is that its function as a medium of involvement for musicians is a side-effect; worship bands form in a church because that church wants to connect with people in a new way through CCM. Springhill has acknowledged how the addition of

contemporary music has impacted musicians – how it has attracted new musicians to the church and gotten them involved with the work of the church – and this awareness has certainly helped Heaven Above to be an effective medium of involvement. But this was not *why* Springhill decided to add a contemporary service on Sunday. I think this is an important distinction to make. As churches try to adapt to the changing needs of their congregations, the changes that they make can have unintentional, yet powerful consequences. New issues arise that both church leaders and scholars need to examine and address. Even with CCM, the issue of the sacrality of music, for example, and the role that musicians, congregations, and mass media have in making this new religious music sacred has yet to be explored in depth by either party.

What I hope I have elucidated in this paper is the unintentional impact that the addition of CCM has had on both the involvement and the worship experience of musicians who make this new worship possible. By reaching out to the congregation through the new worship style of CCM, churches have also met the needs of church musicians, many who would not otherwise be active participants in church. I believe this double effect of CCM makes a stronger case for CCM's place in contemporary worship; it not only gets new people to attend church but also gets them involved. As churches continue to evolve, they need to reflect on all the different ways that new changes are impacting the church. Still, changes like CCM are important for churches that wish to stay relevant with new believers. When I talked with Terry, she gave an exhortation to all churches to respond to the needs of their congregations, and I'll end with her comment. She said, "I really value traditional music in church. I was raised on it. I think it's a beautiful part that we should always embrace and never lose. But there are

generations behind us that answer to different styles of music... You always have to have an open mind to be willing to grow and learn more no matter what your age is... because we stop growing if we don't. If you don't want the church to die, you've got to move into the next mindset."

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Appendix I: Interview Guide for Participants

Name, age, job, education, hometown

Tell me about how you got involved in the music ministry at Wellspring.

What made you want to join the music ministry?

What other musical groups have you been a part of?

Have you played in a church group before?

What does "faith" mean to you?

How would you define "worship"?

Tell me about one of the best experiences you've had playing with Wellspring on a Sunday morning.

Can you describe the energy within the band? In the congregation? B/w both?

Were the songs new or were they more familiar?

What made that experience so special?

Can you tell me about an experience on Sunday that did not feel like that? What was different? What was "off?"

Contrast the experience of worship in the congregation vs. on stage with the band.

How is the experience different?

Why do you think that is?

In what ways does leading worship on Sunday distract you from the service?

In what ways does it enhance the service for you?

What do you think the role of Cross Purposes is in the church?

Is leading worship a service to the congregation?

Is it an outreach to new members?

Is it an outreach to musicians?

How has being a member of Cross Purposes shaped your experience of being a member of Wellspring?

How do you think it would have been different if you hadn't joined the group?

Or how was it different when you did? (depending on when they joined)

What part does leading worship play in your faith-life?

In what ways does it affect it?

Has this changed since you've been a part of Cross Purposes?

What do you think are the major differences between rehearsal and Sunday service?

How are your expectations different?

How is your frame of mind different?

How do the goals differ? What is the goal of practice?

How is worshipping God different in practice?

How do you feel you worship/honor God in practice?

Can you describe a time when you really felt you were doing that?

What is the process through which the group learns new music?

Who brings in new music?

What factors do you consider before presenting it to the group?

Must it be by a Christian artist?

How important is new music to the life of the group?

How important is new music to the worship experience of the congregation?

What challenges does learning new music present?

What strategies are used to teach new music to the congregation?

Can you think of some instances in which the band's desire to play new music conflicted with the congregation's need to hear music that is familiar?

How important is practice to worship on Sunday?

Does a good rehearsal always equal a good worship experience?

What other factors affect a good worship experience?

In what ways does the band get closer as a group? (Specific instances or times)

In what ways do you feel practice allows you to be creative?

Can you tell me about a time you when you felt creative in practice?

How do you prepare on your own for Cross Purposes each week?

How does playing in Cross Purposes differ from playing in a secular group?

In performance?

In rehearsal?

Focus/goals?

How are your relationships with your other band members different?

In what ways are secular and Christian groups similar?

What is the difference for you between secular and Christian music? What makes it Christian for you?

How important are the lyrics?

What other aspects of the music make it Christian for you?

Are there secular songs which hold the same spiritual meaning for you? If so, what are they and why?

How would you react to some who say that rock music has no place in the church?

How effective is rock music as a medium for worship?

For whom is it effective?

Why do you think that is?

What role does music play in your daily life?

When do you listen to music?

What are some of the reasons you listen to music?

Have these reasons changed as you've grown up? If so, in what ways?

How often do you play music outside of Wellspring?

What role does music play in your faith-life?

Can you think of any instances in which a song changed the way you thought about God?

In which a song deepened your relationship with God?

Is there anything you would like to add that I haven't asked about?

Appendix II: PHSC Approval

This study was approved by the Human Subjects Committee at the College of William and Mary, starting on September 12, 2007.