

# D I S K U S

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## **Introduction: Religion and Music Special Issue**

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This special issue of *Diskus* emerged from two consecutive panel sessions at the BASR's 2013 annual conference at Liverpool Hope University, and features six articles which approach different intersections of religion and music. The first session, entitled "God Listens (to Slayer)" concerned religion in heavy metal and punk music cultures, and also included a paper by Pierre Hecker committed elsewhere so not appearing here, on the contestation of public morality in a metal scene in Istanbul, Turkey. The following panel at the conference, "Religion and Music: Practice and Theory" surveyed a broader range of musical styles and, indeed, conceptions of religiosity and musicality.

The issue begins with Willy Pfändtner's consideration of these concepts, and what they might say about each other, prompted by a meditation on the phrase "religiously unmusical," as used by Max Weber and Richard Rorty, and, in another form, Jürgen Habermas. Using this rhetorical curiosity as a departure point, Pfändtner explores the implications, in a postmetaphysical context, of considering religiosity as something, like musicality, for which one might, or might not, have an "aptitude." In addition, some further thoughts are offered on the inverse of the expression; whether it might be possible to be musical in a religious sense.

Following this, Niall Scott assesses the possibility of a heavy metal liturgy, focusing on Swedish black metal band Watain's live concerts, while drawing on examples from a wider black metal milieu. Scott examines contrasting understandings of liturgy as public rites, with particular reference to Catherine Pickstock's theory of liturgy and pseudo- or anti-liturgy. Scott however, while aware of the dangers of black metal performance lapsing into spectacle, moves beyond Pickstock's approach to allow that Watain's performances might enact an apophatic liturgy, noting similar inversions and continuities as can be found in black masses.

Owen Coggins' article explores other aspects of function and reception in an analysis of audience discourses surrounding a specific drone metal recording by the band Om. Drawing parallels between the uses of canonical texts designated "mystical" in drone metal's musical productions and in

mystical scholarship, the paper suggests ways in which citation and recitation are mutually inflected across both textual scholarship and music. The article closes with a reading of a Youtube comment thread: an ongoing, multi-authored composite text which performs exegesis, commentary and interpretation of the band's recording, which itself has become a text of contested religiosity.

Next, Francis Stewart examines straight edge punk as surrogate religion, building on a framework of implicit religion to account for the uses of religions sounds and symbols as well as modes of practice. Rather than surrogacy conceived as a lesser replacement, however, Stewart shows that straight edge punk can be thought of as surrogate religion in the sense of a successor, drawing on etymology of the word dating back to the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. One of several examples Stewart outlines is the straight edge punk rendition of "Amazing Grace," with audience members reinforcing community and personal commitments through participation in the song.

The same song, reterritorialized in a different way with different religious connotations, appears in Vanessa Meier's consideration of a songbook used by Sai Baba devotees in Switzerland. Meier discusses this fascinating compilation of songs from a wide variety of sources in relation to their adaptation for Sai devotees, utilising the concepts of de/reterritorialization in examining their new uses in light of previous contextual connotations.

George Chryssides also treats songbooks, in this case the Jehovah's Witnesses' songbooks from the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century to the present, using the historical songbooks as a resource through which to trace developments in the values and standards of that religious community with respect to music. These include the gradual exscription of "Babylonian material," that is, songs or lyrics perceived to have a secular or mainstream Christian source, and revisions of lyrics and removals of particular songs thought to place too much emphasis on individuals, against religious teachings.

Finally, Marian Caulfield examines 'Being', ineffability and sonority in experimental sound scene in Cork, Ireland, her thoughts on terminology (and its difficulties) relating to the first article of the issue, taking into account the negotiations surrounding a language of spirituality ascribed to sonic practices that deliberately resist and strain against established musical and verbal categories.

Through highlighting ways in which established institutions navigate their positions in relation to other religious and secular traditions through managing a corpus of song texts; or through the practices of self-consciously confrontational metal and punk music propagating certain elements related to religiosity even while criticising and inverting; or simply by reflecting on the metaphorical uses of the ideas of religiosity and musicality, these papers collectively demonstrate how music can be a vital site for a lively criticism of, radical development for, and communal participation in contemporary religious practice.