

Review of *Singing the Congregation: How Contemporary Worship Music Forms Evangelical Community*, by Monique Ingalls. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018

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Monique Ingalls's *Singing the Congregation: How Contemporary Worship Music Forms Evangelical Community* is a landmark publication, inviting vitally diverse readings. Fusing distinct disciplinary traditions and settings of field research, the book offers much more than a fresh understanding of popular religious music. With ethnomusicology and congregational music studies at the foreground, Ingalls's undertaking spans popular music and media studies, sociology, theology, among other fields, to propose an analytical model for congregation and worship. The book evokes a novel understanding of the reasons and ways in which contemporary worship music constitutes congregation; an understanding that, even though primarily addressing the North American evangelical context, concerns broadly the shaping of worship within and between certain denominational families across the globe today. The model comprises five distinct ways in which congregations are formed through music-making. These *musical modes of congregating* shape the book structure into five main arenas, concerned with concert, conference, local church, public, and networked congregations, respectively.

Ingalls's accounts are based on multi-sited fieldwork between 2006 and 2013 in the US and Canada, specifically in Nashville, Tennessee; Atlanta, Georgia; St. Louis, Missouri; Kansas City, Kansas; Grand Rapids, Michigan; Mount Union, Pennsylvania, whilst also online, concentrating on social media and websites. Central to the synthesis of chapters is a mosaic of accounts – historical, fieldnotes-based, narrative, critical – alongside interview extracts and social media users' comments, figures and tables,

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upload indexes, and video and website images. The breadth of analysis comprises musical and worship practice, song repertoires, discourse, magazine articles, album covers, and worship lifestyle products.

To prepare the ground for the main discussion, the Introduction clarifies the use of main concepts, such as contemporary worship music (CWM), and the inevitability of employing the designation “evangelical” to locate the musical orientations foregrounding the monograph. Within a broader picture of distinct thematic threads and disciplinary perspectives to CWM, the author is positioned toward a more dynamic and less categorical approach to evangelical Christianity that combines the model of religious “discursive networks” by religious historian Michael Bergunder and the concept of “aesthetic formations” by religion and media scholar Birgit Meyer; both are employed for their process-oriented, anti-essentialist focus that is indicative of the kind of congregational constitution Ingalls proposes. In addition, practical theologian Pete Ward’s concept of “liquid church” and the music-making focused work of theologian Mirella Klomp are part of Ingalls’s theoretical framework toward the constitution of worship in extra-ecclesial settings, beyond the local church. The under-theorized discussion of religious/non-religious positionality is addressed as the author speaks of her field presence in relation to her religious, ethnic, sexual, and class orientations, among others, while echoing ethnomusicologists Melvin Butler and Jeffrey Summit in discussing negotiations in being both a faith practitioner and ethnographer.

Based on fieldwork in concerts in Atlanta, Nashville, Toronto, and Mount Union, Chapter 1 considers performative modes through which the *concert congregation* comes into being. It explores the development of the Christian music industry and CWM in relation to perceptions of authenticity, the emergence of the “worship experience” and its marketization. The concert analysis focuses on the notions of “God-centered worship,” “participation,” and “worship lifestyle,” extending evangelical pastor and magazine editor Marshall Shelley’s framework, set to “authenticate” a concert’s standing as worship experience. Largely inviting experimentation in embodied modes of worship, the concert congregation emerges as a vital place for (understanding) evangelical youth today. Thomas Turino’s real-time performance fields are employed for an evaluation of both participatory and presentational features in the worship concert, while Matt Hill’s “performative consumption” aids the discussion of the worship lifestyle, highlighted by striking examples, such as Chris Tomlin’s *Made to Worship*, at the same time a “song hook, theological statement, musical performance, and brand slogan.” (66) Studies on branding, consumer culture, and selfhood accentuate Ingalls’s view of congregational music as popular music.

The *conference congregation*, approached as “pilgrim gathering” and “eschatological community,” is examined next. The Urbana and Passion conferences, held in St. Louis and Atlanta, respectively, foreground the discussion of how attendees experience God and participate in the heavenly

community, how music contributes to the generation of transformative experience, and why, in turn, this experience informs worship in the local church. Martyn Percy's framework of the "postmodern pilgrimage" is employed to show how the gathered crowd "perform[s] the eschaton" through "sonic agents" such as speech, song, and shouting (81). Byron Dueck's "imaginaries" and Phillip Wegner's "narrative utopia" are utilized to show the overlapping of imaginaries between translocal evangelical and eschatological communities enabled through conference worship. Furthermore, Ingalls demonstrates how distinct musical inclinations between the Urbana and Passion conferences imply distinct imaginations of such communities based on orientations favoring diversity and hegemony, respectively. Ingalls's analysis does not omit a critical reflection on conference musical performances centered at marginal Others. Rather, it sensitively looks into neocolonial politics and processes of othering, while extending Patrick Johnson's notion of "dialogical performance of blackness" to "dialogical performances of marginality" and drawing critically from Homi Bhabha's "colonial mimicry" and Teju Cole's "white savior industrial complex."

Chapter 3 turns to a local *church congregation*: St. Bartholomew's Church in Nashville, its shifting repertoires of musical and spiritual practice and negotiations of evangelical-episcopal identity. Beyond the discussion of the Sunday morning worship structure and diversity of music repertoires, Ingalls considers the church musical repertoire as an "active repertory" and a "repertory of action," based on the concepts of Jeff Todd Titon and Mark Chaves, respectively. Crucially, it is through the latter that she analyzes how a unique identity of the church emerges from its strategic positioning within and between the episcopal, evangelical, and charismatic currents. Special attention is also paid to musical choice and identity in youth services and in relation to the (post-)evangelical Emerging Church Movement.

Chapters 4 and 5 move from designated territories of congregational constitution to the *public*. Chapter 4 concentrates on CWM in the "praise march," particularly the March for Jesus (1992-1999) and the Jesus in the City Parade (1999-), Toronto, which have distinctly modelled public congregations globally. Framed through such notions as J. L. Austin's "performative utterances," Melvin Butler's "musico-spiritual warfare," and Suzel Reily's "enchantment," the chapter is concerned with distinct evangelicalisms and their relation to the wider society. The March for Jesus is analyzed through the sonic values of synchronicity, uniformity, and sonic permeation, based on the work of its lead songwriter/theologian, Graham Kendrick. The Jesus in the City Parade is examined, likewise, through its distinct values of simultaneity, variety, and sonic unevenness. The distinctiveness of musical orientations between the March for Jesus and the Jesus in the City Parade generates different identities for the public congregation, since the social ideals of the marching communities are, in the former case, based on an authoritative "script" and, in the latter, on diversity.

Chapter 5 focuses on the online worship experience, its field-sites being worship videos and interlocutors dispersed across the globe. Drawing on Heidi Campbell's "networked religion," Ingalls introduces *networked congregations* to speak of "interconnected modes of congregating that digital audiovisual and social media technologies enable." (173) Emphasis is put on the standardization and capitalization of the worship experience by the evangelical media industry, highlighted by a parade of striking terms, like "screen culture," "digital iconography," and "worship junkie." Ingalls speaks of an "experiential whole" that YouTube worship videos provide, an interplay of music with image and text. By so doing, she suggests the inseparability of the aural and the visual in a "densely textured multimedia environment" (190-191) as well as the audiovisual worship experience as a "portable practice," borrowing from Thomas Csordas. Her discussion of agency finds the individual interwoven with transnational worship brands and the media industry, similarly to the overlapping of online and offline worship experience.

Alternative repertoires and models of evangelicalism, with emergent questions for further research, are brought into the book's concluding chapter, its highlight yet being a loud point on the global "worship mainstream" emerging from North American evangelical orientations to music, theology, and society. To evoke this, Ingalls interprets Chris Tomlin's *How Great is Our God* "World Edition," a version different from the original which foregrounds the book's very first vignette. This time, the pop-rock style of CWM seems to rule over the deposits of cultural diversity on which it capitalizes.

The polyphony of disciplines is a big strength of the monograph, inviting, nevertheless, some challenges. For example, ethnographic vignettes may have been more evocative, if not "justified" in advance, but rather positioned as an opening to chapters and their sections. Then again, drawing on particular disciplinary orientations, this suggestion may not best cater to a diverse readership. While reading, I engaged in an internal dialogue, resulting from themes, approaches, and methodologies of research I happen to share with the author. For instance, even though I certainly embrace the notion of an imagined evangelical community, I found the distinction between "specific" and "imagined" Others challenging in the context of the concert congregation (60-61), inasmuch as I see the concert congregation providing a setting for large crowds to sense their volume through sounding and moving together. Considering the concert congregation a place where the imagined is (temporarily) actualized may accentuate the diverse dynamics in and implications of the worship experience that this mode of congregating enables.

A second point of dialogue concerns multi-sited-ness, as a central condition to the composition of this work. In contrast with the tradition of single-sited ethnography, Ingalls brings five sites into a single monograph. This is clearly a strength in that it provides a multi-layered understanding of

evangelicalism through distinct sites that are central to its constitution today. Such strength, nevertheless, is not explicitly addressed and contextualized, as Ingalls mentions multi-sited ethnography (24), but no reference to George E. Marcus's legacy and/or any relevant study is made. Had the monograph been situated within this methodological and epistemological arena, its suggestions for social sciences more broadly would have been louder.

The points of dialogue raised above emerged amidst a multitude of delightful reading moments and the somewhat scholarly fulfilment which the establishment of *musical modes of congregating* may bring about to readers studying congregational communities, like myself. With this monograph Ingalls adds significantly to the emerging body of interdisciplinary work intensely systematized over the past decade, in part through the biennial conference on Christian Congregational Music, which Ingalls convenes, among other scholars. *Singing the Congregation* provides a window into revisiting not merely North American evangelicalism but also the boundaries between local and global popular music and culture, denominational identity, faith communities. The monograph attends to the need for embracing synergies between ethnomusicology and popular music studies, particularly toward a more vocal ethnomusicology of popular music in which the popular and religious co-exist. I believe such developments may, as well, become increasingly important in less music-oriented fields.