

Editorial

Resonating worlds. The possibilities and effects of sound and music



Issue 7:1 of [LIMINA – Theological Perspectives from Graz](#) sets out to discover the possibilities and effects of sound, rhythm and music. The plethora of articles combine current ideas in music and sound research with insights from art and cultural studies and add reflections from a philosophical and theological dimension. The authors seek to understand how sound and music affect and effect our perception of the self as well as the world, and whether auditory and musical experiences can open up and transmit transcendence. They explore the potential linguisticity of music as well as its power to (re)shape the order of time and rhythm.

The human faculty of hearing, the physiology of experiencing music and the effect of sound on human behaviour have been extensively researched by scientists. Numerous studies show that music acts as a stimulant affecting mood, memory, subconscious behavioural triggers and social interactions. However – and as becomes clear in these articles – empirical science alone cannot explain the complexities at play in the world of sound. It does not reach far enough to understand the relationship between hearing and transcendence.

Within the context of religion, listening, singing and making music are fundamental forms of communicating the divine and accessing transcendence. “Faith comes from hearing” (cf. Romans 10:17; Deuteronomy 6:4) – this is a foundational principle in the Bible. Faith that is passed on in interpersonal exchanges and received through listening is also expressed in sounds and rhythms through music, song and dance. According to Salman Rushdie “hearing the human voice lifted in song” is one of those occasions “when the bolts of the universe fly open and we are given a glimpse of what is hidden; an eff of the ineffable”. Singing and making music as well as ac-

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tively listening to music in liturgy and worship services, but also doing so in sacred spaces in general, allow us to access divine and spiritual resources. After all, sounds hold and provide a therapeutic power that connects to our social and spiritual vitality as human beings, as exemplified in several of the articles in this issue.

Revelation in a religious sense is communicated and disseminated through the preservation and cognitive reception of canonical scripture and traditions. What complements these strategies for a deeper understanding are resonating acts of recitation and cantillation, of rhythmic and musical expressions, which form an integral part of church services. It is this meaningful impact of music that has inspired and continues to inspire musical (re)interpretations of religious texts. It holds the key to unlock new perspectives and explanations that inform and enrich religious practices.

Music and sound also resonate beyond philosophy, theology, spirituality and religious practice in art and cultural spaces. They integrate, amplify and cross different dimensions of communication and language, thus creating new possibilities and forms of human self-expression. They hold vital potential for the preservation of collective memories and cultural consciousness. Often, music and sound play an important role in literature and film with added philosophical and theological implications, some of which will also be explored in the following articles.

Günther Pöltner's philosophical text analyses music not just as a phenomenon that triggers a reaction in the listener but as a phenomenon of correspondence. He describes the effect of music as something more than evoking emotions, it can attune us to different – our own – worlds. According to Pöltner, the power of music lies in its ability to make human beings intrinsically experience their relationship with the world.

Dorothee Bauer explores the eschatological dimension of music to trace and reveal theological meaning. Her journey takes us from medieval depictions of angel concerts to the otherworldly soundscapes of Olivier Messiaen (1908–1992). The tension between glimpsed experiences of grace and anticipated consummation, which is a defining characteristic of Christianity, appears to become viscerally tangible through musical experience and composition.

Jakob Helmut Deibl, on the other hand, explores sacred Christian buildings as listening spaces. In doing so, he discovers that the language we use, even in describing auditory experiences and spaces, is primarily a visual one. Deibl thus proposes – and also demonstrates – a purposeful application and creation of sound-specific language. He also finds inspiration

for the design of sacred buildings in the desire to reenforce the connection between music, cosmic harmony and construction in creating resonance chambers for the Word of God.

Ulrike Sallandt offers insights into Pentecostal liturgy based on her empirical research and experience in Pentecostalism. On the example of the Peruvian Pentecostal theologian Bernardo Campos Morante, she pneumatologically analyses the spatial and acoustic dynamics of Pentecostal worship within a theoretical framework of aesthetic and cultural categories in the sense of the spatial turn, and particularly within the concept of performative spaces.

Réka Miklós conceives a musical-pastoral model for church and worship practices that combines spirituality, self-expression and communal experiences of faith through song and melodious Bible verses inspired by Gregorian chant and its characteristic elements of singing and interpretation.

Predrag Bukovec and *Franz Josef Zeßner-Spitzenberg* discuss a particularly sensitive area of religious practice. Their research looks in detail at the potential and applicability of music and song in worship services for people with dementia in care homes.

Sr. Katharina Fuchs delves into the therapeutic dimension of music. She explores the possibilities and limitations of using music for therapeutic processes based on an insightful case study and discovers sacrosanct signs of self-realisation and self-transcendence.

Magdalena Kraler takes us onto a resonating journey through Hans Bemann's (1922–2003) literary masterpiece *The Stone and the Flute*. She places the central musical figure in a cultural and spiritual-historical context in relation to the transformative dimensions of nature spirituality accessible through sounds and rhythms.

Fritz Treiber presents a different musical aesthetic to the sounds of romanticism and nature in his essay on the phenomenon of Black Metal music and its cinematic representation. He shows how humour and irony serve to deconstruct the dark nihilism and satanistic aspects associated with Black Metal subculture based on the example of three films that also succeed in providing comedic entertainment.

Last but not least, *Andreas Burri* paints a musical-theological portrait of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) who was also active as a musician and composer throughout his intellectual career. Burri follows “musical” traces in his autobiography and comes to the conclusion that it is in fact constructed around his opera *Le Devin du village* and anchored in foundational questions of justice and reconciliation. Music holds the key to forgiveness.

With this multi-dimensional exploration of “resonating worlds”, [LIMINA](#) hopes to reflect the profound effect and universal presence of music within art and culture, personal and societal approaches and interpretations of life, as well as religious expression and transcendental experiences. Music “opens up a singular world within our lifeworld [...]. The musical idea remains an awe-inspiring mystery – astonishing as the miracle of all miracles: that there is being.” (Günther Pöltner)

We invite you to immerse yourself in this issue of [LIMINA](#) and hope it inspires you to listen to music, to let music take you on a journey into a different world, a journey full of wonder about the miracle of being!

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