

Sing With Me: An Analysis and Live Performance of Songs
that Facilitate Audience Participation

by
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A thesis presented to the Honors College of Middle Tennessee State
University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation
from the University Honors College

Fall 2023

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this project to all who pursue serving the church through worship leading. From a leadership perspective, it is my hope that the research gathered for this project will inspire worship leaders to use proven techniques and tools for engaging their congregations. While an increase in knowledge and skill to complement the worship experience is only a portion of the worship leader's role, it is often one left to chance. The calling to lead God's people into worship is an honor not lightly taken. I pray that the insights in these pages will only enhance what the Holy Spirit is already doing within the churches throughout the world.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I cannot thank my thesis director, Bess Rogers, enough for all her help in writing this Honors College thesis. She has been so attentive and available throughout the entire process. I am certain I would have been completely overwhelmed without her holding my hand along this journey. Thank you to my awesome husband, Brian, for supporting me and encouraging me on those long nights when I was tired and exhausted from my studies, for allowing me to lead the church into worship each Sunday, and for the practice sessions in preparation for the Celebrate Antioch event. Thank you to my three sons, Nicholas, Matthew, and Michael, who all played some role in planning and preparing the event. Thank you to my church family and our board members for their encouragement and support during this process, and to the worship team for their hard work during the summer months in preparation for the event. Finally, I want to thank the University Honors College, Dean John Vile, Dr. Judy Albakry, and Dr. Martha P. Hixon for the opportunity to participate in the Honors College and grow immensely in my chosen field of interest.

ABSTRACT

This creative project analyzes various methods used to engage audiences, including the age-old tradition of call and response, storytelling through parables found within the scriptures of the Bible, and sing-along strategies commonly found in many children's songs. This analysis also includes a live performance of selected songs to demonstrate and explore avenues of musical leadership that create connection and fulfillment between community participants. The conclusion of this study is that the songs and tools engaged within the Celebrate Antioch event increased group interaction, connection, and enjoyment for all involved. Following post-Covid lockdowns and social isolation, many communities crave these basic needs of human experiences that our event provided. My hope is that this project inspires others to create opportunities like this one for their own communities.

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INTRODUCTION

For as long as people have been performing, they have been pondering the best ways to connect with community members and draw them closer together through music. While it is tempting as a performer or musical leader to seek fulfillment of our own needs and musical passions, the truth is that we are most fulfilled when the audience can share the journey with us.

Fellow student Linsay Osterholt of Bowling Green University included this remark in her thesis research paper, “As modern audiences increasingly seek active and engaged roles, the successful musician of the twenty-first century will arguably be the one who welcomes and encourages closer and more personal engagement with the audience they are performing to” (Osterholt p. 6). According to Professor Desmond Dickerson during his performance skills lecture, the expression of those moments and emotions must contain elements of professionalism, authenticity, connection, and musical skill (Dickerson). While these ingredients are all necessary to create a desirable result, I narrowed my focus and attention to the art of connecting and engaging my audience with a range of interactive styles.

My goal for this project was to draw upon inspiration and wisdom from established traditions and research to show how and why engagement with the audience benefits all involved. This was done by planning and performing a live worship event that featured engagement with a congregation. This performance utilized three participation techniques: call-and-response singing, storytelling through biblical scripture and song, as well as 2-part vocal interactive arrangements.

Call-and-response is known traditionally as a form of singing that originated within the Sub-Saharan African region (Thorman). Many African American congregations use this form of singing today. Artists and songwriters today also incorporate engagement techniques like call and response, such as contemporary Christian artist Hezekiah Walker, with his worship song titled “Every Praise” written by J. David Bratton. Call-and-response is a compositional technique that works similarly to a conversation. A “phrase” of music serves as the “call” and is “answered” by the same phrase or a complimentary phrase within the song. These phrases can be either vocal, instrumental, or both. For this project, I primarily utilized vocal call-and-response.

Storytelling through song can provide us with hope and great inspiration and allow the audience or congregation to experience self-reflection that leads to empathy and compassion for each other. Rebecca de Leeuw et al. write, “Meaningful music can open the listener’s heart by sparking them to contemplate about life, and expressing love toward close others, while pleasurable music can open the listener’s heart by being joyful, making people laugh and make new friends” (De Leeuw et al., 641).

Biblical stories, often referred to as parables, are given by Jesus and recorded in the New Testament gospels. These short stories are designed to captivate listeners to convey religious and moral truth. Author Willie J. Stroud had this to say about songwriting and the parables, “Storytelling is known for captivating the imagination and alluring one into a state of self-reflection”(Stroud 20). Stroud also shares that lyrics containing the Word of God, “may conjure up emotions of faith an excitement that may engage the heart of the listener” (20).

Two-part vocal arrangements require splitting an audience into either two sections divided into the left and right side of the room or simply into low voices and high voices and teaching them each a separate vocal melody with lyrics to be sung either simultaneously or separately. Music researchers Marianne Judd and Julie Ann Pooley are among those who are finding that the benefits of singing with others can lead to a sense of fulfillment, “Results illustrate that group singing is a joyful activity that promotes well-being and is life-enhancing for those involved” (269).

Life-changing research in music is making great strides every day. One aspect of music’s healing ability is highlighted by Dr. Anne Fabiny of *Harvard Women’s Health Watch*. She cites the work of social worker Dan Cohen, who himself travels to bring music to patients suffering from Alzheimer’s and Dementia (Fabiny). In her report, she demonstrates growing evidence that suggests “Listening to and performing music reactivates areas of the brain associated with memory, reasoning, speech, emotion, and reward” (Fabiny). In the same report, Fabiny also discusses the benefits for stroke and brain-injury patients. Her article states,

Researchers at the music and neuro-imaging laboratory at Harvard-affiliated Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center have shown that singing lyrics can be especially helpful to people who are recovering from a stroke or brain injury that has damaged the left-brain region responsible for speech.

Aside from the physical health and well-being aspects of musical engagement, the psychological benefits are also discussed by Judd and Pooley, “Singing in choirs has been found to provide emotional, social, intellectual, creative and physical benefits” (270). The article also mentions Pythagoras, the Greek philosopher who was the first to use music as a means of therapy (Judd and Pooley 270). They also mention that following WWII,

severely injured soldiers were serenaded by musicians to alleviate boredom (Judd and Pooley 270). However, doctors soon realized that music provided even more benefits than they expected, seeing steady improvements in depression, morale, and socialization. UK authors Natasha Hendry et al., share in their article that psychological benefits are greater among those who actively participate in group singing rather than just listening to music (1400). This study noted that those who were part of a community choir experienced “increased positive emotions, facilitated mood change or expression of emotions as well as increased social networks and connectedness to others” (Hendry et al., 1400).

The effects on body, mind, and spirit collectively can be summed up by theologian Martin Luther. “My heart, which is so full to overflowing, has often been solaced and refreshed by music when sick and weary” (“Music and Fine Arts”).

PREPARATION FOR THE EVENT

My first task in preparing for this event was to choose a set list of songs that would engage the audience, appeal to a diverse congregation, and be simple enough for non-musicians to sing. I initially chose “Roll Jordan, Roll,” an African American spiritual with a call-and-response section, “Might Get Loud,” an energetic contemporary Christian rock song, and “Nobody,” a modern storytelling song.

To prepare for the Celebrate Antioch event, we held four rehearsals during the month leading up to the July 22nd event and a full-dress rehearsal on the day of the event. During these rehearsals, we learned the chosen songs, arranged individual parts, and practiced the songs individually and as a complete set.

The rehearsals proved to be extremely informative regarding the flow of the performance and the overall effect. I made certain alterations and adjustments on the spot as I saw fit. For instance, I changed the first song selection, “Roll Jordan Roll,” due to an octave jump in the response section that I felt would be too difficult for some to follow. “Swing Low Sweet Chariot” proved to be a much better fit due to its familiarity and simplicity.

I also decided to incorporate a song that would engage the children in our congregation. I chose an arrangement of “All Night All Day” for its simple and straightforward call-and-response form (McCoy). I invited the children’s pastor to gather a group of children who would like to participate in the event. I recorded a simple version of the song that I sent to the children’s pastor to share with their parents so the children could practice at home. In addition to at-home practice, the children met in the sanctuary

for two consecutive Sundays for rehearsal and a dress rehearsal just a few hours before the event.

Additionally, I asked my other band members to sing lead vocals on two of the songs that I had originally planned to sing: “Nobody” and “It Might Get Loud” (“Casting Crowns”) (“Might Get Loud”). I did this because I believed that seeing and hearing a variety of voices would make the performance feel more like a community collaboration rather than a spotlight on a particular vocalist or musician.

Lastly, as per suggestion from our pastoral leadership, I invited a fellow worship pastor from our local community who was in attendance that evening to sing and play keyboard. He was afforded the opportunity to choose a couple of his favorite songs. We also asked a family member who plays piano and sings to share a traditional song that most would know and be able to sing along with. Both additions were very impromptu, which I feel added to the authenticity and appeal of the event.

To facilitate a stronger connection and engage our community known as Antioch, I conducted some preliminary historical research on the local area. My findings yielded some surprising results. “In 1820, Charles Hayes, a large landowner, donated land for the church to build on, and began referring to it as the Church at Antioch, giving the rising town its name” according to a Nashville government publication (“Nashville Next”). This inspired me to incorporate the concept of past, present, and future into the live performance, allowing me to present the project in an applicable and relatable form. After considering this added information, I chose the scripture “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever” as the event’s theme to emphasize what God has already

done, is doing, and will do in the future of our community (Bible, New International Version).

A couple of the songs which I incorporated into the event also had roots in Tennessee history, making them highly relevant. I learned that “Swing Low Sweet Chariot” was originally recorded by Nashville’s Fisk University Jubilee Singers in 1909 (Little). This really highlighted our community’s musical past. Another included “All Night All Day” which is also known as an African American Spiritual with unknown authorship (“All Night”). However, Otis L. McCoy, a Church of God minister from Tennessee is credited as having arranged this standard for hymnal publication (McCoy).

Once I established the theme of the event, finalized the song selections, and researched each for relatability to our community, I created a written outline for myself, the band members, and our audio/visual engineer to follow during the performance. This outline detailed the set order, stage directions, transitions, visual cues, and reminders of what I intended to say and do with the audience.

In addition to planning the live performance, t-shirts were ordered for church members to wear at the event, 300 flyers were printed and passed out to a nearby neighborhood, and a Facebook event titled “Celebrate Antioch” was created one month prior to the event. A full-size sheet cake was also purchased for all those in attendance to enjoy following the event. The church was very gracious to cover the expense of these added items. The cost of the production was not initially estimated but as the event began to take shape, the church embraced the opportunity to contribute to its success by providing financially to cover the cost of the events additions, which in all totaled \$1,540.

Another last-minute change included restructuring the song order per Professor Rogers' advice to create better flow, which is reflected in the timeline to follow.

Below are a few images of the event created to promote public interest, including the event flyer designed by a youth volunteer seeking to aid event attendance, the custom cake ordered to encourage fellowship following the event, the Facebook livestream invitation posted by myself, and the event t-shirts also designed by a youth volunteer to promote excitement and expectation.

CELEBRATE ANTIOCH IMAGES



CELEBRATE ANTIOCH EVENT OUTLINE

The creation of an outline for the event was the next step prior to our final dress rehearsal. It included highlighted prompts in blue for me, yellow for the musicians, and green for the lighting, videography and ProPresenter technicians. The outline did not function as a word-for-word script but as a guide throughout the event. The outline is provided below:

Event Outline

INTRODUCTION: (BEGIN AMBIENT PADS- low volume)

Welcome, thank you all so much for joining us to celebrate Antioch, our surrounding communities, and My CR Church. I genuinely believe that that to fully appreciate what God is doing here, we must take the time to celebrate what the Lord has already done.

NICK

SCRIPTURE READING: HEBREWS 13:8

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.” (Bible)

Most of us may not know that our city, Antioch, was named after the New Testament Church, Antioch.

In 1820 Charles Hay, one of the largest landowners in the area, donated property to build a church. That church is still here today and is less than 2 miles from us. He based his name change on biblical scripture.... “And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.”

A godly heritage is something to celebrate, which is why we invited you here tonight. To celebrate what God has done, what He is doing today and what He is planning to do in here in the future.

GUITAR BEGINS PLAYING:

This first song is a song I grew up singing and love very much. This song doesn't quite date back to Antioch's beginning, but it is a reflection of what God has done right here in the Nashville area. The Fisk Jubilee Singers were the first to record this traditional African American spiritual

in 1909. It is a song of encouragement, faith, and hope. It is called “Swing Low Sweet Chariot.”

So, I bet you all did not know that when you came tonight that we would put you to work. We will need you to be in the choir tonight. Can you do that?

(Try to get them to respond)

Let me hear you give a shout if you can do that!

Alright, I am going to start the song out with the first two lines, and I need everyone to sing the second to lines as loud as you can.

NICK PUTS UP SLIDE: “COMING FOR TO CARRY ME HOME”

Okay, now let us do a practice run. Are you ready?

GUITAR ONLY STARTS PLAYING

SING FIRST TWO LINES – CUE AUDIENCE TO SING THE LAST TWO LINES

That was awesome? You got it. You are ready. Remember sing out, I’ve got a mic, and we need to hear you. Are you ready? Can I hear an amen if you are ready? (Get them to respond vocally)

DO “SWING LOW SWEET CHARIOT”

That was awesome! You all did so great we are going to let you do it again!

START PADS FOR “MIGHT GET LOUD”

This Next song is a great song to celebrate what God is doing TODAY! The songs we sing may change but He never does. Can I count on you all to help us sing this next one? This one might get loud, but it is okay, sing it out and give it your all.

GUITARS START TO PLAY CHORDS TO CHORUS

When we get to the chorus, I need all my alto's and bass singers to sing with Brian as loud as you can every time you see "It might get Loud" on the screen.

Okay, now when we get to the part that says, "Heaven's coming down, down, down" I need all my sweet sopranos to sing it out with me.

NICK PUT UP SLIDE WITH "MIGHT GET LOUD" CHORUS

Practice chorus with them.

That is, it!! Not too hard right! Are you ready? It is going to get LOUD!!!!

START SONG # 2 "MIGHT GET LOUD"

That was amazing! You all make a great choir!

PADS BEGIN FOR SONG #3 "NOBODY"

You know sometimes we do not always feel like we are worthy. Sometimes guilt and shame can creep in and try to weigh us down.

PARAPHRASE: JOHN 8: 3-11

Mary who was caught in an act of adultery by the Pharisee's. The guilt and shame of sin is just too heavy for us to carry. Yet Jesus did not condemn her but invited her to take on a new identity through Him. An identity without shame and guilt (Bible)

The world tries to keep us burdened down, but we have an invitation to lay those burdens down.

This next song I believe reflects the heart of John the Baptist in the gospels where he states,

READ SCRIPTURE: JOHN 3: 30

"He must become greater; I must become less" (Bible).

START SONG #3 "NOBODY"

JUSTIN AND CAM REMOVE MIC AND MUSIC STANDS

PASTOR BRIAN SPEAKS

PASTOR BRIAN INVITES THE CHILDREN UP TO SING

(Children find their spots, Shelby leads them from the front of platform)

TERRI GIVE A SHORT HISTORY OF THE SONG WHILE THEY ARE GETTING READY

The song the kids will be doing tonight, “All Night All Day” is from a written arrangement by Otis L. McCoy, a minister from Lawrenceburg, TN area. Maybe you have heard it before.

PIANO STARTS PLAYING: “ALL NIGHT ALL DAY”

INTRODUCE SPECIAL GUESTS

PASTOR BRIAN THANKS THE AUDIENCE FOR COMING AND CELEBRATING ANTIOCH, OUR CHURCH, AND WHAT GOD WANTS TO DO HERE.

INVITATION GIVEN TO JOIN US TOMORROW FOR SUNDAY SERVICE

PLEASE STAY AND ENJOY SOME CAKE AND COFFEE WITH US!

“SWING LOW SWEET CHARIOT”

Background

This time-honored spiritual is commonly believed by many to have been written by an enslaved African American named Wallace Willis (“Swing Low”). According to Hymnologyarchive.org “Swing Low Sweet Chariot” is one of the best-known spirituals of all time. This quote also describes the song as a classic simple tune written within the pentatonic scale, “It has a full chorus/refrain (“Swing low, sweet chariot”) and an interlinear refrain (“Coming for to carry me home”), making it suitable for a soloist to provide the verses, while a large group would respond with the repeated elements” (“Swing Low”).

It was first recorded by the Fisk University Jubilee Quartet in 1909 and is still revered by many in the church today (Little).

Lyrics

Swing low, sweet chariot

Coming for to carry me home

Swing low, sweet chariot

Coming for to carry he home

I looked over Jordan and what did I see

Coming for to carry he home

A band of angels coming after me

Coming for to carry me home

Swing low, sweet chariot

Coming for to carry me home

Swing low, sweet chariot
Coming for to carry me home
If you get there before I do
Coming for to carry me home
Tell all my friends, I'm coming too
Coming for to carry me home
Swing low, sweet chariot
Coming for to carry me home
Swing low, sweet chariot
Coming for to carry me home

Analysis

Given that “Swing Low Sweet Chariot” is widely known and recognized, it worked well to establish a rock-solid connection with the audience right at the beginning. Before we played the song in full, I had the audience rehearse the first chorus and first verse with us to establish expectations and guidelines for effective participation. As suggested per Hymnologyarchive.org, I sang the first line, “Swing low sweet chariot,” solo and asked the audience to follow in response with the second line, “Coming for to carry me home.” We then proceeded to sing together. The songs’ simplicity helped to ease any difficulties and they did a stellar job following along. I received many compliments on the song choice as well as requests to include more of the older classics in the future.

“NOBODY”

Background

This modern contemporary song was written by Mark John Hall, Bernie Herms, and Matthew Joseph West. It was first published by Casting Crowns in 2018 on the album *Only Jesus* (“Nobody”). According to Mark in an article published by FM radio station WCIC the song serves to challenge today’s society to think past ourselves and to consider others first, just as John the Baptist did in John 3:30: “He must become greater; I must become less” (“Nobody”) (Bible). Mark continues with this statement concerning the original intent of the song, “What John was saying is that I’m a nobody. You don’t even need to know me, I have nothing for you but can point you to the One who does” (“Nobody”).

Lyrics

Verse 1

Why You ever chose me
Has always been a mystery
All my life, I’ve been told I belong
At the end of a line
With all the other Not-Quites
With all the Never-Get-It-Rights
But it turns out they are the ones You were looking for
All this time

Chorus

Cause I'm just a nobody

Trying to tell everybody

All about Somebody who saved my soul

Ever since You rescued me

You gave my heart a song to sing

I'm living for the world to see nobody but Jesus

I'm living for the world to see nobody but Jesus

Verse 2

Moses had stage fright

And David brought a rock to a sword fight

You picked twelve outsiders nobody would've chosen

And You changed the world

Well, the moral of the story is

Everybody's got a purpose

So, when I hear that devil start talking to me, saying

"Who do you think you are?"

Chorus

I'm just a nobody trying to tell everybody

All about Somebody who saved my soul

Ever since You rescued me

You gave my heart a song to sing

I'm living for the world to see nobody but Jesus

I'm living for the world to see nobody but Jesus

Bridge

So let me go down, down, down in history

As another blood-bought faithful member of the family

And if they all forget my name, well, that's fine with me

I'm living for the world to see nobody but Jesus

So let me go down, down, down in history (go down in history)

As another blood-bought faithful member of the family

And if they all forget my name, well, that's fine with me

I'm living for the world to see nobody but Jesus, yeah

Chorus

I'm just a nobody (nobody)

Trying to tell everybody

All about Somebody

Who saved my soul (oh, saved my, saved my soul)

Ever since You rescued me

You gave my heart a song to sing (you gave me a song to sing)

I'm living for the world to see

Nobody but Jesus (nobody but You, Lord)

I'm living for the world to see nobody but Jesus

I'm living for the world to see nobody but Jesus

Analysis

“Nobody” was chosen to demonstrate through biblical storytelling the relatability of scripture to our lives still today and provide greater context for participants to reflect upon. While the lyrics within the chorus express the writer’s meaning and interpretation of John 3:30, I also felt the song could relate to people on many diverse levels, which is why I chose to share the encounter between Jesus and Mary Magdalene found in John 8 (Bible). Mary’s story models the transformation of a destructive lifestyle to one of acceptance and grace, leading her to become a faithful follower of Christ. She must have been familiar with the pain of feeling like a nobody.

This song touched the hearts of men and women alike and we have continued to perform this song multiple times after the event. My own father-in-law said he loved it, and following the event, a lady from our congregation mentioned that this song was one of her favorites. She had this to say, “I loved that song ‘Nobody!’ There are times that I feel like a nobody.” Her interpretation was much like my own and is especially applicable to verse one.

All my life, I’ve been told I belong

At the end of a line

With all the other Not-Quites

With all the Never-Get-It-Rights

But it turns out they’re the ones

You were lookin’ for all this time

“MIGHT GET LOUD”

Background

This contemporary rock-style worship song was written by worship leader Chris Brown, lead pastor Stephen Furtick, and Brandon Lake. It was recorded for the first time at an Elevation-sponsored worship night. The event was the first time they had been together for worship in eighteen months following the Covid pandemic (Holcomb). According to a podcast interview done by *Lead Worship Well*, Co-writer and worship leader, Chris Brown had this to say about the song, “Our congregation was so excited to be back worshipping together like that. I think this album as a whole represents where our church is right now and we’re so happy others finally get to experience it as well.”

Lyrics

Yeah, oh

Excuse me for a minute

But I have got a song to sing

It might not be on key

But it’s from my heart

And no one else can tell it

What the Lord has done for me

This might take all day

So I better start right now

Chorus

And it might get loud

It might get loud

Heaven's comin' down, down, down

And it might get loud

Somebody say

It might get loud, eh

Heaven's comin' down, down, down

And it might get loud, yeah

Verse 2

Oh, I don't got a halo

No, I'm not a perfect man

I'm just glad to be a child of God

Cause when I think of where I could've been

Should've been, would've been if He hadn't stepped in

Oh, I got a praise on the inside that can't be denied

And I got' a get it out right now

Chorus

It might get loud

It might get loud

Heaven's comin' down, down, down

And it might get loud

It might get loud

Heaven's comin' down, down, down

And it might get loud (when the saints start praising)

It might get loud (when the chains start breaking)

Heaven's comin' down, down, down
And it might get loud (when the saints start praising)

It might get loud (when the chains start breaking)

Heaven's comin' down, down, down

It might get loud

One, two, three, go

Bridge

Oh, why can't I praise Him as loud as I want?

Why can't I praise Him as loud as I want?

(Heaven's comin' down, down, down, down)

Why can't I praise Him as loud as I want?

(Comin' down, down, down)

Why can't I praise Him as loud as I want?

(Down, down, down, down)

Why can't I praise Him as loud as I want?

Why can't I praise Him as loud as I want?

Why can't I praise Him as loud as I want?

Why can't I praise Him as loud as I want?

Yeah, yeah, yeah!

Yeah, yeah, yeah!

Yeah, yeah, yeah!

Chorus (x2)

Oh, it might get loud (excuse me for a minute)

It might get loud (but I've got a song to sing)

Heaven's comin' down, down, down

And it might get loud (no, I don't got a halo)

It might get loud (but I know that I'm a child of God)

Heaven's comin' down, down, down

It might get loud (cause when I think about His goodness)

It might get loud (oh, I can't keep my praise in)

Heaven's comin' down, down, down

It might get loud

(It might get loud!)

Outro

Oh, why can't I praise Him as loud as I want?

Why can't I praise Him as loud as I want?

Why can't I praise Him as loud as I want?

Why can't I praise Him as loud as I want?

Analysis

This song became one of our biggest challenges. We spent many hours working on this song as it is not an easy song to do with its overlapping vocals and coordinated musical riffs. We felt it was worth the effort, however, because we all loved the energy of the song and its history of bringing a church back together following Covid (Holcomb),

and the progressive rock beat appealed to the younger generation and a few of the older generation as well.

This song leaned primarily on the overlapping of the chorus and the verse after the intense guitar lead. I quickly concluded that this would not work well for non-professional singers and changed the two-part arrangement to reflect high and low vocal ranges within the chorus instead. However, this also proved challenging to teach and execute with success. I do think that the audience enjoyed the energy of the song but was unable to follow along because of the song's complexity. If I tried this style of engagement again, I would consider something simpler.

REFLECTION AND COMMENTS

This project was not only relevant to my studies but has been meaningful to me on a personal level. For three years, I have served as a worship leader alongside my husband, who currently serves as the lead pastor of My CR church. My weekly tasks include selecting songs, preparing worship charts, equipping our worship team, and leading worship each week for our Sunday service. Through this work, I have realized that there is immense potential to speak hope into those hurting, especially when audiences can easily relate and engage. The skills gained through this project are simply tools in the music leader's tool belt to enhance and not replace what the Holy Spirit is doing in people's hearts. The worship experience is much more than the sum of these musical parts.

"Celebrate Antioch" allowed me the opportunity to analyze my choice of songs, weigh the importance of my delivery, and evaluate the response of the audience. Overall, the event proved to be an enormous success in achieving its main goal: to develop

techniques that draw people together through music and fellowship. In fact, I have had multiple requests to include more songs like “Swing Low Swing Chariot” and “Nobody” in future events.

As a Commercial Songwriting major, I believe that sharpening my skills and knowledge in terms of audience participation will be beneficial to my songwriting. I look forward to considering familiarity, simplicity, and sing-ability for an audience as I continue to write. The topics I choose to write about are also just as important when seeking to write effective and influential songs. I realize now that my choice of lyrical material may be exactly what someone needs to hear at that moment. It could be the open door to healing a broken heart, mending a troubled mind, calming fears, and relieving anxiety. It may also be the encouragement someone needs that brings hope, acceptance, joy, and belonging.

There were some things I learned through this process that I had not anticipated as well. My planning skills were stretched to include some of the finer details of event planning, which included ordering enough plates, cups, forks, and refreshments, ordering the cake with a copy our church logo, picking up balloons, and ensuring the facility was cleaned and set up and ready for guests. As for the visual details, I learned a great deal about lighting and background slides and participated in developing the best selection for each song. The influence of color and images serves as a powerful tool to enhance the song’s lyrics and emotions. My favorite slide and lighting selection was for “Swing Low Sweet Chariot.” It was warm and lighter than the others, with the image of stained-glass windows in the background which felt very nostalgic.

Unfortunately, the aftermath of the recent Covid pandemic has induced a fear of social interaction, which has in turn led to an increase in isolation, reducing opportunities for community engagement. However, musical interaction can ignite in us a glimmer of hope. In an article published in *Frontiers of Psychology*, researchers had this to say about the effects of music-related activities during the pandemic,

Media reports from the height of the pandemic's initial international surge frequently highlighted that many people were engaging in music-related activities (from singing and dancing to playing music from balconies and attending virtual concerts) to help them cope with the strain of the pandemic. (Ferreri et al. 1)

While there are seasons of life that may require adherence to public safety guidelines, it is crucial for community leaders to be vigilant in seeking out new and old ways to engage people, especially on the heels of widespread lockdowns. Engaging through music collectively has proven to be effective in providing encouragement in our own church. One church member had this to say concerning Celebrate Antioch, "My favorite part was bringing the community together," while another commented, "The kids were just precious!"

There is no greater service to our community than offering the gift of song to lift our spirits and speak to our hearts. Author Rebecca De Leuw cites this quote from Bono: "Music can change the world because it can change people" (De Leuw et al., 626). I want to be a part of that change by incorporating every skill available or necessary to aid people in experiencing better health, inner peace, and greater spiritual depth.

LINK TO LIVE EVENT: <https://youtu.be/c-OubSADnaY>

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