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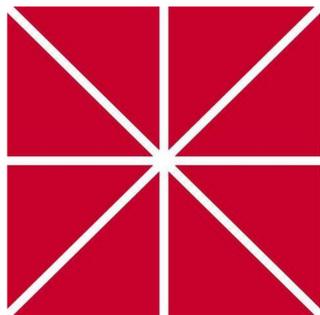
Praising God around the World: Christian Worship Music as an Individual and Collective Experience

Divya Putty

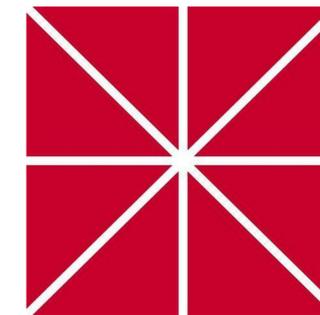
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Praising God around the World



Christian Worship Music as an Individual and Collective Experience

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Abstract

The artists “Bethel” and “Hillsong” are frequently recognized by Christians living in America. But what about the names “Bridge Music India” or “Sinach”? These names would be most likely unknown in the states but celebrated in India and Nigeria. While each stems from vastly different cultural backgrounds, they all serve the purpose of creating a space for people to connect with God and each other through musical worship. Drawing on four different pieces of worship music and their use in live services, this article analyzes the effects of worship music, specifically their lyrical and musical content, on the individuals participating in these services. We will see that, on a personal level, individuals experience an awareness of the presence of a higher power, an ability to release current emotional burdens as well as celebrate the unchanging character of God. On a corporate level, people experience a powerful uniting with those around them as they declare the presence and love of this God. I will also argue that this practice can look different within various communities. Thus, the various environments and socio-economic standings of these individuals will also be taken into account when considering how worship music impacts them. From these experiences, I will argue that worship music is more than just singing songs on a Sunday morning for individuals - it is a form of individually and communally practicing awareness and interaction with God.

Saltworks Church



Saltworks Church is a church of a humble fifty to sixty people that began in 2011. The attendees include elderly couples, young families, a handful of college students, and a few homeless individuals who are involved in a homeless ministry run by some of the families.

“Saltworks is a community of Jesus followers. We are a church community currently transitioning toward a beautiful expression of the fullness of what God has been leading us toward. We believe in the Father, we believe in the Son and we believe in the Holy Spirit. Join us on the journey of desiring more of Him!”

One member I had the chance to speak with after the service shared that one song was particularly encouraging and challenging for them. When asked why, she said she has been feeling disconnected from God and is finding it hard to notice the ways that He is actively working within her life.

Faithful Central Bible Church

Faithful Central is a predominantly African American megachurch of over 10,000 attendees in Los Angeles, California. Located at the Great Western Forum, this church fills up the 17,000-seat arena promptly at 10am every Sunday morning. Faithful Central is dynamic in age if not as much in race. Their population has grown to create several kinds of music ministries: praise teams and two choirs.



If one looks around during a Sunday morning worship service, one will see the majority of the congregation standing, many swaying, clapping, raising hands, singing loudly as they repeat the lead singer in declaring the character of this “mighty” and “worthy” God, as their worship songs say.

“We enter into God’s presence with open hearts and experience powerful times of worship that are meaningful, life-changing, and personal, all the while allowing the Lord to move as He would during our worship time.”

Yeshua Ministries

Yeshua Ministries is a team of musicians who desire to spread the love of Jesus through a new genre of worship - contemporary Hindi Christian music. The members of their team are from Mumbai, India who, at first, only meant to share their songs with a local church. However, far more people have now heard the name Yeshua Ministries across the world.

“Apart from making new Hindi worship music, we travel to different parts of the country to do worship concerts/workshops...During our events we engage the crowd in emphatic praise and intense worship and also include exhortations, altar calls followed by ministry time.” Yeshua band’s events find the venues stormed with young fans in their twenties and thirties. The atmosphere of one of these events is very similar to that of a rock concert - dark, bright lights, an excited audience, and hands lifted high. Their lead singer, Cameron Mendes, ushers the audience into not only singing lyrics to songs, but into believing certain things about God and speaking these things over themselves and their current situations.



Conclusions

Each of these three communities have one thing foundationally in common: they all make spaces for people to have encounters with God through music. In each case, individuals are comfortable being honest with themselves about how they feel towards God, are willing to believe that they can communicate with God about those feelings, and perhaps receive something in the process.

At Saltworks, musical worship reminded one member of God’s comforting presence and she allowed that to fuel her praise to God even in difficult circumstances. She came feeling burdened and left feeling hopeful. My research reveals additional individual experiences within the other two communities that I have explored. These three explorations, while distinct and dynamic, led me to common and even united findings that are further unveiled in this research paper.

So what?

Whether spiritual, musically-inclined, or not, most agree: we are only scratching the surface of the power music has to change how people feel physically and emotionally. If this is true in spiritual contexts, then a personal openness to musical worship may bring pleasantly unexpected experiences to those who seek them...and I believe that is worth being open to.