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THE INFLUENCE OF STRINGS IN GOSPEL AND CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN  
MUSIC: THE ROLE OF THE INSTRUMENT AND THE PRODUCER

By  
KELSEI M. PEPPARS

A PRODUCTION PAPER

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Music in Commercial Music  
in the School of Music  
of the College of Music and Performing Arts  
Belmont University

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

May 2023

Submitted by Kelsei Peppers in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Music in Commercial Music.

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## **Acknowledgements**

First and foremost I would like to thank God—He has blessed me in tremendous ways, surrounded me with beautiful friends and colleagues, and without Him—His unending grace, mercy, and love—I would not have made it this far. I would like to thank my esteemed professor—Dr. Ryan Joseph—for his invaluable advice, continuous support, and patience during the course of my master’s degree. His immense knowledge and experience have encouraged me in all the time of my academic studies and daily life. I would also like to thank Ms. Lina Sheahan for her invaluable aid, time, and technical support on my study. I would like to thank my many friends and colleagues in Missouri who have faithfully believed in me over the years and have always encouraged me to continue to pursue this musical dream of mine—I would not be here today without any of you. Finally, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my grandmother, my sister, and my mother. Without their tremendous understanding, patience, and encouragement, it would have been impossible for me to complete my study. Thank you.

## **Abstract**

This paper will examine the use of strings (with an emphasis on the violin) in early gospel music, contemporary gospel music, and Contemporary Christian Music. The purpose of this research is to analyze the role of the violin and strings in these genres of music while also analyzing the technical and melodic aspects of the instrument and music that are present within these specific genres, both historically and today. Furthermore, the technical aspects and processes of production (writing and arranging, booking, creating, contracting, producing, and performing) will be explored and discussed. This project will

- 1) Display and describe the use of string instruments (with an emphasis on the violin) in these genres of music,
- 2) Provide context throughout church music history showing the contextual relationship between the development of church music and the development of the usage of string instruments, and
- 3) Describe the processes of production and my role in each of these, including writing and arranging, contracting, booking, producing, and recording (playing).

The culminating objective of this paper is to draw conclusions based on observations including similarities, differences, unique melodic and technical aspects used, growth and development of ideas throughout the history of these genres, and of the violin and its utilization in these genres.

## **Introduction**

Music has existed for centuries, with evidence of it being used as early as the first century (Genesis 4:21 [English Standard Version]). It has existed as praise music, sacred music, church music, vernacular, popular, traditional, contemporary, and in many other forms. As more and more groups of people crossed paths and became acculturated to each other's lifestyles and traditions, new instruments and styles of music were developed. Music not only transcended boundaries and state lines, but continents.

Among the numerous genres and styles of music, church music is one that has continued to develop in significant and distinctive ways. From Gregorian chant, hymnody, and liturgical pieces to gospel, contemporary hymns, and Contemporary Christian Music (CCM), there exist similarities but stark contrasts as well. As styles were developed, so were instruments, and each played a vital role in the development of the other.

The music of Western culture, known as Western music and distinguished from the music and traditional culture of Asia, has roots in the civilizations of antiquity (Burkholder 2014, 4). From scales used to the function music serves, some of the earliest influences can be dated back to Greek writings which served as foundational to the development of Western civilization ideas and growth, and its development of music.

Although there is very little written record of these ancient traditions, many were passed down orally and can be validated by ancient and prehistoric paintings, drawings,

and instruments, though few have survived since most were made from fragile and perishable materials (Burkholder 2014, 5). However, at the end of the prehistoric age and with the invention of writing, many ancient traditions began to be recorded including traditions in church music.



## **Chapter One**

### **Historical Context**

Many aspects of Western music first developed within church music, including polyphony and notation (Burkholder 2014, 22). With Christ's commission to "Go, ye, unto all the world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19), Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire, Greece, Italy, and the Near East, drawing many converts. As Christianity spread, so did its traditions in music, including those of Judaism.

It is well documented that Christianity had roots in Judaism and Jewish culture—after all, Jesus himself was Jewish (Burkholder 2014, 23). Some of the earliest practices in music shared between the Jewish man and the Christian were the chanting of scripture and the singing of the Psalms (Burkholder 2014, 23). Pre-Christianity, there is evidence of music being practiced after special observances (i.e. Passover) and in temples and synagogues. Often accompanying sacrificial rituals, the priests (Levites—a priestly class which included musicians, descendants of Aaron) would perform the sacrifice often witnessed by lay worshippers. Additionally, during the ceremony, a choir would sing psalms assigned to the day, which were often accompanied by psalter and harp, trumpets, and cymbals (Burkholder 2014, 24).

In the early church the singing of psalms and chanting of scripture was a regular part of the service. The earliest record of Jesus and His followers singing is found in

Matthew 26:30, where—according to Jewish custom—they sang a song of praise (hymn) following Passover and headed for the Mount of Olives (Matthew 26:30). As these Jewish traditions became a part of the growing movement of Christianity, the practice of these traditions—singing psalms and hymns of praise—became a part of the Christian’s daily life, as well. By the fourth century, the number of Christian converts was growing tremendously, and new traditions were being established (Burkholder 2014, 25).

As time progressed and leaders were appointment and removed, ideas about theology and social and musical practices were tested. This led to the development of different types of Chant—Byzantine, Ambrosian, and Gregorian. These types of Chant were foundational in the development of church music and eventually the establishment of notation (Burkholder 2014, 31). However, although these liturgical texts were written down, the melodies were learned aurally via oral transmission, leaving no written traces of how they were actually sung (Burkholder 2014, 31).

As the influence of the Church grew and as cultures began to collide, the musical traditions of Jews and early Christians and their influences spread across the ancient world. Much of these customs and practices influenced philosophers, educators, and musicians throughout the Middle Ages and well into the present day (Burkholder 2014, 45). The practices of singing psalms and other hymns are still used in Christian and Jewish services today (as will be discussed later in this paper).

Classification of chant, the eight church modes, assigning melodies to texts, the preservation of notation, arranging higher pitches to higher notes on the staff, and many other concepts can be seen as influences in music and the development thereof dating from the ninth century all the way through the sixteenth century (Burkholder 2014, 45).

Because of the practices which were established and developed in the early church, people today and in future generations will have a way of reading, writing, analyzing, and playing music.

Evidence shows that plucked string instruments were present as early as the Bronze Age (Burkholder 2014, 5). However, it was not until the latter half of the sixteenth century that the violin came into the picture in the form more similar to how it is known today. Over the course of the fifteenth century and first half of the sixteenth century, the violin underwent a number of physical changes. It was during this time that the instrument itself (along with other string instruments) was also beginning to be recognized as preferred over wind instruments, being “consistently associated with virtue, spiritual love, and harmony,” making it favored in softer and more intimate settings (Boyden 2001).

As the violin was undergoing crafting and development in countries like France and Spain, the center of Italian violin making moved to Cremona, which is where the Amatis began to create some of the most infamous instruments of their time, some of which were still studied in the twentieth century. This is important because as Italy became the center for fine violin-making, other aspects of art and music followed. It was during this time and well into the seventeenth century that the violin became recognized as the ideal source for the newly-composed dance music that was developing (Boyden 2001).

The violin spread remarkably quickly and across borders partly because it was often utilized by independent, musical family groups, similar to troubadours in the earlier centuries. These groups composed or arranged their own music and often traveled to

great lengths in order to play for the right—and well-paying—patron (Boyden 2001). As courts were beginning to employ musicians, specifically string players or multi-instrumentalists who were able to play different instruments depending on the occasion, other organizations began to do as well.

During this same time, multiple changes were also taking place in the Church. It was in 1517 that Martin Luther wrote the *Ninety-Five Theses* often associated with the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, a religious movement within Christianity that posed a religious and political challenge to the Catholic Church. Many historians believe that the start of the Reformation was fueled by political and economic troubles, though largely driven by religious freedom and other motivations (Becker 2016). It was from this movement that the establishment and development of other denominations within Christianity took form.

Although changes in music did not occur immediately following the Council of Trent, its influence was seen and began to take its course over the next one hundred years. Profound changes occurred in the “Reformed Churches” even prior to the council’s meeting—not only in the way people worshipped, but also in music used for worship (Becker 2016). The council itself made very few changes and decisions about what the future of music in the Church looked like; most of the authority was left to individual councils and local churches. This allowed for progress and experimentation and the urge to change to develop in individual councils and locales.

At the turn of the seventeenth century the violin was gaining significant popularity. As its reputation was growing, so was the concept of soloists and the concertante style—a style in which one or more solo instruments contrast with a full

orchestra. This gave way to the concept of “instrumentally accompanied church,” and the solo voice beginning to develop in church music (Boyden 2001). To a certain degree, Baroque music also fulfilled one of the purposes of church music—to glorify God. Music across the Western world began to move in a direction away from polyphony and toward monophony and simpler harmonic progressions and melodies, making room for improvisation and soloistic playing in the future.

By the end of the nineteenth century a departure from traditional White hymns took place and “the gospel hymn” began to emerge (Boyer 2003). Traits that characterized this particular style of music included complex, spiritual texts, colorful imagery and simile, and syncopation (Boyer 2003). The gospel hymn grew in use and popularity tremendously at the beginning of the twentieth century, particularly after the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles (1906-1909) and similar revivals like it (Boyer 2003). It was during and after these movements that evangelical churches like Pentecostal and Holiness churches became popular.

In 1907, after attending the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles, the sanctified Pentecostal Church of God in Christ was established in Memphis, Tennessee. It was here that the performance style of African American gospel music originated (Boyer 2003). Characteristics that are often associated with this style of music such as glossolalia, shouting, evocative, often improvised music, and highly energetic, bodily movement (swaying, grooving), and rhythmic responses (handclapping, foot-stomping, and snapping) began to take root. As these congregations grew, the need for ministers and singers with strong, authoritative voices to cut through the vivacious response of the congregation also grew. Perhaps unbeknownst to the people of the time, this need was

making a way for other soloistic voices—including the violin—to be utilized in these settings in the Church. With the establishment of Thomas A Dorsey’s<sup>1</sup> Gospel Songs Music Publishing Company, African American gospel music spread across the country.

Toward the middle of the twentieth century, between the 1930s and 1950s, the musical concept of call-and-response was extremely prevalent in gospel music—the idea in which a solo instrument or voice leads, or “calls,” and a choir or secondary instrument responds in a similar fashion, or “response.” This was a primary characteristic of gospel music at the time. It was also around this time that gospel music had its influence on jazz, rhythm-and-blues, and soul music. This style of gospel music was categorized as traditional gospel.

It was not until the 1970s when the subgenre of contemporary gospel music was coined and the Church began to move away from the ideas of traditional gospel, influenced now by the jazz and soul music of the time, and incorporating elements of elaborate harmony, vocalism, and timbres inspired by popular African American music (Boyer 2003). This style of gospel music appealed to a wider audience and further progressed gospel music as a whole among people within and outside of the Church. gospel music grew so extensively during this and the following decade that additional subgenres were established, including “Sanctuary Contemporary” (elements of rhythm-and-blues with gospel), “Urban Contemporary” (elements of jazz, rhythm-and-blues, and hip-hop with gospel, and “Devotional Gospel” (meditative and more intimate).

Although these subgenres grew, the concepts of traditional and contemporary gospel music remained prevalent and applicable as gospel music progressed. A common

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<sup>1</sup> Not to be confused with the big band leader Tommy Dorsey

feature of a gospel song or piece was the vamp—a musical moment where a solo singer would improvise over a static harmony while a choir or background group would repeat a single phrase. This idea was introduced by Mahalia Jackson in such songs as “Move Up a Little Higher” in 1947 and was reiterated in Hawkins’s “Oh Happy Day” 1969 (Boyer 2003). This idea would continue to be utilized as gospel music expanded, and later gave space for other instruments such as violin, cello, and guitar to serve as the solo voice in this type of setting.

The influence of jazz on gospel music and gospel music on jazz was quite significant throughout the twentieth century. Many jazz musicians of the time wrote about the musical and spiritual experience that gospel music had on them, as many would play both in secular and sacred settings. Other experiences that were shared in jazz and gospel music settings included the diverse aspects of its musical vocabulary including text, harmony, rhythm, and improvisational techniques and the communal and relational experiences. In particular, the vamp played a noteworthy role in the emergence of modal jazz, where the most significant elements of the genre were the adaptation of lengthy passages of static harmony (vamps) rather than intense passages of modality (Boyer 2003).

As the concepts of gospel music grew, so did jazz and the development thereof. Composers like Wynton Marsalis and Eric Reed wrote works that incorporated elements of both genres, in pieces like “The Word of God” and “In this House, On this Morning” (Boyer 2003). Vocalists and vocal ensembles helped establish some of the most fundamental concepts and elements of gospel music. Ideas like the vamp and call-and-response are still prevalent in gospel music today. As time progressed, space was created

for additional instruments to be utilized in a fashion similar to the way the solo voice was used in traditional and contemporary gospel music. It is from these experiences that additional genres of Christian music were established and the solo voice, or instrument, became popular in these settings.



## Chapter Two

### Theoretical Context

In comparison to other genres of music, gospel is most closely related to the blues and jazz. These two genres utilize similar musical techniques including rhythmic, harmonic, melodic, and formative. In addition, the subjects and themes about which these pieces are written are often similar. Horace J. Maxile, Jr. argues that “the notion of the importance of ‘how you do it’ directly relates to core attributes of African American culture and performance practices,” *it* being compositions of Black composers (Maxile 2008). One could further argue that the concept of “how you do it” carries over into performance practices and interpretation of these compositions—that this notion is not simply reflected in writing, but in doing (performing, analyzing, etc.). This is described by African American musicologist Olly Wilson, “The substance of that approach is that the essence of the black musical tradition consists of shared conceptual approaches to music making, and hence is not basically quantitative but qualitative” (Wilson 1974, 20).

One of the most defining aspects of both jazz and gospel is the emphasis on rhythm, which is often syncopated and sometimes irregular. An excellent example of this in jazz is in “Undecided” by Hezekiah Le Roy Gordon (better known as “Stuff” Smith). Within the first thirty measures Smith utilizes syncopation—throughout the head as well as into the solo section of the piece. This technique draws attention to the variance in rhythm while also emphasizing the straight rhythms (Bass 2015).

An example of this type of rhythmic emphasis in gospel is in “Can’t Nobody Do Me Like Jesus” by James Cleveland (Cleveland 1975). The syncopated rhythms in this particular recording are highly present in the piano and organ and between the soloist and choir but can also be found in the other instruments, including the drums. Additionally, rhythm is naturally emphasized in gospel through hand clapping and foot stomping. In this same piece, the choir maintains a consistent and emphasized rhythm, even while the pianist solos and diverges from the rhythm through clapping. The underlying beat and feeling of “1, 2, 3, 4” is maintained with the choir clapping on beats two and four and the bassist maintaining a walking bass line.

Another common rhythmic motif of gospel music that is unique to pieces in 6/8, or a “broad 4” (or 12/8) is the emphasis on beats two and three, and five and six. This emphasis is typically created by the kick drum playing on beats one and four, leaving beats two and three, and five and six open for another instrument or voice to fill the space. This rhythmic motif is typically shown through hand clapping on beats two and three, and five and six.

Shirley Caesar’s “He’ll Do It Again” (Caesar 1989, at 0:49-0:55) is an example of traditional gospel that utilizes this idea. In Caesar’s recording it is much less noticeable, but the emphasis of beats two and three, and five and six is still present and made noticeable by the accompaniment of the drum set and keys. An example used in Contemporary Christian music is The Belonging Co’s “Firm Foundation.” In this live recording (Belonging Co. 2022, at 1:49-2:15) the choir and members of the congregation can be heard audibly clapping on these beats.

Another defining attribute of both jazz and gospel music lies within the harmony. This became more present in gospel music in the 1970s when it began to borrow and utilize musical ideas and aspects of the jazz music of the time, including more elaborate harmonies and harmonic progressions. Furthermore, soloists and instruments in the accompaniment started experimenting with added harmonies and techniques such as pitch bending and sliding (including the utilization of “blue notes”).

Regina Carter’s arrangement of “St. Louis Blues” (Carter 2006) is an example of the use of more elaborate harmonic progressions, where blues notes and pitch bending are utilized by the solo violin, solo clarinet, and solo voice, in addition to elements of reharmonization in the piano. Furthermore, this piece is an example of the dynamic relationship between two solo voices in a piece. In this case it consists of the solo vocal line and the solo violin line. In gospel, these techniques can also be found in “Can’t Nobody Do Me Like Jesus” by James Cleveland and The Charles Fold Singers (Cleveland 1975), where the pianist and organist are heard bending pitch and altering some of the harmonies in the accompaniment.

The melody is one of the most easily manipulated characteristics of gospel and jazz music. In gospel, the solo voice is often the part that is manipulated either by the singer or instrumentalist and is characterized by melisma, octave displacement, and a wide range of pitches. This may also be starkly contrasted by the choir or ensemble maintaining a structured and simple melody and rhythm of pitch while the soloist manipulates both the pitch and rhythm of the melody.

An example of this use of melody in traditional gospel is Whitney Houston’s arrangement of the traditional hymn “His Eye is on the Sparrow” (Houston 2012). It is

important to notice how the pianist and organist accompany Houston. During Houston's soloing and vocal improvisation, the organist and pianist maintain simplicity in harmony and changes. However, in between Houston's improvisatory runs, the pianist takes more liberty in harmony and inserts soloistic runs and improvisations of their own, serving the role of a secondary soloist in the form of a duet—rather than as an accompanist—while the organist serves as a figure of accompaniment. Furthermore, the pianist mimics portions of Houston's improvisational choices which further solidify the idea of two voices rather than one in this particular arrangement.

An example of this in contemporary gospel is in Houston and Kirk Franklin's arrangement of "Joy" featuring the Georgia Mass Choir (Houston 1996). In this piece, Houston maintains a stricter observance of the melody during the verses but takes more liberty in the choruses and sections where the choir leads in the melody. As the piece progresses, however, Houston begins to take slightly more liberty in the verses, marked by octave displacement and melodic runs. Additionally, there are moments toward the end of the piece in the final chorus and tag where Houston "speak sings," a technique more formally known as *sprechgesang*.

This technique was introduced by Engelbert Humperdinck in *Königskinder* (1897) (Griffiths 2001). Contemporary composers like Arnold Schönberg and Alban Berg utilized and further developed this technique in the twentieth century, renaming it as *sprechstimme* (Griffiths 2001). In 1925, Berg presented the idea of a work being "half sung," categorizing it as *sprechmelodie*. In this technique, the performer "stays on the note without change; in speaking the performer strikes the note but leaves it immediately by rising or falling in pitch" (Griffiths 2001). Artists in the twentieth century who utilized

this technique included jazz artist Louis Armstrong and Pop artist Jimmy Durante. In contemporary gospel, artists like Kirk Franklin, Marvin Sapp, and Tasha Cobbs Leonard utilize this technique often.

In the early days of gospel, many jazz musicians borrowed concepts and ideas from gospel music. As mentioned previously, the “call and response” concept was developed by early gospel artists and groups and was extremely popular. This concept was primarily utilized in choral groups but was adopted by jazz musicians as well, where a band leader or soloist would play a melodic line (primary) and the band or a small ensemble would “respond.” Solo jazz instruments at the time were a lead vocalist or small ensemble, but eventually grew to include the piano, alto or tenor saxophone, trumpet, occasionally a trombone, and eventually a violin or cello (Boyer 2003).

As music in these genres developed and transitioned, gospel musicians began to gather influence from their jazz contemporaries, utilizing techniques like pitch bending and flattening notes (usually the third, fifth, or seventh scale degrees). In blues, these techniques contributed to the emotional intensity of the songs and pieces that were being sung and worked in a “musical parallel” to the lyrics (Burkholder 2014, 863).

The blues were not about “having the blues” but about conquering them through a kind of emotional cleansing or purging of emotions like fear and defeat, which was embodied in the music (Burkholder 2014, 863). Similar themes about victory, conquering enemies, affecting change, and the faithfulness of God were presented in early spirituals (Turner 2018). These songs and ideas were passed down orally from generation to generation and eventually became present in early gospel of the 1930s, with some themes continuing to spread well into the twenty-first century. During the first half of the

twentieth century, jazz artists like Louis Armstrong popularized a number of these tunes like “When The Saints Go Marching In,” which features solos on his famous cornet, clarinet (the precursor of the saxophone), and trombone.

As mentioned in previous chapters, gospel music began to transition in the 1970s as musicians and gospel groups moved away from the traditional ideas of call-and-response and choral refrains to a new style termed “Contemporary Gospel,” which included more elaborate harmonies, vocalism, and timbres inspired by popular African American music and jazz music of the time (Boyer 2003).

Historically, strings were utilized in gospel music as part of a string section or full orchestra, and either accompanied a choir, or a soloist and choir (Harris 1994). In more recent years, strings—particularly the violin and cello—have been utilized more frequently as solo voices compared to other instruments traditionally used in CCM like the electric guitar, acoustic guitar, and lead vocals. As jazz and gospel music developed throughout the twentieth century, the idea of and emphasis on a “solo voice” also developed.

Traditionally, this solo voice was a literal voice, often a lead vocalist/worship leader or pastor (Boyer 2003). As mentioned previously, the necessity for a solo voice stemmed from the need for strong, authoritative voices that could cut through the vivacious response of the congregation. As this idea progressed and genres developed, the solo voice deviated from always being represented by a vocalist to a solo instrument taking that role.

Although the violin has been utilized less as a solo voice compared to instruments like the human voice, saxophone, or piano in genres like jazz and gospel, its rarity and

intentional use in these settings is significant and changes the character of pieces within these genres of music, and in some ways even the genres themselves. For example, as jazz developed in the twentieth century and as violinists of the time (including Joe Venuti and Stuff Smith) began to bring merit to the violin as a jazz instrument, significant changes within the genre of jazz began to take place. Artists like Django Reinhardt, who had a background in violin playing, even influenced the state of jazz music with the creation of a new style—Hot Club Jazz, which was made popular by players like Stephane Grappelli (James 2001).

An example of this in CCM is “Ain’t No Grave” by Cageless Birds<sup>2</sup> and Molly Skaggs (Cageless Birds 2018), where the violin serves as both an instrument of accompaniment and as a solo voice. Two additional examples in this genre include Kari Jobe’s “The Wind” (Jobe 2020) where both cello and violin represent the solo voice collectively, and in “Offering” by Rick Pino and Allison and Antonio Marin (Pino 2021) where the vocalist serves as an accompanist along with the pianist while the strings are featured as the solo voice.

Although the use of strings as a solo voice has become more popular in genres like gospel and CCM throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, it is evident that there is more experimentation to be done. From the beginning of church music to the present-day, secular genres of music have been influenced by the techniques and musical practices established by the Church, which has also had its own influence on genres like gospel and CCM and other forms of church music. If the use of strings can continue to be explored in genres like gospel and CCM and help pioneer new techniques and musical

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<sup>2</sup> Cageless Birds is Jonathan David, guitar and vocals, and Melissa Helser, lead vocals.

ideas within these genres, then it can be expected that the same influential relationship between jazz and gospel in the early twentieth century can occur between church music and other genres of music today.



## **Chapter Three**

### **Business Context**

Aside from the artist or band and the producer, the project manager is one of the most important roles fulfilled during a recording project—perhaps even the most important. The primary purpose of a project manager is to organize, plan, and execute the project while working within restraints like budgets and schedules. On occasion, this position is filled by the artist or a personnel member of the band, which can cause additional pressures as this person may have added responsibilities like arranging, orchestrating, booking, producing, and playing.

This chapter will focus on the professional responsibilities of each as well as contain a discussion on workflow and establishing and maintaining a timeline, including preferences when recording and the results thereof. Additionally, it will explore my personal experience in this role along with personal insight into each aspect. The planning, the preparation, finding the right players, booking the right location, and all responsibility is overseen by the project manager, whether directly or indirectly. For this project, I served as project manager, directly overseeing every aspect of the project.

At the start of a project, even before a single song or piece has been selected, a timeline is determined and established. Of course, this timeline will most likely be edited several times during the course of the project, but it is important to establish a reasonable

timeline from the beginning. This allows the project manager to foresee any complications that may arise, as well as institute precautions that may prevent any future delays in the timeline.

Once a timeline is established, it is important to explore recording options. I spent some time researching different recording studios, both those in which I have recorded in and those I have not, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of each. Things to consider in this step included budget, availability of the studio based on the timeline and scheduling, availability of players, and again, budget. Additional options are recording in a home studio, either one's own or one of an acquaintance or colleague. This can reduce costs significantly but can also cause issues when it comes to scheduling.

Before contacting sound engineers and studios, however, it is necessary to establish the number of tracks being recorded and an estimate of how much time is needed to record each track. It is vital to have these aspects of the project—including the overall scope of the project—predetermined in order to submit this information to the engineer, players, and producer (if the producer is an external hire). Most mixing engineers base their rates on the number of tracks being mixed, while most studio engineers base their rates on an hourly figure. Knowing this information will also help the project manager when determining his or her budget.

When determining a budget, the following must be considered: the number of players and hourly cost for each, the amount of time to record and the studio rental cost (per hour), the cost of mixing and mastering the record, the cost of the in-studio engineer, any set up fees for the studio, any fees for outsourced arranging or orchestrating, and any contracting, producing, or management fees. If the artist chooses to act as the producer, a

player, contractor, and manager, these fees can be combined and reduced. For this project, I served as the artist/player, contractor, manager, and producer, as well as arranger, significantly reducing the cost of the overall project. The budget that I established early on included the following: the number of players and hourly cost for each, the cost of renting a studio, mixing and mastering costs, and the cost of an engineer (when utilizing an outsourced studio).

For this project, I decided to utilize both a recording studio and a home studio, as well as record a portion of the solo violin tracks on my own. By recording most of the solo tracks on my own I was able to save a significant amount of time in the studio, which ultimately reduced costs. However, there were a few tracks—including the live recording—that required the violin to be recorded concurrently with the rest of the ensemble. For example, the arrangement of Stuff Smith's "Blue Violin" was very simple and included a small ensemble (piano, drum set, upright bass, and violin) as well as improvised violin and piano solos. In order to maintain a tight ensemble and allow for smooth transitions between solos, it was determined that it would be best to simultaneously record the entire ensemble together. As a result, the live recording took on an entirely separate and larger scope than the other individual tracks.

When it was determined that one or two of the tracks would be recorded live, additional planning began. The venue that was chosen was a historic building in Saint Joseph, Missouri that President Abraham Lincoln once visited on one of his trips out West. The building now operates as Restoration Church but maintains the historical record, including artifacts, within the building. Aspects of this process included confirming a recording date with the venue, booking local players, verifying that key

players (lead vocals, drums, and keys) were available, identifying the type of equipment the venue had, and coordinating with the local sound engineer to rent any additional equipment. This portion of the process was much more complex because it involved coordinating with a venue hundreds of miles away. For this project, I chose to collaborate with a couple of local engineers and colleagues to determine what additional equipment might be needed as well as the processes of recording live that would ensure maximum efficiency and quality.

Another facet of project managing includes booking and contracting. These roles are often outsourced, but for this specific project, they were overseen by the project manager. The role of a booking agent is to book and secure a place to record such as a studio, home studio, or venue and determine the number of days and/or hours per day in the studio. This individual or group of individuals may find themselves needing to book an engineer as well, if one is not included with the studio. This individual also will need to have a strong understanding of the project's budget in order to work within those guidelines.

The Contractor will either work closely with the booking agent or have the responsibility of operating in both roles. This role entails hiring players for the project and confirming that the required documentation for each player is completed and properly submitted. Examples of documents may include forms of payment (W4 or I9), photo and/or video release forms, or additional forms required by the owner of the project.

The final three roles encompassed in this project can be integrated—producer, player, and arranger. In a project this size and as an individual encompassing the majority

of these roles, playing appears to be the most easily managed for the performer. This was definitely the case for me, since I had the most expertise in the area of violin playing. However, it was also necessary for me to recognize that I still needed to prepare in this area, especially when it was time to complete the live recording aspect of this project.

As simple as it may be to “show up and play,” and in most cases that is the case, with this project I had to take more specific steps and plan meticulously to ensure that I met the required deadlines. This process of preparation included fulfilling each of the more complex aspects of the project first, all while maintaining an idea of the program and what it was going to sound like and then progressing to the implementation of charts, transcribing pieces, arranging pieces, and ultimately practicing pieces so I knew what my role as a performer would entail when the day of the session came.

Aside from writing arrangements, solo writing or even improvising in some cases was necessary. For example, there is a section in “Blue Violin” where the solo is passed to the violinist. For this piece, I planned what I would improvise based on the chord progression. With my training as a classical violinist and having initial training through a written system, determining what would be improvised beforehand aided in maintaining efficiency within a tight studio schedule, as well as provided the opportunity to explore multiple aspects, emphases, and variables in the solo section, and determine which combination of each had the greatest musical impact in the moment.

Having a loose plan when it came to soloing and recording was the most helpful in this case, since there was flexibility in the end result—as long as an effective solo was included, the specifics of that solo were variable. In some cases, it is necessary to plan exactly what will be performed in order to maintain efficiency or because of a specific

requirement, and this was the case with the live recording, where it was most efficient to have this portion of the project thoroughly planned out in order to remain on schedule.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Analysis of Individual Pieces**

#### **“Blue Violin”**

Stuff Smith was an American jazz violinist and singer and also served as conductor and bandleader even during the early part of his career. In the 1930s, Smith moved to New York and led a band of his own at the Onyx Club where he was known for his hard-swinging style and exorbitant stage shows (Bass 2015). Considered an “adventurous improviser,” he was praised by fellow jazz musicians including Dizzie Gillespie, who credited him as a major influence (Bass 2015). Additionally, Smith was instrumental in the experimentation with and development of electronic amplification as early as 1936, as well as in the pioneering of the violin as a jazz instrument (Bass 2015).

“Blue Violin” was co-written by Stuff Smith and songwriter, lyricist, and composer Andy Razaf and was released on Smith’s 1960 album *Cat on a Hot Fiddle*. The piece is performed in G blues following a loose ABA’A form. The instrumentation is reduced at the beginning as the upright bass begins by walking a bass line in G blues, followed by the entrance of the piano with a short five-note motif that outlines the key of the piece. The general contour of the piece is shaped by the limited instrumentation at the beginning with the drum set and upright bass, quickly followed by the entrance of the piano and then the violin after an eight-measure introduction. After the initial A section at the beginning, the violin leads into the B section which remains in the key of G but

emphasizes G major for a few measures then returns to G blues at the return of A. After this section, both the violin and piano improvise sixteen-measure solos over the progression of the A section, followed by a condensed A' section with the violin slowly fading out and ending on a similar reduction of instruments as in the beginning with the piano and drum set concluding the piece.

The rhythm is varied and experimented with throughout the entirety of the piece. The simple melody and theme begin with few notes and a simple swung rhythm. However, as the piece progresses through the B section, return of the A section, and violin and piano solos, rhythmic variance occurs and the rhythms become much more syncopated, which is especially noticeable in the return of the A section and violin solo with syncopated eighth-note and sixteenth-note rhythms. At the return of the A section after the solos, the melody becomes more prevalent than the rhythmic variations, as the rhythm itself is more melodic (where there is less space between the rhythmic changes) and the rhythmic emphases in the melody are accentuated by triplets and other larger rhythmic values with little to no space or silence in between them.

Following the eight-measure introduction, the violin enters at the “head” of the piece, or the A section, with a simple melody that is developed throughout the section. The melodic ideas within the A section are simple and centered primarily around the first, fourth, and fifth scale degrees. Some development within the dynamic range occurs in the B section momentarily as the violin’s melodic range also expands to the E string.

In general, the dynamic range is not stark and only varies slightly within the piece. The largest contrasts occur between the thematic material from the beginning to the end of the piece and how a simple idea is developed throughout, as well as in melodic



range. During the solo violin section, the violin's range explores the lower octaves on the G string and the upper octaves on the E string.

At the return of the A section (after the solos) the violin concludes by returning to the idea of emphasizing scale degree one (G) with chromaticism between 1 and sharp 7. The sharp 7 is unique in this case because a traditional blues piece includes a flatted 7, leaving a whole step between scale degrees seven and one. Chromaticism is also used to emphasize particular notes in this scale and piece in the B section, return to A, and violin solo where the sixth scale degree is flatted as well. This type of note is considered a non-chord tone and emphasizes scale degree five. Finally, the initial melodic material presented by the piano in the introduction returns at the end of the piece as the violin fades out and the drum set softly concludes with the piano.

#### “The Dove”

“The Dove” is the newest release of the songs chosen for this project and was released by The Belonging Co. featuring Kari Jobe on December 30, 2022. The piece was written by Cody Carnes, Kari Jobe, Andrew Holt, and Austin Davis and was originally recorded live at The Belonging Co. Conference in September 2022.

The form of the piece is similar to “Blue Violin” in that it begins softly with a simple instrumentation of lead vocal, synthesizer, and keyboard and develops throughout the first verse and chorus. Additional instruments (electric guitar, acoustic guitar, violin, drum set, and vocal harmony) are included in the transition from the second verse into the second chorus. Additionally, the piece concludes in a similar fashion with the piano, synthesizer, and electric guitar.

The overall form of the piece is as follows: Intro, Verse 1, Chorus, Verse 2, Double Chorus, Interlude, Bridge 1 (repeated), Tag, Interlude and violin solo, Verse 3, Tag, Chorus (build), Bridge (repeated), interlude, Bridge (down). What is interesting and unique about the form of this piece is that it concludes with the bridge. In traditional CCM a song is concluded after a final chorus followed by a brief “outro” or instrumental ending. In this case, the artist chose to end on a soft or “down” bridge, which I included in my recording of this song, as well.

This piece is written and performed in the Contemporary Christian style characterized by a standard chord progression of I–IV–vi–V and lyrical melodic lines and phrases. However, the harmony of the song is based entirely around this simple progression but includes a few variations. For example, the progression in the chorus is altered by beginning on IV and ending on V (IV–vi–I–V). By ending on the dominant, the listener is left expecting a resolution either with a repeat of the bridge or a return to the chorus or original progression (I–IV–vi–V). Further variations include additions of seventh chords and a I<sup>6</sup> chord in the tag following the third verse, which changes the character of the moment. With the addition of a “walk up” in the Tag (essentially passing from scale degree three to five), and with the dynamic and rhythmic build in the band, the character shifts from a gentle, reflective mood to one of anticipation and even hope. Through this technique the listener’s ear is led into the next section of the song, which is a return to the chorus.

“The Dove” is filled with variable melodic ideas that are presented in different instruments/voices. The piano begins the piece gently with a simplified version of the primary melody that appears in each verse then reverts to basic chord changes as the lead

vocal takes over the melody. The melodic range begins low and the dynamic range is soft. By the first chorus, both the dynamic and melodic ranges have increased but remain at a medium level of sound and range (in pitch).

The rhythmic development in this piece is similar to the melodic development—it begins with an idea, a motif, and simple chord changes. As the piece progresses, the rhythm becomes varied as the drums begin to add a consistent eighth-note pulse in the second chorus. Throughout the piece, both the dynamic and melodic ranges and rhythmic variations oscillate between this idea of soft, gentle moments and loud, confident, bold, and almost declarative themes and moments. Even within the violin solo alone, this idea of gentle and bold is presented both within this single moment and also throughout as the violin contributes with fills, melodic doubling, and rhythmic support.

#### “All Hail King Jesus”

In 2021, Bethel Music released the album *Homecoming* featuring Bethany Wohrle on the song “All Hail King Jesus.” This same song was originally released in 2017 by Bethel Music, written by Jeremy Riddle, Steffany Gretzinger, Peter Mattis, and Ran Jackson. I based my recording on the 2021 version.

The form is standard for a CCM piece: Introduction, Verse 1, Verse 2, Pre-Chorus, Chorus, Turnaround, Verse 3, Pre-Chorus, Chorus, Instrumental/Interlude, Bridge, Chorus. Ending on the chorus is very common in CCM songs. It begins with an ominous sound—a swell into the first verse with a tremolo in the violin and pads in the synthesizer and keyboard. The rhythm and melody are unknown at this point, and the tonal center is also ambiguous as the listener is unsure of the scale degree being emphasized during this brief introduction.

The first verse begins with simple chord changes in the piano while the lead vocal takes the melody. In verse two, the violin enters with simple pads and the keys also add additional simple fills. The guitar adds additional movement with a short, repeated motif as the lead vocal enters in the chorus. This additive formula continues throughout the entirety of the piece, creating a momentous build into the bridge. In the final chorus, the reverse effect occurs as instruments and vocals drop out in order to conclude the piece in a similar fashion to how it began.

The rhythm is used in variable ways throughout to drive the song. In the first pre-chorus, for example, the band plays the same rhythm as the lead vocal—two quarter notes followed by a half note. This pattern is played on different beats within the pre-chorus, adding to a feeling of uncertainty while the violin’s role in this moment is to lead the rest of the band into the first chorus. This is done through the use of dynamics (a swell from piano to mezzo-forte) and the use of rhythm—the violin enters on a single whole note that is held from the last measure of the pre-chorus into the downbeat of the chorus.

Melody and rhythm work in tandem in the first chorus to create a feeling of regality—similar to a royal entrance—that is further solidified by the lyrics within this chorus. This is done through the primary electric guitar lead line maintaining an eighth-note pulse while the kick drum is played on beats two and four and the keyboard plays only the chord changes. The full band is not playing at this point, which creates space and “room to breathe” within the chorus while the piece begins to move rhythmically at the end into the third verse through a sixteenth-note subdivision played by the violin, acoustic guitar, and keyboard as well as varied eighth-note patterns in the drum set.

The return of the chorus (a double chorus) utilizes much fuller instrumentation—the full band is playing, including the violin adding fills and varying the melodic range. In the chorus that follows, the drum set adds a rhythmic drive by using the kick drum on every beat rather than only beats two and four, as well as with a sixteenth note pattern on the snare on beat four.

Throughout the entire piece, the rhythm shifts between simple chord changes to the use of varied rhythmic patterns of eighth and sixteenth notes. The climax of the song takes place in the bridge and the final chorus is much softer, so the conclusion of the piece approaches somewhat abruptly because the entire band drops out at the end and only the keyboard, lead vocal, and congregation vocals (within the live recording) are heard. This approach, however, is quite effective in that it allows the listener to reflect and emphasizes the lyrics at that moment. My inference is that the artist did this in order to do just that—emphasize the lyrics at the end and solidify the message of the song.

#### “His Eye is on the Sparrow”

“His Eye is on the Sparrow” is a traditional hymn written in 1905 by Civilla D. Martin and Charles H. Gabriel. It was made popular by Charles McCallom Alexander who made significant contributions to the popularization of gospel hymnody in the early part of the twentieth century (Eskew 2001). The song has been arranged and recorded multiple times by artists like Ethel Waters, Mahalia Jackson, Michael W. Smith, and Whitney Houston (one of her last recorded songs before her death in 2012). For my project, I most closely related my arrangement to that of Michael W. Smith’s but wanted more of a gospel and African American sound, so I pulled influences from Whitney

Houston's arrangement—such as pitch bending—and hired an African American lead vocalist.

The form of the piece is not like the form of traditional hymns where a single chorus is preceded by multiple verses. Instead, the piece begins in 6/8, and the verse is sung with a significant amount of rubato until the first chorus. Immediately following this there is a series of tags with the final one almost serving as a pre-chorus into the final chorus, where the key change occurs after the last line. The first verse includes a simple instrumentation of piano and only the lead vocal. It is not until the latter half that the strings enter while the lead vocal continues to take liberty in rhythm but less than at the beginning of the verse.

In the first chorus, the melodic range is expanded. However, the arranger is careful to not push the limits too much at this point as a large growth in both dynamic and melodic range occurs at the final chorus. As the climax occurs at the final chorus, the upper strings remain in a higher register while the lower strings maintain the harmonic foundation. At the end of the song, both the upper and lower strings end in a higher range while the lead vocal returns to a middle-to-lower range. As this piece concludes, the instrumentation returns to a simplified version as well, including a string quartet and piano.

This piece was recorded using a technique called “stacking,” where a small ensemble records multiple “passes” or takes and “stacks” them in the mixing process. The result is a larger, fuller sound similar to that of an orchestra rather than a small quartet or ensemble. In order to achieve the full sound of an orchestra, this technique was

utilized with a string trio and overdubbing of the additional violin part and recording multiple takes of each from there.

Another unique aspect of this piece is the utilization of the choir. In the final tag of the first chorus, the choir enters in unison on the last line with the lead vocal then breaks out into harmony in the final chorus. As mentioned in previous chapters, the choir was a significant part of the development of and popularizing of gospel music in the 1920s and 1930s and well into the 1950s. The idea of call-and-response was established through a lead vocal “calling” and an ensemble “responding,” which was almost always a choir. In this particular piece, the call-and-response idea is not present as the choir joins in with the lead vocal, allowing the lead vocal to take more liberty and include solo/improvisatory notions. The use of a choir along with soloistic melodic choices and improvisation was—and still is—a defining trait of gospel music and had a lasting impact on other genres of music, including the influence on pop and soul artists like Whitney Houston (Ramsey 2012).

#### “I Worship You, Almighty God”

Another hymn that was released much later is “I Worship You, Almighty God,” which was written by Sondra Corbett and released in several hymnals in 1983. The arrangement I chose to include in this project is a simplified reduction of the original. The instrumentation is also simplified as it only includes strings, a lead vocal, and piano.

The form of this piece can be easily manipulated because the singer is primarily in control and the harmonic progression is not too complex. This arrangement showcases the use of strings as both a solo voice and in accompaniment of a lead vocal. The piece begins with the lead vocal and piano, with the pianist taking cues from the vocalist as

they sing with rubato while still within tempo. The strings enter toward the end of the first verse on soft and sustained pads that are almost non-existent in volume, leading into the chorus where they become more audible. As the lead vocal flourishes in tone and dynamic well into the chorus, the strings remain beneath, adding melodic fills throughout. It is not until the repeat of the chorus that the strings become the primary voice and are accompanied by the piano. In the final pass of the chorus, the lead vocal and strings exchange melodic material in a way that resembles a duet. Although the lead vocal produces lyrics, the strings echo in a way that is similar to a call-and-response though it is gentle enough for the listener to understand that the piece is concluding.

The melodic material in this piece is simple, stripped down, and reduced to the primary pitch, with a few additions of melisma and other improvisatory emphases. Although the lead vocal includes a few moments of improvisation, the majority of improvisation can be heard in the strings both during the accompaniment in the beginning of the piece and in the final chorus. The feeling of reverence and awe is created through the use of a simple melody and accompaniment.

The harmonic progression of this piece also contributes to this. The harmony is more intricate than other hymns and CCM songs as it includes multiple extensions in both the verse and choruses. These extensions include fourths, sevenths, ninths, and seconds. Extensions add complexity to the harmony, which is emphasized in the left hand of the piano through arpeggiation. Furthermore, the harmony strays from a standard I–IV–vi–V–I progression by including minor second chords, suspension chords and inverted chords.



“Amazing Grace (with ‘Gymnopédie No. 1’)”

The final piece of this project is an arrangement of a traditional hymn and contemporary piece—“Amazing Grace (with ‘Gymnopédie No. 1’).” The words to the famous hymn were written by Thomas Newton, a captain of a slave ship carrying captured African people to America in 1772. Although the words were written by Newman, the melody is listed in the Library of Congress as “Unknown” (Library of Congress n.d.). Erik Satie wrote “Gymnopédie No. 1” as part of a collection of pieces in 1888.

This arrangement begins with Satie’s “Gymnopédie No. 1” in the piano accompaniment while the violin follows with the primary melody in “Amazing Grace.” However, only the first four measures are played as the arrangement begins with increments of melodies from each song, rather than an entire melody at once. The main melody from Satie’s piece is primarily found in the piano while the primary melody from “Amazing Grace” is found in the violin line, although there are moments throughout where each is presented in both the violin and piano lines.

The piece begins with a simple dotted half-note in the left hand of the piano, followed by a quarter rest half-note rhythm in the introduction, which alludes to the beginning of Satie’s original work. This rhythmic motif is carried throughout the piece in the left hand of the piano and solidifies the underlying pulse. Similar rhythms are emphasized in traditional and contemporary gospel music in pieces with time signatures in 3/4 or 6/8 where beat one and/or four is emphasized and the remaining two beats are not. Interestingly, this concept appears in this arrangement of a traditional hymn and classical piece.

Both the piano and violin utilize lyrical melodies and long phrases throughout the piece, while the majority of the rhythmic changes occur in the left hand of the piano. The smallest note in this piece is an eighth-note and the longest is three dotted half-notes tied to each other. This emphasis on long lines and phrases primarily contributes to the reflective quality of “Gymnopédie No. 1” but also in “Amazing Grace,” as the original lyrics were paired with the melody in a way that portrays Newman’s personal reflection on his time at sea and his testimony of coming to Christ.

While the majority of the piece is in D major, there are moments where the tonal center of D minor is present. For example, measure 21 begins the shift from major to minor as C naturals start to appear followed by F naturals. This continues for several measures until the return of the recapitulation in measure 40, though this may not be considered a true recapitulation since the melodic material is quite different from the beginning. One additional moment within the piece where the primary voices stray from the major tonality is toward the end, in what appears to be an unraveling of the melodies from each piece. The harmony returns to D minor momentarily, only to resolve on a D major chord. It is noted that in the original work of Satie, the final chord was a D minor chord, but the arranger chose to conclude in a major, more positive tonality.

## **Conclusion**

The idea of a solo voice in music, specifically church music, has existed from the very beginning of time. In early periods, the solo voice was often represented as a unison voice, which might have included a group of church members reciting liturgical readings in chant form. As music in the church developed, this idea continued to exist and adapt to the changing culture of the Church. Over the course of centuries, the solo unison voice developed into a literal solo voice, which was represented as either a human voice or solo instrument.

This cycle continued well into the twentieth century, when gospel music became popular and a revival of choirs and choral music began. The idea of a solo unison voice returned and became so influential that new musical concepts were formally established, including the call-and-response. Furthermore, these ideas that were established in and heavily utilized in gospel and church music began to be utilized in other genres like jazz and blues.

As music continued to develop in jazz, blues, and gospel during the twentieth century, the idea of a solo voice—represented by either a human voice or solo instrument like saxophone or guitar—became prevalent once again. This development eventually led to the utilization of string instruments (including the violin) as a solo voice in church music, gospel, and CCM.

Throughout my observation of CCM and gospel music, I found that the general forms of songs appear to be quite similar with regards to the growth of the piece. For example, most songs on this project begin softly or gently with a reduced instrumentation, grow as they reach the climax of the piece, and then return to a reduced and gentler arrangement at the end. Although I did not consciously choose each of these pieces for that reason, it does show that this is a similarity in form between CCM and gospel music based on the variety of songs and the conclusion thereof.

In addition to melodic and structural aspects, I have found rhythmic and harmonic aspects to be some of the most definitive traits of gospel and CCM. Gospel in particular is often defined by syncopated rhythms and a focus on rhythm that is easily expressed through body movement—either hand clapping, foot stomping, swaying, or dance.

Another aspect that was explored was the role of project management and the business context within this project. The concepts of booking and contracting, the management of resources and a budget, and the preparation of the musicians and vocalists—each role was explored and discussed within the context of managing a studio recording project. Additionally, the same concepts were discussed within the scope of a live recording project, in which case the similarities included managing resources and booking. However, the differences between the two are seen in the musician's preparation and how one prepares for a live event versus a studio event where multiple takes and passes can be taken. The concept of booking was also similar, but the difference was in the type of venue and coordinating schedules with a live team of musicians, the event staff, and any additional staff that needed to be present such as the producer.

In this project, I have shown various roles of the violin and how it appears in gospel and Contemporary Christian Music. The versatility of the instrument is shown in a chamber ensemble, in this case a string quartet, in a duet, and as a solo voice. The violin can serve not only as a solo instrument portraying the lead melodies, but also in an accompaniment role where its emphasis can either be rhythmic, harmonic, or melodic, depending on the genre of music.

The exploration of the various roles of strings—specifically the violin—in the genres of gospel and Contemporary Christian Music proves that the instrument is not limited to one particular genre or style of church music, nor is it confined to one particular role within these genres of music. The versatility of the violin operating within these genres is seen in the arrangement of “His Eye is on the Sparrow” where it serves in a small chamber ensemble, or in “The Dove” where it serves in an accompaniment capacity but also as a solo voice.

As the instrument has developed over time, so has its ability to be utilized in less traditional ways. It has been and will continue to be applied in these less traditional settings, allowing for further exploration and experimentation to occur. There is extensive room for future research, either following the conclusions drawn from this project or research previously completed. As exploration of these concepts and ideas are pursued, the use of the violin and other instruments in genres like gospel and CCM will continue to be pioneered in ways that bring insight and advancements in church music.

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