Pop Music with a Purpose: The Organization of Contemporary Religious Music in the United States

by

Adrienne Michelle Krone

Department of Religion
Duke University

Date: __________________________

Approved:

_______________________________

David Morgan, Supervisor

_______________________________

Yaakov Ariel

_______________________________

miriam cooke

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of Religion in the Graduate School of Duke University

2011
ABSTRACT
Pop Music with a Purpose: The Organization of Contemporary Religious Music in the United States

by
Adrienne Michelle Krone

Department of Religion
Duke University

Date: _____________________
Approved: _____________________

David Morgan, Supervisor
Yaakov Ariel
miriam cooke

An abstract of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of Religion in the Graduate School of Duke University
2011
Abstract

Contemporary Religious Music is a growing subsection of the music industry in the United States. Talented artists representing a vast array of religious groups in America express their religion through popular music styles. Christian Rock, Jewish Reggae and Muslim Hip-Hop are not anomalies; rather they are indicative of a larger subculture of radio-ready religious music. This pop music has a purpose but it is not a singular purpose. This music might enhance the worship experience, provide a wholesome alternative to the unsavory choices provided by secular artists, infiltrate the mainstream culture with a positive message, raise the level of musicianship in the religious subculture or appeal to a religious audience despite origins in the secular world. It is vital to categorize contemporary religious music based on the goals of three key players - the record labels, the musicians and the audience. In this paper I use data from all three key players in addition to analysis of music and lyrics to ascertain the placement of music within my organizational system. I arrange contemporary religious music into two functional categories based on these key factors. These categories create a framework for understanding the multi-purpose world of contemporary religious music and its role within American religious communities.
Contents

Abstract........................................................................................................iv

Contents.......................................................................................................v

1. Introduction..........................................................................................1

1.1 Contemporary Christian Music.........................................................5

1.2 Contemporary Religious Music........................................................9

1.3 Measuring Success...........................................................................14

1.4 Music in the Digital Age.................................................................16

1.5 Christ, Culture & Categories.........................................................17

1.6 Communal Contemporary Religious Music.....................................22

1.6.1 Devotional Communal Contemporary Religious Music.............32

1.7 Integrational Contemporary Religious Music.................................40

1.8 Conclusion....................................................................................51

Appendix A............................................................................................53

Resources...............................................................................................54
1. Introduction

A musician named Larry Norman, a Christian musician and producer, revived Martin Luther’s famous quotation “Why should the Devil have all the good music” as he began his career in Christian music in the late 1960s.¹ He redeployed the quotation “as a boogie-woogie manifesto”² and started a movement of religious music that spread well beyond Larry Norman’s Christian subculture. The quotation describes the motivation of hundreds of religious musicians who write, perform and make a living producing good music that is also God’s music. These musicians represent different races and religions, and approach music in very different ways. Their music is contemporary in style, religious in nature and ensures that the Devil does not have all the good tunes.

Larry Norman one of the first contemporary religious musicians and his music sparked the creation of the countless musicians, albums and tours that followed. Contemporary religious music as an industry exists both outside the mainstream music industry and within it. Just as religion is present in American culture, it is present in American music. Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) has become a massive industry in its own right with annual record sales nearing $600 million,³ but CCM does not exist in a bubble. CCM is on the radio, on movie and television soundtracks, and a part of mainstream culture.

As a Jewish teenager attending a public high school outside Buffalo, NY, Contemporary Christian Music was not on my radar. My household was a musical

¹ Beaujon 21
² Beaujon 21
³ Howard and Streck 192
one and my memories of childhood are accompanied by a diverse soundtrack. My parents, siblings and I each play at least two instruments. My dad sang in the synagogue choir and my siblings and I sang in the junior choir. On car trips we passed the time playing name that tune and petitioning to choose the next cassette tape on deck. I believed I was quite musically literate until an Evangelical friend of mine announced at lunch one day that she would no longer be listening to secular music. Imagining a future filled with synagogue style chants and children’s songs I had learned in Hebrew School, I inquired as to what she was planning to listen to. She casually answered that there was plenty of Christian music that she could listen to that was more suitable to her ears and God’s will. My friend stayed true to her word. She avoided school dances on account of the music played by unsavory DJs and listened to classical music in her car. In the summer, my friends headed in droves to see Britney Spears and The Dave Matthews Band at the local amusement park, but my faithful friend waited until the Kingdom Bound Festival came to town each year. Other friends grew frustrated with her refusal to participate in our musical culture but I found myself envious of her alternative musical world. It wasn’t until I had graduated college that I discovered a new group of musicians who were creating an alternative musical world for Jewish teens. I was working on a nationwide summer arts program for Jewish teens and we hired Jewish rock musicians to lead workshops for our participants. Watching them play upbeat and catchy tunes with their electric guitars and hip t-shirts, I realized that the music I wished I had as a teenager was now

---

4 Kingdom Bound is one of the largest Christian music festivals in the United States. It is hosted each summer at Darien Lake Amusement Park in Darien Center, NY by Kingdom Bound Ministries, “The Gospel Through the Arts.” [http://www.kingdombound.org/index.php](http://www.kingdombound.org/index.php)
a reality. The Contemporary Christian Musicians led the way, but Jewish musicians and Muslim musicians picked up guitars and microphones and followed suit. This paper seeks to incorporate this new class of religious musicians into the conversation.

A great deal of the religious music produced by Muslims and Jews is released into the mainstream culture from the start because a separate music industry with the resources of the CCM industry is not available to these communities. When all of the religious music that thrives in the mainstream and religious subcultures is counted, the world of contemporary religious music (CRM) is too large to study without an organizational system in place. My goal is to organize the copious amounts of CRM produced in the United States into a framework based on the musicians, audience and production of the music in order to form a clearer picture of the role that religion plays in the world of CRM. CRM covers a vast spectrum of music and religiosity of the music varies across the CRM spectrum. The framework established in this paper will separate contemporary religious music into categories. There are certainly other ways to approach the study of contemporary religious music. One could assess the theological messages contained within the music. Work could be done to determine the role of the music in the religious practice of those who create the music and those who listen to it. This project could be a study in the religious economy that surrounds CRM and the culture of American consumerism that led to the creation of the CRM industry and allows it to thrive. Perhaps in the future, I will attend to these projects but for now, I seek only to evaluate the current state of CRM and formulate a system for approaching and understanding the world of contemporary religious music.
The question of why religious musicians produce contemporary religious music is central to this project. Contemporary styles of music, like rock ‘n’ roll and hip-hop, are often thought of as secular music, or even as the Devil’s music. Despite the connotations that come with contemporary music, the musicians discussed below are consciously producing music that incorporates their religious heritage and beliefs in styles that are less traditional in religious circles. Michael Gilmour, who has written extensively on religion and popular music, notes that “Contemporary popular music tends to define itself over and against something, whether earlier music, political positions, or society’s values and expectations. It is oppositional in one way or another.”

Contemporary religious music is reactionary in its choice to bring religious values and traditions into the secular American music scene. In the current music scene, lyrics containing offensive language, overt sexual references and descriptions of violence are so common that songs about God, faith and morality are quite oppositional. Contemporary religious music is contemporary because the style of the music closely reflects the style of music available in the mainstream music market. In the mainstream market, new music is created in infinite genres each year and in the CRM market, new music is being created in similar styles. There is metal and Christian metal, hip-hop and Muslim hip-hop, reggae and Jewish reggae. This music is contemporary because its instrumentation, rhythm and sound reflect the music created in the secular world.

This paper will investigate the musicians composing and presenting religious music, the music they write and perform, the record labels that produce and market
the music and the audiences that buy the records, blast the tunes on their iPods and
attend the concerts. The world of contemporary religious music is vast, and this
paper touches only the surface of a much larger project. Once a framework for
approaching contemporary religious music is established, a great deal of work in each
area of the CRM world will remain.

1.1 Contemporary Christian Music

Before delving into the world of contemporary religious music, we must first
understand what religious community the musicians are coming from, the messages
they seek to convey, the audiences they hope to reach and the effect of their music on
that audience. No less important is an awareness of the record labels that invest in
this music and the economy created by this music. Contemporary religious music
sales are not easy to track as the music falls into various categories established by the
greater music industry. Contemporary Christian Music (sometimes included in
Gospel categories) is recognized as a genre within the greater music industry but
Contemporary Jewish and Muslim music are lumped in with existing musical
varieties based on the style. For example, most of the Muslim music discussed here
is tracked on R&B/Hip-Hop charts. If the numbers for the Contemporary Christian
Music are any indication, there is a large and flourishing market in religious music in
the United States. Randall Balmer, a prominent historian of Evangelicals in America
provided the following background information on the Christian music industry for
the fourth edition of his book Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into the
Evangelical Subculture in America.
Contemporary Christian Music was a huge industry, not merely a niche market, bringing in an estimated three-quarters of a billion dollars annually by the mid-1990s. In the late 1980s and early 1990s several labels were taken over by secular corporations that recognized the potential for profits. In 1998, according to *Billboard* magazine, the contemporary Christian music market share of the recording industry had exceeded that of jazz, classical, New Age, and soundtracks.⁶

Since Contemporary Christian music (CCM) is an established sub-market of the record industry, helpful scholarship has defined the subsection boundaries of Contemporary Christian music. There are three main approaches to defining the boundaries of Christian music.

Christian music is most often defined by the content of the music. The music historian Don Cusic “contends that there are two types of music: music with lyrics about Jesus Christ and the Christian life (‘gospel music’), and music with lyrics about everything else (‘secular music’).”⁷ Cusic categorizes music with lyrics about Jesus Christ and the Christian life as “gospel music” and this is a fairly standard practice in the music industry. Sociologists Jay R. Howard and John M. Streck clarified the categorization of Christian music in the mainstream music industry in a book they wrote on the subject: “According to the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), gospel music is gospel music, and, for the purpose of tracking sales, religious music of all types have traditionally been lumped together into a single category [sic].”⁸ Contemporary Christian music is celebrated each year at the Gospel Music Association’s Dove Awards. A GMA Dove Award is the Contemporary Christian Music industry’s most prestigious award. At the mainstream music

---

⁶ Balmer 300  
⁷ Howard and Streck 9  
⁸ Howard and Streck 83
industry’s Grammy Awards, awards for Contemporary Christian music are given out in seven different categories of gospel music such as “Best Rock or Rap Gospel” and “Best Pop/Contemporary Gospel.”\(^9\) For this purposes of this paper, except when referring to music industry awards like GMA Dove Awards and Grammy Awards, the term ‘gospel music’ will be used only to refer to traditional gospel music and the term ‘Contemporary Christian music’ or simply ‘CCM’ will be used to refer to Christian music that is not traditional gospel music.

At the other end of the spectrum is the approach explained by Howard and Streck where “contracts, not content, define CCM.”\(^10\) This approach defines Contemporary Christian music based on the record labels that are releasing the music, the venues that hire the bands to perform and the retail outlets that sell the music. In the case of Contemporary Christian music, the record labels, churches and Christian bookstores that participate in marketing CCM define CCM when they choose which musicians to sign, concerts to host and albums to sell.

There is also a community approach to defining CCM. Howard and Streck describe the community approach to defining Contemporary Christian music as “an artistic product that emerges from a nexus of continually negotiated relationships binding certain artists, certain corporations, certain audiences, and certain ideas to one another.”\(^11\) In many Christian homes, acceptable Christian music is defined by a combination of the lyrics, religious lives of the musicians and the production and

---


\(^10\) Howard and Streck 11

\(^11\) Howard and Streck 14
distribution of the music. For many Christian parents a song may contain lyrics about
Jesus but if the musician is a poor role model or the marketing of their album contains
offensive images, the music is not considered appropriate. For example, the band U2
has released many songs with Christian themes and explicit religious lyrics.
However, since the members of U2 have not consistently identified as Christians,
some communities within the Christian subculture are reticent to play U2 music, even
music with Christian language and themes. The solution to this problem is to have
Christian bands cover U2 songs. Steve Stockman, an author who wrote *Walk On:
The Spiritual Journey of U2*, took note of this interesting phenomena while on his
promotional visits to Christian radio stations. He found that “most of the stations
could play U2 songs covered by other artists, but not played by U2 themselves,
because the band’s spirituality wasn’t explicit, mostly because its members drink,
smoke, and swear.”¹² The Christian rock band Audio Adrenaline, a Communal CRM
group with two Grammys for Best Rock Gospel Album¹³ and five GMA Dove
Awards,¹⁴ recorded a cover of U2’s “*Gloria*” for the 2004 Christian Compilation
album *In the Name of Love: Artists United for Africa*.¹⁵ All of the songs on the album
are U2 songs covered by Christian artists. The Christian subculture approves of U2’s
mainstream music, but they require its Christianization before they adopt it for use in
their community.

¹² Beaujon 134
I define contemporary religious music by the content, contracts and communities that produce and consume the music. All of the Contemporary Christian music I discuss was created by Christian musicians, with Christian content, for Christian audiences. It was not all produced by Christian record labels but was all marketed to Christians through Christian bookstores and publications like CCM Magazine.

1.2 Contemporary Religious Music

This study commenced with an overview of Christian music because there is a larger audience for Christian music in America than exists for other religious groups. A larger audience has enabled a massive industry to develop around Contemporary Christian Music. Though the population of Muslim and Jewish Americans does not provide an audience for religious music on the scale of the Christian music industry, parallel industries do exist in these communities. According to the American Religious Identification Survey in 2008, 76% of Americans identified as Christians. Comparatively, just over 1 percent of Americans identified as Jews and just under 0.6% of Americans identified as Muslims. So, in numbers representing the potential audience for religious music, there were roughly 173 million Christians, 2.6 million Jews and 1.3 million Muslims in the United States in 2008. The industries that have developed around Jewish and Muslim music are very similar to that which sprouted up to support Christian music, but on a scale that is proportional to the population size of these communities.

---

16 Kosmin and Keysar 5
Moving forward, I will consider American Jewish and Muslim music alongside Contemporary Christian music. The Christian community in the United States is not unique in its adoption of the music styles of the surrounding culture. Music of the surrounding culture has influenced Jewish and Muslim communities, which have also repurposed the music. I want to train a wider lens on contemporary religious music in the United States and bring Contemporary Jewish and Muslim music into analytical view.

Jewish musicians were mixing religion and music thousands of years before Jesus walked through Palestine. The bible contains evidence of the first Jewish musician, Jubal: “He was the ancestor of all who could play the lyre and the pipe” (Gen. 4:21). Jubal’s musicianship is not mentioned as an oddity, but as a natural practice and through this reference, musicologist Marsha Edelman asserts that “Jewish tradition thus records music as the earliest art form, one basic to human nature.”

Given a history of Jewish musicians that stretches back to the beginning of Judaism, it is not surprising that Jews often express their identity and faith through music. Cantor Jonathan L. Friedmann, who has written extensively on Jewish music, asserted that “One of the many cultural features shared by the world’s diverse Jewish communities is a high regard for music.” Musicologist Eric Werner adds that “The Jews consider themselves a particularly musical people.”

---

17 Edelman 1
18 Friedmann 2
19 Friedmann 2
The Jewish people have become accustomed to living as a minority in larger societies and while some Jews insist upon strict separation between their communities and the larger culture, others embrace the larger culture. “Because Jewish people have lived as a minority culture within larger communities, Jews have ‘borrowed’ aspects of the majority culture along the way. This has led to the creation of more than one kind of music, in more than one language.”\(^{20}\) The Contemporary Jewish music created in the United States is just the most recent wave of music from the global Jewish community.

Where Contemporary Christian music content is defined by references to Jesus Christ and living a Christian life, Jewish music is defined somewhat more loosely. Carol Sachs, a noted musicologist, stated that Jewish music “was written ‘by Jews, for Jews, as Jews.’”\(^{21}\) Where Christian music uses the language of Jesus and salvation, Jewish music can often be identified by the language of its lyrics. Jewish music often contains Hebrew and/or Yiddish lyrics. Hebrew is the language of the holy books of the Jewish tradition. It is also the language that has expressed the thoughts, beliefs and deepest desires of the Jewish community for hundreds of years. Yiddish was the language spoken by Jews in Eastern Europe for centuries and came to America with Jewish immigrants in the twentieth century. The use of Yiddish varies in the Jewish community but is tied to age. My great grandparents spoke Yiddish, my grandparents spoke Yiddish and English and my father spoke mostly English but understands Yiddish. The only Yiddish I know comes from songs I sang

\(^{20}\) Edelman ix  
\(^{21}\) Edelman x
in synagogue, pet names my grandfather used and the derogatory terms that pepper my father’s vocabulary. Despite a decline in Yiddish speakers in America\textsuperscript{22}, Yiddish words still roll off the tongues of many American Jews and the language is especially vibrant in Jewish liturgy and music.

It should be noted that Jewish tradition does contain within it rabbinical decrees restricting music. These decrees include a prohibition on public musical performance, the use of instruments in worship and prohibitions on women singing in front of men.\textsuperscript{23} Edelman explained that the rabbinic bans on music were not uniformly and universally enforced noting that “the rabbis underestimated the power of music in the lives of the people.”\textsuperscript{24} Orthodox Jews still enforce the prohibitions on the use of instruments in synagogue and men listening to women sing but the more liberal Jewish communities have embraced music both inside the synagogue and beyond.

Islam and music also have a complicated history. In some Muslim communities, music is thought to be haram (forbidden) but Muslim music exists in many forms all over the world. In many places in the Muslim world music is expanding its influence as part of political movements, as suggested by Mark Levine in his 2008 book, \textit{Heavy Metal Islam}. In the United States, most of the Muslim music being produced is from the African American Muslim community. In African

\textsuperscript{22} According to the US Census Bureau 315,953 Americans spoke Yiddish at home in 1980 but in 2007 only 158,991 Americans spoke Yiddish at home.

\textsuperscript{23} Edelman notes that “to acknowledge the loss of both their Temple and Jewish national autonomy (in the absence of a functioning Jewish rabbinical court, or Sanhedrin), the rabbis invoked a ban on public musical performance. The Levitical choirs and the instruments that had enhanced Jewish rituals were silenced by rabbinical decree. The same prohibition of musical celebration was imposed upon synagogue practices as well.”

\textsuperscript{24} Edelman 11
American Muslim communities, the community that is most relevant to the study of CRM in America, music is not considered forbidden. Linguist H. Samy Alim described the relationship between African American Muslim communities in a piece titled *A New Research Agenda: Exploring the Transglobal Hip Hop Umma*:

Members of the hip hop nation who represent the three African American Muslim movements [the Nation of Islam, the Nation of Gods and Earths (or the Five Percent Nation) and the Sunni Muslim community] have independently observed that they very means by which the Quran was revealed to the Prophet—that is, orally and, in large part, through rhymed prose-exhibits parallels to the linguistic and literary mode of delivery found in hip hop lyrical production.25

Once parallels were drawn between traditional Quranic recitation and modern hip hop, African American Muslims immersed themselves in the world of hip hop and Muslim hip hop became a prominent subsection of the hip hop nation. African American Muslims are not alone in their use of music to convey Muslim beliefs; though music from Muslim Americans outside the African American Muslim community is scarce. Yusuf Islam (formerly known as Cat Stevens) is one example of an artist who has contributed music with Muslim themes and Arabic lyrics outside the hip hop genre. On the subject of Islam and music, Yusuf Islam said: “so long as it is within certain moral limits and does not divert a person from worship - it obviously doesn’t make people Kafirs (non-Believers).”26 Muslim music is most easily identified by the use of Arabic. Arabic is the language of the Qur’an and as a result Arabic is central to Muslim identity. Arabic is used by American Muslims of Middle Eastern descent in the home but it is used by the greater American Muslim

25 Alim in cooke and Lawrence 266
26 Islam 3
community in worship, study and music. The American Muslim community is growing and the music of American Muslims will surely reflect that growth in the coming years.

Jewish music and Muslim music are included in this discussion because the music that emanates from these communities is finding a place in the landscape of American culture the same way that Christian music has. Christians, Jews and Muslims all over the United States are creating music for their communities and much of this music seeps into the wider culture and becomes a part of that culture.

1.3 Measuring Success

Throughout this piece, I use certain tools to gauge success in the mainstream music and CRM worlds. In order to measure success across industry boundaries, I will rely only on instruments recognized by the majority of the music industry. The first is Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) certification. The RIAA is “the trade organization that supports and promotes the creative and financial vitality of the major music companies. Its members are the music labels that comprise the most vibrant record industry in the world.”27 The RIAA is the organization that tracks record sales and certifies albums and singles as Gold, Platinum, Multi-Platinum and Diamond. If an album is certified as gold, the RIAA has acknowledged that it sold at least 500,000 copies. Platinum albums or singles must sell 1,000,000 and multi-platinum albums or singles are measured in million dollar increments. For example, if an album or single is triple-platinum, it has sold 3,000,000 albums. A

diamond album or single has sold at least 10,000,000 copies.\textsuperscript{28} The RIAA is recognized as an authorized source of information on record sales by the music industry and the CRM industry. The Grammy Award is the most prestigious award one can win in the American music industry and is used as an indicator of success in this paper for that reason. The Christian Music Industry has its own prestigious award, the Gospel Music Association (GMA) Dove Award. CCM artists who have won Grammys and GMA Dove Awards often list them together on their websites, as they are both a badge of honor in the CCM world. The Billboard Charts track record sales on a weekly and annual basis on charts in subsections of music that span the spectrum of music in America from Bluegrass to Heavy Metal and everything in between. Achieving a spot on a Billboard chart is a high honor for musicians.

These tools will be used throughout this paper to measure success but that does not suggest they are the only standard of achievement. For many musicians that will never sell 500,000 albums, have a number one hit on the Billboard chart or win a Grammy, there are other ways to define success. Especially with regards to Muslim and Jewish Communal CRM, success will be defined outside the parameters of the RIAA due to a small potential audience pool. For a Muslim Communal CRM artist to achieve Gold record standing, almost half of the American Muslim population would need to purchase that record. Similarly, for a Jewish Communal CRM artist to achieve a Gold record, one in five American Jews would need to own the album. Individual designations of what makes a hit record are less standardized, but I measure success in the Jewish and Muslim Communal CRM world by the success of

the artists. If the artist is able to make a living writing, selling and performing their music within their religious community, they are a success by my standards.

### 1.4 Music in the Digital Age

The influx of new technology has rocked the music industry. With the advent of computers and the internet came the ability to download music legally and illegally. Young Americans are more likely to download individual songs or entire albums online than purchase a CD in a record store. Success in the music industry is now defined not only by the sale of physical records, but by the sale of digital music as well. A spot on the top selling list on iTunes Top 100 is just as prestigious as a spot on the Billboard Hot 100. But iTunes still only accounts for a portion of the music consumed digitally. YouTube videos, which are free to view and widely available, can be converted into audio files at no cost. YouTube tracks how many users have viewed videos, but the numbers are unreliable and do not account for multiple views by single users. Illegal music sites provide an outlet for the transfer of millions of audio files between users, all unaccounted for by the music industry. This has resulted in a music industry where record sales are more difficult to track and consumption of music that was never sold is almost impossible to measure. The music industry is currently grappling with the issues presented by the digital age, and thus far the industry has not responded to the explosion of digital music with a sufficient solution. Despite huge amounts of music available to Americans that is free of charge and easily accessible, millions of CDs are still sold every week.
Americans are loyal to their favorite musicians and still purchase their music and attend their concerts in huge numbers.

1.5 Christ, Culture & Categories

With an understanding of the religious communities participating in the world of contemporary religious music, we move forward to distinguish between the different varieties of CRM. Previous work that was done to distinguish between different types of contemporary Christian music is quite helpful in creating a similar set of criteria to organize contemporary religious music. Jay Howard and John Streck laid out their framework for the study of Contemporary Christian Music in the 1999 book, *Apostles of Rock: The Splintered World of Contemporary Christian Music*. This book is aptly named in its reference to the splintered world of CCM, since they view the world of CCM as divided into thirds over the problem of reconciling Christianity with modern culture. Howard and Streck engaged H. Richard Niebuhr’s influential work, *Christ and Culture*, to explain the approaches of the three factions of CCM. Involving Niebuhr in the conversation on Contemporary Christian music is logical, since CCM exists in the intersection between Christ and culture. However, Howard and Streck’s application of Niebuhr’s framework to the divisions in the world of CCM has flaws.

Niebuhr’s typology included five solutions to the Christ and Culture dilemma. Howard and Streck employ three of Niebuhr’s categories, including two that Niebuhr set out as extremes. In the approach Niebuhr terms *Christ against Culture*,

---

29 Niebuhr 45

---
from the culture. Termed “radical” by Niebuhr, these Christians prove their loyalty to Jesus and their fellow Christians by forming a new community of believers. They separate themselves because, as Niebuhr pointed out, the corollary to their idea that the new society was established by Jesus was the thought that “whatever does not belong to the commonwealth of Christ is under the rule of evil.”

Niebuhr mentioned groups like the Mennonites and Quakers as examples of those who view Christ in opposition to culture, but Howard and Streck applied this solution to Contemporary Christian Musicians who separate themselves from the mainstream music business. Removing oneself from society to live by the law of Christ is not the same as creating an alternative cultural form. Howard and Streck call their category Separational CCM and include in this category all music that “attempts to make a stark distinction between Christian and secular culture, while at the same time remaining committed to reaching non-Christians and making converts.”

Distinguishing between Christian and secular culture is different than forgoing culture completely, as those Niebuhr exemplifies in his discussion did. Howard and Streck’s attempt to establish a connection between Niebuhr’s separatist movements like the Mennonites and Quakers, many of whom don’t permit the use of musical instruments, with contemporary Christian musicians is problematic. The artists Howard and Streck include in their Separational CCM category are separating themselves within culture, rather than from culture. Despite the difficulties with equating the Christ against culture perspective with musicians who seek to remain within the Christian

---

30 Niebuhr 50
31 Niebuhr 57
32 Howard and Streck 16
subculture, Howard and Streck were right to recognize this faction as worthy of
distinction within the CCM world.

On the other end of the spectrum, Niebuhr defines the Christ of Culture
perspective. This approach covers Christians who see culture as a natural product
of creation. These Christians have no issue reconciling Christ with culture because
Christ is a part of culture. They “interpret culture through Christ” and “understand
Christ through culture.” Howard and Streck applied the Christ of culture
perspective to their Integrational CCM category. They explain that Integrational
CCM is produced by those “opposed to the idea of withdrawing into an isolated
Christian subculture” and that Intergrational CCM seeks to appeal to a broader
audience beyond the Christian community. Included in their definition of
Integrational CCM was the suggestion that Integrational musicians set out with the
intention to “integrate themselves, as well as their Christian beliefs, into mainstream
culture.” Again, there is a disconnect between Niebuhr’s category and Howard and
Streck’s use of that category to explain a faction of the CCM world. Those who see
Christ as culture would not need to integrate themselves into mainstream culture,
because they would believe that Christ is already there. The Christ of culture
approach actually works better to explain the religious music produced in the
mainstream music industry by secular and nominally Christian musicians. Howard
and Streck’s Integrational CCM category is better explained by Niebuhr’s Christ and
Culture in Paradox approach. Here Niebuhr detailed a struggle between the Christian

33 Niebuhr 83
34 Niebuhr 83
35 Howard and Streck 16
36 Howard and Streck 16
self and the cultural self. He noted that “Luther divided life into compartments, or
taught that the Christian right hand should not know what a man’s worldly left hand
was doing.” Niebuhr 171 This conflict between one’s Christian beliefs and cultural
responsibilities seems to better describe the musicians with hands in both the CCM
world and the mainstream music industry.

Niebuhr’s final category that caught the eye of Howard and Streck was Christ
the Transformer of Culture. Niebuhr wrote that those who approached culture
through this perspective saw the possibility for a conversion of culture through Christ.
He quoted the ever-popular bible verse John 3:16 to explain this position: “God so
loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not
perish, but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the
world, but that the world might be saved through him.” Niebuhr 197 (John 3:16)

Howard and Streck reached a bit too far when they applied this approach to their Transformational CCM
category. They wrote that Transformational CCM “has as its goal not to enter or to
withdraw from mainstream culture but to enable its transformation.” Howard and Streck
17 They went on to clarify that what they meant by transformation and despite their use of Niebuhr’s
verbiage, they took his approach in a very different direction. Niebuhr intended for
this approach to be applied to Christians like Augustine, who sought to transform all
of culture through Christ. Augustine saw Christ as a converter of culture who
“redirects, reinvigorates, and regenerates that life of man.” Niebuhr 209

Howard and Streck’s transformational artists did not seek to convert culture through Christ; rather they

37 Niebuhr 171
38 Niebuhr 197 (John 3:16)
39 Howard and Streck 17
40 Niebuhr 209
strive to raise the level of a culture that already exists. Their transformational goal was an artistic, not a religious one. As Howard and Streck explained, “Transformational CCM is produced by musicians who no longer approach CCM as a religious tool or as entertainment; it’s art.”41 While it is important to recognize musicians seeking to raise the level of art within the CCM world, one need not invoke Niebuhr or Christ to do so.

Upon examination of Niebuhr’s approaches to the Christ and culture dilemma and Howard and Streck’s acknowledgment of the fragmentation of the world of CCM, I have narrowed the vast world of CRM down to two categories that together form a framework for organizing the music that exists in the space common to the worlds of religion and culture. The two categories discussed below are Communal Contemporary Religious Music and Integrational Contemporary Religious Music. Communal CRM includes all of the music created by members of a religious community that is intended for consumption within their community. Integrational CRM includes all of the music produced by religious people that reaches audiences within their religious community and in the wider secular culture. These categories are not meant to include every piece of music that is both religious and contemporary; rather they cover the majority of the music that fits these parameters. One example is given for each religious group in each category, but this does not suggest that these are the only artists whose music would exemplify the category. I simply chose musicians who have found success and gained popularity in their communities and in American culture to provide proof of these categories in action. The artists, content,

41 Howard and Streck 112
audience and distribution of the music in each category will be taken into account to
gain a more complete understanding of the musical side of contemporary American
religion.

1.6 Communal Contemporary Religious Music

Howard and Streck established a category called “Separational CCM” which
was useful but as previously mentioned, the term “separational” is a bit of a
misnomer. Contemporary religious musicians may be separating themselves from the
mainstream music business but they are not separating themselves from culture.
Rather, they are producing music that uses the themes and language of their
community, and intend to provide for their community an alternative form of
entertainment. So, from here forward, this category will be named Communal
Contemporary Religious Music (or Communal CRM). Without intentions to appeal
to an audience beyond that within their community, they are by definition communal
musicians, hence the new label for this category.

For his book Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory, Randall Balmer chose to
focus on the band Jars of Clay for his chapter on music, “Sound Check.” He
covered the journey of Jars of Clay from their start as college students to
fame, awards and national tours. Balmer began his chapter where Jars of Clay
was born, when its members met as students at Greenville College, a Free
Methodist liberal-arts school in central Illinois. They not only started a CCM
band, they also majored in “Contemporary Christian Music.” Quite fittingly, they chose a band name from the bible. “When it came time to choose a name Lowell, the keyboardist, suggested Jars of Clay, from 2 Corinthians 4:7: ‘But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.’” They got their start when they submitted a demo to the Gospel Music Association Spotlight Competition. “On April 27, 1994, they performed in Nashville for the Gospel Music Association Spotlight Competition and won grand prize as the best new Christian band.” Jars of Clay continued their success with the release of their first album, *Jars of Clay*.

Their success is often credited to their modern pop/rock style that is closer to the music playing on mainstream radio than that of other CCM artists. “By tapping into mainstream music,” Randall Balmer has pointed out, “they have avoided the lyrical and stylistic inbreeding that afflicts some of the other contemporary Christian music groups.” Their music was new and exciting in the Christian market and the album was extremely successful gaining “double-platinum status and a Grammy nomination for Rock/Gospel Album of the Year.”

Jars of Clay enjoyed some crossover success with the song *Flood*. Balmer included a note that the song “crossed over onto alternative and ‘mix’ stations as well

---

42 Balmer 295
41 Balmer 295
44 Balmer 295
45 Balmer 295
46 Balmer 305
47 Balmer 296
as MTV and VH-1.” The lyrics that are intended to reference the biblical story of Noah’s ark but use no explicit references to Noah, God or the bible. The catchy chorus had me pressing repeat and singing along by the third play. It refers to being “lifted up” but does not label God or Jesus at the one able to do so.

But if I can't swim after forty days
and my mind is crushed by the thrashing waves
Lift me up so high that I cannot fall
Lift me up
Lift me up - when I’m falling
Lift me up - I'm weak and I'm dying
Lift me up - I need you to hold me
Lift me up - Keep me from drowning again.49

The crossover success of “Flood” was not indicative of their other music and remains their only song to achieve success in the mainstream market. The band did not actively seek out crossover success and were responded to the reality of crossover success in a very Christian way. During an interview, Randall Balmer informed the band members that their song “Flood” had become quite popular in New York City gay clubs and were asked to “imagine three thousand gay men dancing to ‘Flood’ and all of them with their shirts off.”50 The band members seemed surprised and eventually responded with hopes of evangelism. Balmer noted one band member’s response: “If people dig the song and go out and buy the album and come to Jesus…” So, even with success in the mainstream market, the members of Jars of Clay remained focused on their mission as Christians and possibilities for Evangelism.

48 Balmer 296
49 “Flood.” Jars of Clay.
50 Balmer 305
Despite fleeting success in the mainstream market Jars of Clay has been very successful in the Contemporary Christian Music market. Three of their subsequent albums, *Much Afraid*, *If I Left the Zoo* and *The Eleventh Hour* earned Grammys for Best Pop/Contemporary Gospel Album in 1997, 2000 and 2002 respectively.\(^{51}\) *Much Afraid* was certified Platinum in 2000 by the RIAA.\(^ {52}\) Jars of Clay have also won thirteen Dove Awards between 1996 and 2007 for their music.\(^ {53}\)

Jars of Clay are an example of a very successful Communal CRM group. Communal CCM strives to provide an alternative experience for music fans who find the mainstream music world oppositional to their Christianity. “From Elvis Presley’s swinging pelvis to Marilyn Manson’s celebration of Satanism (with points in between too numerous to mention), there has been much about rock music for Christians to abhor. The dilemma for Christian adolescents then is clear. On the one hand, rock and roll music plays a critical role in establishing identity and defining their social groups, but at the same time, it appears to contradict many of the values they hold as Christians.”\(^ {54}\) Communal CRM contains lyrics using the language of a religious community.

Jars of Clay do not shy away from using explicitly Christian language and this is what places them in the Communal CRM category. As previously mentioned, their crossover hit “Flood” is biblical in theme. Without explicit religious content and

---


\(^{54}\) Howard and Streck 5
referring only loosely to the story of Noah, a tale shared by the Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities, this song appealed to a larger audience. Other songs on the same album place Jars of Clay firmly within the Christian music world. In “Love Song for a Savior” the language is without question religious and is therefore less likely to appeal to a non-Christian audience.

In open fields of wild flowers
she breathes the air and flies away
She thanks her Jesus for the daises and the roses
in no simple language.\(^{55}\)

No simple language, indeed. With the song directed toward a savior and Jesus mentioned in the first verse, this song is Christian in both content and intention.

Jars of Clay is only one example of the many Christian bands and musicians who produce Christian music, using Christian language, for Christian audiences. Entire record labels like Myrrh Records and Maranatha Music (founded by Larry Norman) were established to promote Christian music within the Christian community. Christian bookstores fill their shelves with Communal CCM and help these musicians sell millions of records. Christian rock festivals draw thousands of fans each summer and provide a wholesome alternative for Christian youth. There are enough Christians in the Christian subculture to finance a separate music industry that is booming.

The communal music industry within Judaism is less booming, but it is large enough to employ several full time Jewish musicians who record with Jewish music labels, tour Jewish synagogues and community centers and sell their albums in

\(^{55}\) Jars of Clay. “Love Song to a Savior.”
Judaica shops all over the country. Jewish music classified as communal almost always contains Hebrew. Hebrew is a language that very few people outside the Jewish community in the United States understand. One Jewish musician had this to say about the language of Jewish music:

Language has the enormous power to transform the music that accompanies it. It is the very taste, the feel, the association, and the context of that language. It’s so powerful that you can put almost anything against that language and you will experience it as a Jewish experience. This language is, of course, Hebrew.  

There are numerous Jewish musicians who create and perform contemporary music specifically aimed at Jewish audiences. When The Josh Nelson Project takes the stage with electric guitars and a drum set in tow, you expect rock music, which they deliver in a distinctly Jewish package. Their upbeat but slightly hard rocking style appeals to a broad audience within the Jewish community. Equally entertaining to audiences filled with sweaty, rock music loving teenagers fueled by energy-drinks and the leadership of the Reform movement at their biannual conference, The Josh Nelson project tours the country performing at synagogues, Jewish community centers, camps and Jewish events. The website for the band places the band within a Jewish context calling their music “high-octane Jewish rock.” Acknowledging their popularity with young audiences, the website also points out that “each musician is young, Jewish and a positive role model.”

---

56 Friedmann 122 (Sharlin)
In 2009, the band released *Lift* “built upon songs of Jewish identity and continuity.”

59 *Yih’yu L’ratzon* takes a line from the end of the Amidah prayer, part of the Shabbat service, and sets them to a contemporary rock beat. The song includes only the Hebrew but an English translation is provided below.

Yihyu l'ratzon imrei fi v'hegyon libi  
l'fanecha, Adonai tzuri v'goali.  
May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart  
Be acceptable to you, God, my Strength and Redeemer.

*Lift* was released on a Jewish musician Craig Taubman’s record label, Craig ‘n’ Co.

Half of the song titles on the album and almost all of the songs on the album contain Hebrew, verses from prayers and religious references.

The website for the band reveals the target audience of the band noting that “The Josh Nelson Project is a perfect choice for community concerts, inspiring Shabbat services, and artist residencies.”

61 I have seen the band perform in community concerts and observed as people of all ages danced and sang along to the music. I was also intricately involved in a program that utilized Josh Nelson and his band mates as artists in residence. Watching them work with Jewish teens to express their Judaism through rock music revealed the power of artists dedicated to their religious community. The teenagers who worked with Josh were treated to a role model who was cool, talented and proud to be Jewish. The band’s busy tour schedule is testament to their appeal in the Jewish community as Jewish entertainers and

60 Josh Nelson Project. “Yih’yu L’ratzon.”  
educators. And, as with Jars of Clay, The Josh Nelson Project is only one example of musicians making a living in Communal CRM.

In Muslim music in the United States, the best example of Communal CRM is the hip-hop produced by the Five Percenters, also known as the Nation of Gods and Earth, an offshoot of the Nation of Islam. Felicia Miyakawa, who wrote the book *Five Percenter Rap: God Hop’s Music, Message, and Black Muslim Mission* explained that “Five Percenter theology is multiply grounded in Black Muslim traditions, black nationalism, Kemetic symbolism, Masonic mysticism, and Gnostic spirituality. But the history of the Nation of Gods and Earth is also tightly entwined with hip-hop’s history.”  

Most of these artists are classified as communal because their lyrics contain language that reflects the theology of the Nation of Gods and Earth and is less appealing to those outside the community. These musicians receive a great deal of encouragement from their community as well as the Nation of Islam, and they are “supported by [Louis] Farrakhan’s claim that ‘one rap song is worth more than a thousand of my speeches.’” One Five Percenter group is Brand Nubian, whose albums are quite popular within their community on account of the insider language they use. Five Percenter theology includes teachings on science and math and those within the community are authorized to teach that science and math to others. Brand Nubian teaches through song. Miyakawa wrote that in Brand Nubian’s ‘Dance to My

62 Miyakawa 5
63 However, because the Five Percenter language is only recognizable as religious within the Five Percent and Nation of Islam communities, in some cases Five Percenter music has gained the attention of mainstream culture. Public Enemy and Wu Tang Clan are two notable examples of Integrational CRM Five Percenters.
64 Miyakawa 22
Ministry,’ Lord Jamar creates a metaphorical classroom and presents himself as both minister and teacher of “truth” and “black facts.”

See it's a positive force which guides my course
It ain't Little Bo Peep, who's sheep Little lost
It's the Tribe, the God Tribe of Shabazz
First on the planet Earth, but definite to be the last
If Allah stands, she'll pass
Students enroll, while Jamar teach class
Seminar I give, is for you to live
Not try to keep your mind captive

Lord Jamar sees himself as an instructor of Five Percenter doctrine and Brand Nubian uses their music to get this message to their community. As the following anonymous review from Amazon.com emphasizes, this message was successfully conveyed.

This album LITERALLY changed my life. It exposed me to the teachings of The Nation of Gods and Earths (also known as the 5% Nation of Islam or the Five Percenters)...I was DEAD to the REALITY of God and how he relates to me and my people until I analyzed this album which led me on a quest to learn the teachings of the 5%. This album is ABSOLUTELY one of the BEST hiphop/rap albums ever made second ONLY (in my opinion) to PUBLIC ENEMY’S 2nd album It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back.

This listener experienced the album as Brand Nubian intended – as lessons in doctrine. It is interesting that this anonymous listener’s vote for best hiphop/rap album went to another Five Percenter group, Public Enemy. Brand Nubian and many of the other groups that come out of this community release their albums on mainstream music labels and depend on mainstream music sales for success. Brand

---

65 Miyakawa 43
66 Brand Nubian, “Dance to My Ministry.”
67 Miyakawa 136, taken from an anonymous review of Brand Nubian’s One for All, posted to Amazon.com in May 2000.
Nubian has released albums through Elektra Records, Arista/BMG Records and more recently Babygrande Records. There is not a separate industry set up to produce and promote Five Percenter music. As a result, many groups end up diluting their language and selling their albums to audiences beyond their community. “Many of the most commercially successful conscious solo acts and groups of the late 1980s and early 1990s, such as Public Enemy, Brand Nubian, Poor Righteous Teachers, X-Clan, the Jungle Brothers, Queen Latifah, KRS-One, Nas, Busta Rhymes, and the Wu-Tang Clan, had at least nominal ties to Islamic doctrine.”68 Brand Nubian, and other groups like theirs, make conscious choices to appeal to an audience within their community by using explicit Five Percenter language in their music.

Jars of Clay, The Josh Nelson Project, Brand Nubian and countless others who form the world of Communal CRM seek to elevate their religious community and teach people through their music. For Contemporary Christian music, “the numbers that count are: (1) record sales…and (2) souls brought to Jesus via dramatic conversions.”69 Communal CRM artists sell millions of records each year and are recognized by the mainstream music industry for doing do. Souls brought to Jesus, God and Allah are slightly more difficult to track, but this music definitely has the power to lift spirits and make one proud of their religious community as they hum along to these contagious Communal CRM tunes.

68 Miyakawa 2
69 Beaujon 162
1.6.1 Devotional Communal Contemporary Religious Music

The success of the Communal CRM artists has created a need for contemporary devotional music. Just a few decades after the first record labels geared towards religious music opened their doors religious artists were selling millions of albums to willing fans. For the younger generation of worship attendees whose ears perk up at the sound of Britney Spears, Madonna or Jars of Clay, as well as older generations who still own original Beatles and Rolling Stones albums, contemporary music is gaining popularity in worship services because it is the music style that delights the ears of the congregants outside of worship. There is a burgeoning market for contemporary style worship music and this music forms a subcategory of Communal CRM, which will be referred to as Devotional CRM. Due to legal issues surrounding the use of instruments, the contemporary worship music movement has not spread to mosques and Orthodox synagogues. Devotional CRM is most popular in churches that are large and non-denominational though many mainline protestant denomination churches have begun to offer contemporary music services in addition to their regular traditional music worship services. This subsection features examples from large evangelical churches and liberal synagogues. While a great deal of this music is produced by the in house worship teams in individual churches and synagogues, a number of record companies and recording artists have jumped on board with this trend. In contemporary worship services modern instrumentation (namely the use of electric guitars and keyboards) and music styles attract younger generations accustomed to contemporary music. Fascinating
and functional, devotional CCM remodels the rock ‘n’ roll style, once sole property of the secular world, for the worship of God.

**Sunday Morning at newhope church in Durham, NC**

As church bells greet parishioners arriving at Sunday morning services all over town, a different sound greets those arriving at newhope church. From the moment you step out of your car, you are greeted by upbeat chords from electric guitars. As people chat and drink coffee from the coffee shop (Higher Grounds) in the rotunda, pop style praise music emanates from hidden speakers, preparing the mind for worship and the ears for the music heavy service they are about to be treated to. In keeping with a tradition of rock concerts the world over, the doors to the worship room remain closed until 10 minutes prior to the set start time. Once they are opened, worshippers shuffle in pausing to receive programs from ushers at the door and select the perfect seat. As the clock on the screens displays the final moments of waiting, the lights dim and the stage comes to life. The room is transformed into a concert venue as everyone stands up, bright colored lights flash across the stage and the opening drum beats and guitar chords greet those who came to pray. The ten person worship arts team (two percussionists, a keyboard player, four electric guitar and bass players and three dedicated vocalists) proceeds to treat the excited crowd to twenty-five minutes of uninterrupted rock ‘n’ roll worship. As the band plays, the small screens add vibrant images to the colorful stage display while the large screens are employed to project the band’s image while scrolling the song lyrics so the crowd can participate. The Pastor leaves the singing to the worship team until the last song, which the arts pastor teaches to the congregation verse by verse before its performance. Prior to their vocal debut, the parishioners participated mainly through waving of arms, clapping, and a bit of swaying in their seats. After the last chords cease to echo through the room, the lights come up and a chair and high top table are brought to center stage. The Pastor treats the crowd to a sermon filled with video interludes, images and humorous stories invoked to teach the crowd how to go about their daily lives as Christians serving Jesus. Forty-five minutes later, the lights dim once more for a closing session of music and prayer. The congregation, inspired by the sermon and excited to hear a familiar melody, sing along heartedly with the tune they learned earlier as the worship celebration comes to a close with another fifteen minute set of rocking praise and hands raised up when they aren’t preoccupied clapping along. NewHope Church calls their Sunday morning services “celebrations” and the term is a perfect description. With concert lighting, talented musicians, catchy tunes and a gifted preacher aided by modern technology to spread the good news, this church celebrates
worship and sends their congregants out into the “mission field” uplifted, excited and ready to rock.

The worship style chosen by the leadership of the newhope church reflects a larger movement towards contemporary worship in churches and liberal synagogues all over the United States. Devotional CRM serves in many different capacities based on the needs of individual congregations. In more traditional congregations, contemporary worship may be provided in a separate worship service or Devotional CRM may be used sparingly in a more traditional worship service. In other congregations, like newhope, Devotional CRM makes up the majority or all of the music performed during worship services.

According to Robert Wuthnow, who observed the use of contemporary worship in Boston’s Park Street Church for his book *All in Sync: How Music and Art are Revitalizing American Religion*, noted that contemporary worship “incorporates musical instruments (such as electric guitars and keyboards) and lyrics unheard of in churches a generation ago,”70 but the incorporation of new instruments and lyrics is not a new phenomenon in worship music. Marsha Edelman went so far as to suggest that the move towards contemporary worship music in Judaism in the last half of the twentieth century should have happened sooner.

The immigrant generation had needed to retain the music of its past-partly out of a false sense that ‘European’ culture represented authenticity and partly as a ‘security blanket’ against the raging and unpredictable winds of changing American culture. Unlike the music of virtually every

70 Wuthnow 152
previous generation of Jews, the music of America’s Jews had failed to take on the trappings of the majority culture surrounding it.\textsuperscript{71}

Edelman’s book followed Jewish music through many times and places where it was always influenced by the surrounding culture. She sees American Jews taking up contemporary worship music as an acknowledgement of their diverse musical past and freedom from the European music that had maintained its hold on the community for centuries. Pastor Danny Harrell of Park Street Church also expressed the idea that contemporary worship is not new when he said: “What the contemporary worship movement has done is not unlike what Luther did back in the sixteenth century. It simply borrows the music of the culture and redeems it for the church.”\textsuperscript{72}

With history on their side, Jews and Christians began to incorporate secular music styles into their worship music. Churches moved away from traditional high church organ music and “synagogue music that had been limited to sophisticated choral music and the high art of the cantor prior to 1960 began a slow and steady change that reflected American secular music.”\textsuperscript{73} Interestingly, the inclusion of Devotional CRM played out in different ways in churches and synagogues. In churches the addition of talented performers and ever-changing Sunday set-lists allowed for less congregational participation in the music portions of the worship services. Arts Pastor Brian Fuller of newhope church informed me that they rotate about fifty songs every six months or so. This keeps their worship celebrations lively and fresh but also maintains a concert style atmosphere. In synagogues the inclusion

\textsuperscript{71} Edelman 138  
\textsuperscript{72} Wuthnow 164  
\textsuperscript{73} Friedmann 41 (Goodman)
of English language songs and catchy tunes that were led, rather than performed, by the cantor “transformed the way Jews had traditionally worshipped, moving firmly away from a ‘listening’ model to a participatory style.”74

A large portion of Devotional CRM is produced locally within churches by music ministers and cantors. However, the popularity of Devotional CRM has also allowed for musicians to make their living writing and performing music intended for worship that also brings the house down in concerts. In a place like newhope where the church is new and the arts pastor is even newer, a great deal of the music they perform is borrowed from larger churches and musicians dedicated to the creation of new Devotional CRM. The worship team at newhope currently performs a great deal of music composed by the in-house band, Hillsong UNITED, of Hillsong Church in Australia75. Hillsong UNITED reached number 60 on the Billboard 200 and the number one spot on the Contemporary Christian Billboard chart with their 2007 album, All of the Above.76 Their 2011 album, Aftermath, also reached the number one spot on the Billboard Christian Chart77. NewHope also uses the music of Chris Tomlin. Tomlin is an extremely popular Devotional CRM artist who has won seventeen GMA Dove Awards, including two for “Praise and Worship album of the Year.”78 Tomlin has one platinum album, Arriving, and three of his albums, See the

74 Friedmann 53 (Goodman)
Morning, Hello Love and How Great is God have been certified gold. NewHope’s worship arts team plans to start performing original music soon, but in the meantime there is a wealth of Devotional CRM available to them.

**Friday Evening at Temple Shalom in Oxford, FL**

On Friday January 7, 2011, I attended Shabbat services with my parents at the Temple Shalom. Temple Shalom has 530 members, and due to their location adjacent to one of the largest retirement communities in the country, the majority of those members are over 55. As the largest crowd I have ever witnessed at a Friday night service settled into the sanctuary and scrambled to add seats for those standing, congregants greeted each other and chatted. Cheery and relaxed, the tone of the service changed when the Spiritual Leader informed the congregation that Debbie Friedman was extremely ill and in need of their prayers. The congregation then launched into a solemn version of Mi Shebeirach, Debbie Friedman’s own song which serves as a prayer for healing in reform, conservative and some modern Orthodox synagogues. Mi Shebeirach is a contemporary folk music style version of an ancient prayer for healing. Though most of those present in services that evening had grown up listening only to the sounds of a Cantor’s chanting in services, everyone knew the song and sang along with gusto and purpose. Temple Shalom joined hundreds of congregations across the country as we sang her song and prayed for her healing. Despite voices lifted across the country to the tune of her composition in the hope that she might be healed, Debbie Friedman died on Sunday, January 9, 2011. After her death, the Jewish community mourned their most successful Devotional CRM musicians.

In an article written to commemorate her death, New York Times reporter Margalit Fox wrote that Friedman’s songs “married traditional Jewish texts to contemporary folk-infused melodies.” Fox went on to explain that Debbie Friedman “is credited with helping give ancient liturgy broad appeal to late-20th-

---

81 Fox
Friedman was inspired to begin her career in Devotional CRM through experiences she had in worship services when she was young. “One night I went to synagogue, and realized, sitting there, I was bored,” she told the Los Angeles Times in 1995. “I realized the rabbi was talking, the choir was singing and nobody was doing anything. There was no participation.” Friedman’s music encourages participation. Her songs combine Hebrew prayers and English translations set to folk rock melodies that allow for easy memorization and participation. Describing her approach to music she said: “I want to help people…to learn to pray in a comfortable, non-threatening way.”

Debbie made her living writing music, selling CDs, teaching and performing everywhere from Jewish camps to large concert venues. Friedman’s tunes were omnipresent in my own childhood, from songs sung around fires at youth group events, to a performance of her song “The Youth Shall See Visions” at my confirmation, to quiet prayers I sang for friends and family at night before drifting off to sleep. She “released over 20 albums and performed in sold out concerts at Carnegie Hall and in hundreds of cities around the world.” Her albums were released on Jewish record labels such as Sisu Home Entertainment and the Jewish Music Group. Her albums were sold at her concerts and at Judaica shops all over the United States. After seeing her perform live at Kleinhans Music Hall in Buffalo one year, Friedman’s Live at Carnegie Hall album was played in my family’s standard

---

82 Fox
83 Fox
84 Horn
85 Debbie Friedman Website. “About Debbie.”
rotation, composed mostly of classic rock albums and Broadway musical soundtracks, on long road trips. Jewish Americans may not all buy her records or attend her concerts, but if they hear one of her more famous tunes such as Mi Shebeirach, they will likely recognize it. “Debbie’s music is now performed in synagogues around the world more than that of any other living composer.” The broad popularity of her music speaks to the acceptance of Devotional CRM in Judaism.

Debbie Friedman is one of countless musicians who make a living writing and performing Devotional CRM. She was often compared to Amy Grant, a popular Christian singer whose music repertoire includes Devotional CRM. If Ms. Friedman never attained the vast crossover success of Amy Grant, the Christian pop singer with whom she was often compared, it did not seem to bother her. In an interview with The Palm Beach Post in 2004, Ms. Friedman recounted her response to a music-industry executive who accused her of being just a big fish in a small pond. “I’m not a fish,” Ms. Friedman replied.

Friedman, like many other Devotional CRM musicians, saw herself primarily as a teacher and worship leader. Most of the musicians producing Devotional CRM in the United States today are not as popular and successful as Amy Grant, or even Debbie Friedman. They often hold positions within congregations and write and perform Devotional CRM as part of that position. But there is a market for Devotional CRM and the musicians who compose and perform this type of music. Devotional CRM makes up a growing sector of the Communal CRM world and is one that is likely to become more prominent in the coming generations.

---

87 Amy Grant will be discussed as an Integrational CRM artists later in this paper, since her music has an audience outside worship settings.
1.7 Intergrational Contemporary Religious Music

I will be retaining Howard and Streck’s term “integrational” in my framework because these artists are integrating their religious music into the secular culture. I do not maintain Howard and Streck’s position that integrational artists are members of the Christ of Culture camp. From my reading of Niebuhr, I would place these artists amongst the mediating approaches between Christ against Culture and Christ of Culture. I find that they align closest with the Christ and Culture in Paradox approach, though this is not definitive for all of the integrational musicians. It is applicable for those artists who create different music and performances depending on their audience. They seem to compartmentalize their music into that which is religious and that which is secular. They integrate themselves by moving between these two aspects of their artistry with ease, which allows for their success in the worlds of Christ and culture.

Amy Grant is arguably Christian Music’s most famous star. Her fan base was primarily Christian until she released her 1991 album *Heart in Motion*. The release and subsequent success of *Heart in Motion* broadened Amy Grant’s fan base and shook the solid foundation of her Christian audience. “Amy Grant was, from the beginning of her career, groomed to go beyond the established boundaries of contemporary Christian music.”\(^{88}\) *Heart in Motion* was the vehicle driving Amy Grant from the Christian subculture into the wider music industry. In her career,

\(^{88}\) Howard and Streck 75
Amy Grant has collected six Grammys (all in Gospel music categories)\textsuperscript{89} and twenty-two GMA Dove Awards\textsuperscript{90} for her music. She has released one 5x platinum album, one 3x platinum album, one 2x platinum album, four platinum albums and six gold albums.\textsuperscript{91} RIAA has certified that she has sold at least seventeen million albums.\textsuperscript{92} Six of Grant’s songs were number one hits, including her most famous hit “Baby, Baby.” She is one of two Christian Music stars to be honored with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.\textsuperscript{93}

These facts reveal Amy Grant’s strong appeal in both the mainstream and Christian markets. Grant’s music was produced by the Christian label Myrrh/A&M/Word Records until 2006 when she switched to EMI Records for the release of her Greatest Hits album.\textsuperscript{94} Her initial transition to the mainstream market was rocky. Andrew Beaujon, a music journalist who wrote the book Body Piercing Saved My Life: Inside the Phenomenon of Christian Rock, explained that “[s]he was criticized [by Christian critics] for dancing onstage, for her clothes, for telling Rolling Stone that she liked to sunbathe nude.”\textsuperscript{95} Grant’s successful crossover hits do not use the explicit language that her Christian hits did. Her number one single “Baby Baby”

\textsuperscript{89} Grammys.com “Past Winners Search.” \url{http://www.grammy.com/nominees/search?artist=amy+grant&title=&year=All&genre=All} 9 March 2011.
\textsuperscript{90} Dove Awards.com “Past Winners Search” \url{http://www.doveawards.com/history.php?x=artist} 9 March 2011.
\textsuperscript{92} Amy Grant’s website claims she has sold 30 million albums, but RIAA has only certified her for 17. RIAA.com “Top Selling Artists.” \url{http://www.riaa.com/goldandplatinumdata.php?resultpage=2&table=tblTopArt&action=} 9 March 2011.
\textsuperscript{93} Amy Grant.com “Amy’s Career.” \url{http://amygrant.com/amys-career} 9 March 2011.
\textsuperscript{94} Amy Grant.com “Amy’s Career.” \url{http://amygrant.com/amys-career} 9 March 2011.
\textsuperscript{95} Beaujon 34
includes no religious language and footage from the music video for the song implies that the song is directed toward a love interest. The chorus of the song supports the mainstream message of a young woman in love.

And ever since the day
You put my heart in motion
Baby, I realize
There's no getting over you

Howard and Streck noted that “Grant’s move from gospel queen to mainstream pop star was not accomplished without transformations in the songs she sang.” When you look at the lyrics of “Baby, Baby” next to those of songs she released prior to Heart in Motion and later in her career, it becomes clear that Heart in Motion was consciously void of Christian language. With the release of Age to Age, Amy Grant was awarded with two successful singles and her first platinum album. One of the singles off Age to Age was “El Shaddai.” The lyrics to this song are explicitly Christian.

Through the years you've made it clear
That the time of Christ was near
Though the people couldn't see
What Messiah ought to be
Your most awesome work was done
Through the frailty of your son
I will praise and lift you high
El shaddai

This song came out in 1982 and her songs transitioned slowly through the next nine years until she released “Baby, Baby” in 1991. Post Heart in Motion, she made her...
way back to Christian music, with singles and albums doing well on Christian charts rather than mainstream pop charts. Her 2010 hit from the album *Somewhere Down the Road* is Christian from its title, “Better Than a Hallelujah,” through to its last verse.

Better than a church bell ringing  
Better than a choir singing out, singing out  
We pour out our miseries  
God just hears a melody  
Beautiful, the mess we are  
The honest cries of breaking hearts  
Are better than a Hallelujah

Since Amy is successful crossover artist, she was invited to perform this song on CBS’s *Second Cup Café*, part of CBS’s *The Early Show*. The song also did well on the Christian Music charts peaking at number eight. Amy Grant’s ability to attain mainstream success and a place in secular culture while retaining her Christian faith and fans, all on a grand scale with record sales in the millions, makes her unique among Integrational CRM artists. Howard and Streck noted that “in the context of contemporary Christian music, Amy Grant isn’t a person, she’s an empire—an empire that sits at the center of Integrational CCM.”

Amy Grant found success as an integrational artist because she adjusted her language to appeal to a broader audience. Her likeable pop tunes appeal to listeners from all walks of life and the level of success she reached in each market is directly proportional to how explicitly Christian her lyrics were. Interestingly, Jewish and

---

99 Amy Grant. “Better Than a Hallelujah.”
102 Howard and Streek 78
Muslim Integrational CRM, there is more room for explicit religious language, as long as it is disguised in faster paced hip-hop style music. The lyrics fly by so quickly in hip-hop and reggae style music that secular audiences are likely to miss the religious language if they are not aware of its presence.

Matisyahu is famous for a quick tongue and concerts performed in full Hasidic garb. Matisyahu has two gold records, Youth and Live at Stubb’s, and both of these albums reached number one on the Billboard Reggae chart. Youth reached number four on the Billboard 200 chart. “King Without a Crown”, a song that appears on both of these albums, peaked at number seven on the Billboard Alternative Chart. New York Times writer Jon Pareles noticed the relationship between religious language and fast-paced beats in a 2008 article about the singer.

Matisyahu, who was born Matthew Miller, sings explicitly devotional songs about God, Moshiach (the Messiah) and Orthodox Jewish identity. By setting them to reggae, rock and hip-hop beats, and after working his way up the jam-band circuit, he also reaches listeners with their minds on more secular pursuits, like dancing and drugs.

“King Without a Crown” exemplifies the phenomenon of hiding explicitly devotional lyrics in a catchy reggae tune. The chorus of the song name drops both God and Moshiach (the Messiah).

What's this feeling?  
My love will rip a hole in the ceiling 
Givin' myself to you from the essence of my being

103 RIAA.com “Gold & Platinum Searchable Database.”  

104 Billboard.com “Matisyahu.”  

105 Billboard.com “King Without a Crown.”  

106 Pareles
Sing to my God all these songs of love and healing
Want Mashiach now so it's time we start revealing

The song also contains references to Hashem (God), Crown Heights, and living in Galus (exile), all terms commonly heard in communities of Hasidic Jews. As Pareles pointed out, “[a]long with basic roots reggae [Matisyahu] now uses faster, tongue-twisting dancehall toasting and the electronic beats and brooding chords of hip-hop.” Thanks to Matisyahu’s style and quick tongue these lyrics are hard to catch upon first or even fifth listen. This is not to suggest Matisyahu sought out reggae music intentionally to conceal his religious lyrics. Rather he was drawn to the music and said to *Boston Globe* reporter Joan Anderman: “I was able to find my culture and identity in Judaism and hold onto the truth in this music.” A former follower of Phish and The Grateful Dead, Matisyahu is a reggae artists because reggae music speaks to him. He is not alone in his affinity for this music and Pareles pointed out “its music for believers, with a groove for everyone else.”

Matisyahu began his career with the Jewish label JDub Records. JDub Records is a label that exists to bring “proud, authentic Jewish culture into the mainstream world within which today’s young Jews exist” and “offers them meaningful opportunities to connect with their Judaism and one another.” New York Times Reporter Ben Sisario reported on Matisyahu’s record label switch explaining that JDub Records is a small label and Matisyahu later made a

---

107 Matisyahu. “King Without a Crown.”
108 Matisyahu. “King Without a Crown.”
109 Pareles
110 Anderman 2
111 Pareles
controversial move to the mainstream label Epic Records when he began to see success. In the end, most of Matisyahu’s albums were released jointly by both JDub and Epic. His affiliation with both Jewish and secular record labels reflects Matisyahu’s music, Jewish in language and theme and secular in style. Anderman wrote that “it's the cultural fusion Matisyahu is courting -- a musical bridge uniting the historically cloistered Orthodox Jewish community with the world of nightclubs, secular fans, and marketing plans -- that really sets him apart.” Matisyahu’s “musical bridge” is what makes him a successful Integrational CRM musician.

A fellow religious hip-hop star, Mos Def, also conveys religious themes using religious language through hip-hop music. Mos Def is a Sunni Muslim artist who has had a great deal of success in the mainstream market. His album *Black on Both Sides* went gold and reached the number three position on the Billboard R&B chart and number twenty-five on the Billboard 200 chart. It is an album that opens with explicitly religious language but still appealed to a mainstream audience thanks to a lack of religious language in the album’s singles.

Mos Def sees his music as a way to get information to his fans. In an interview with H. Samy Alim, a scholar of linguistics and the language of hip hop, Mos Def said: “it could be extremely phenomenal, in the sense that hip hop is a medium where you can get a lot of information into a very small space. And make it hold fast to people’s memory. It’s just a very radical form of information

113 Sisario
114 Anderman 1
transferal.” As a Muslim artist, religious messages are part of what he seeks to transfer through this “radical form of information transferal.” In response to a question about why he opened “Fear Not of Man,” the first song on the album, with “bismillah Al-Rahman Al-Rahim” he said: “The spiritual level just puts the seal on it. Like I’m making an effort to reach Allah with this. And, Insha’Allah, my efforts will be accepted. He whispers “bismillah Al-Rahman Al-Rahim,” which translates to: “In the name of God the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate,” almost inaudibly at the beginning of “Fear Not of Man.” Juan Floyd-Thomas, an expert in Black Church Studies, wrote in his essay *A Jihad of Words: The Evolution of African American Islam and Contemporary Hip-Hop* that “The Basmala is traditionally done without musical accompaniment in a tone akin to a reverent whisper.” Mos Def honors tradition by performing the invocation this way, while simultaneously minimizing the explicitly Muslim content of the album. The rest of Fear Not of Man contains some religious references but the use of God, rather than the traditional Muslim term Allah, is notable.

Well, from my understanding people get better
when they start to understand that, they are valuable
And they not valuable because they got a whole lot of money
or cause somebody, think they sexy
but they valuable cause they been created by God
And God, makes you valuable

By using the term God, Mos Def is relaying a religious ideal in a generic way, without the use of a term Allah which is misunderstood by many outside the Muslim

117 Alim in cooke and Lawrence 267
118 Alim in cooke and Lawrence 264
119 Floyd-Thomas in Pinn 64
120 Mos Def. “Fear Not of Man.”
community. Christians, Muslims and Jews would all agree with Mos Def’s lyrics. Walking the fine line between religious content and lyrics more fitting in the hip hop world is a specialty of Mos Def. Mos Def decided to open his album with the bismillah and spread the message that God created people and makes them valuable, but also included songs about girls and issues of race and it is decisions like these that make him a successful Integrational CRM artist.

Amy Grant, Matisyahu and Mos Def are integration artists because they are religious musicians who create and perform music with lyrics that contain religious themes and language. There is another way to incorporate religious tradition into integrational music, and the Klezmatics exemplify this in their unique Klezmer-world music fusion style music. For Jewish audiences, klezmer music is a traditional style of music brought to the United States by Jewish immigrants from Europe. There are klezmer bands all over the United States that make their living entertaining audiences within the Jewish subculture as Communal CRM artists. One klezmer group remains grounded in the traditional klezmer style while also seeking to bring klezmer music to new levels. The Klezmatics are an Integrational CRM group because they have brought a new level of musicianship and the influence of world music styles to klezmer through which they have gained a following in the secular world. The Klezmatics won the Best Contemporary World Album Grammy for their album *Wonder Wheel* in 2006.\(^{121}\) Their website proclaims that this makes them the only

\(^{121}\) Grammy.org “Past Winners Search.”
http://www.grammy.com/nominees/search?artist=klezmatics\&title=&year=All\&genre=All

10 March 2011.
Klezmer group to win a Grammy. The album sets lyrics written by the late folk musician Woody Guthrie to the unique modern klezmer melodies of the Klezmatics. Musician Pete Seeger called the song “Gonna Get Through this World” from Wonder Wheel a “piece of genius.” The lyrics are simple but carry a message that resonates with people from all walks of life.

I’m gonna get through this world
The best I can if I can
Im gonna work in this world
The best I can if I can

The song takes these lyrics, written by Woody Guthrie in 1945 and transforms them into a tune filled with a country twang reminiscent of Guthrie’s music and traditional klezmer style chanting.

The Klezmatics are seen as being part of the Klezmer community while seeking to elevate the genre. Their inclusion of world music styles increases their appeal to audiences beyond the Jewish community, audiences that may never have heard klezmer music if it wasn’t for the Klezmatics.

Musicologist Marsha Edelman noted that “groups like the Klezmatics have begun to push the envelope while clearly evidencing a love for the culture of klezmer. Their music combines the traditional, celebratory aspects of klezmer with original sounds and an almost confrontational style that demands attention from the non-Jewish community.”

The Klezmatics music is Jewish because Klezmer music is a Jewish music style. The Klezmatics sing most often in Yiddish and English, but many of their

---

125 Edelman 274
songs do not feature lyrics at all. Their music style appeals to audiences in the Jewish community and in the secular culture. The marketing of The Klezmatics points to their dual audience. They have released albums on various labels including Piranha, Flying Fish, Xenophile, Rounder and JMG. Of those music labels, only JMG, the Jewish Music Group, is a Jewish label.

Integrational artists like Amy Grant, Matisyahu, Mos Def and The Klezmatics are often criticized from both sides of the spectrum. Howard and Streck pointed out that religious communities express concern “that their focus is on celebrity, their songs too ambiguous, their music watered down” while mainstream audiences might be turned off if they recognize the religious language in their music. However, Howard and Streck also explain that three rationales have emerged to defend Integrational CCM (adjusted for a defense of CRM). The first is that “the music is argued to be a wholesome alternative to the hedonism inherent in most popular music.” “Baby, Baby” may not be a religious song, but it is certainly more wholesome than songs like Britney Spears’ hit “Hit Me, Baby, One More Time.” The second is the idea that religious artists working as mainstream entertainers provide an example of living a religious life for those working in the secular music industry. When Matisyahu appears on stage wearing a yarmulke and tzitzit, he is sending a message to his Jewish fans that one can be modern, successful and a religious Jew. Finally, Integrational CRM is believed to be valuable because it provides a

---

127 Howard and Streck 98
128 Howard and Streck 98
129 Howard and Streck 98
commentary on everyday life from a religious perspective. Mos Def offered his opinion of how people should measure their value opposing prevailing models of valuing one’s worth based on money and beauty in his community. These artists and their colleagues in the Integrational CRM world serve simultaneously as role models for their community and entertainers in the mainstream culture. They provide positive and sometimes religious music to both the culture and their subcultures, though the religious messages they convey may only be understood by those who share their religious beliefs.

1.8 Conclusion

This two category approach to the study of contemporary religious music established in this paper is only the first step of a much larger project on religion and contemporary music. Contemporary religious music from all of the religious communities in the United States has now been organized and we have established a base level of understanding of who is creating the music, who is listening to the music and who is producing the music. Future research can now be initiated to discover the religious experiences associated with the creation and consumption of contemporary religious music. Research should commence to determine what role this music plays in religious communities as well as the function of religious music in secular culture. If this paper has proved anything, it is that there is a strong connection between religion and music. Studying the music of America’s religious people is an entry point for the study of religion in America. In the meantime, this framework can

---

130 Howard and Streek 98
further the understanding of contemporary religious music in America and serve as evidence to the fact that quality, entertaining and thought-provoking music exists outside the Devil’s grasp.
Appendix A.
Sources for Music Material Referenced.


Resources


