

Jochen Kaiser

Congregational Singing as an Emotional Expression of Faith

An Ethnographic Approach (German Environment)

Veröffentlicht unter der Creative-Commons-Lizenz CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 i
© 2018 | Schott Music GmbH & Co. KG

Jochen Kaiser

Congregational Singing as an Emotional Expression of Faith

An Ethnographic Approach (German Environment)

1. Introduction and Summary

Singing can give rise to overwhelming experiences. Many singers describe singing as an activity which improves their well-being. I myself have been singing in choirs and congregations all my life. I remember an evening late in summer, rays of sunlight flashing through the church, listeners sitting quietly with happy faces in the pews and our voices sounding through the huge space of the church. Suddenly, somehow expectedly but nevertheless surprisingly, I was incredibly happy, strongly sensing the present moment and the moving atmosphere which had been created. I had goosepimples and a tear in my eye. The atmosphere was characterised by the magical light, the huge space, the singers and the listeners. I thought to myself: everybody is in the same mood and we are experiencing this wonderful moment together as we sing. In retrospect I would say it was a religious experience.

A systematic summary of this description offers a connection to central terms of the phenomenological aesthetic: though the account is short, it highlights the complexity of aesthetic experiences. The choral concert took place in a real-life environment and not in an experimental context. I was experiencing and describing my subjective experience from a first-person perspective. The description included physical, emotional and cognitive impacts. These were subjective feelings that were undoubtedly and unconsciously endorsed by other singers. This presupposes intersubjectivity since I assumed that all people present experienced the same feelings. The experience was, to use two words from aesthetics, beautiful and moving!

The current study explores the singing of Christian hymns from a phenomenological approach. The subject of research consisted of singing in various contexts within the Protestant church in Germany. The music sung was such that it could also be sung as part of church worship, meaning that choir singing was not the object of investigation. The participant observation took place in some church services and in other events involving singing, e.g. the Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchentag («German Protestant Church Congress») and the Internationaler Gospelkirchentag («International Gospel Church Congress»).

The research question was simple and at the same time challenging: what do singers experience in worship (or other Christian events involving singing) while they are singing together with other singers? The result will of necessity be a convergence towards the experience since it is impossible to have full access to one's own actual experiences or those of others. A second difficulty arises from the need to fix these experiences given their fleeting nature. The tones created by the human voice sound and die away, to be replaced by other tones. It is these single tones that together form the melodies of the hymns.

This survey represents a phenomenological approach to the process of singing. I, the researcher, was involved in the life-world of singing, taking part in worship and events involving singing, which would in any case have taken place without me and my initiative. People came to sing without knowing that research was going to be carried out. Only at the beginning were they informed about the survey.

Singing is understood to be an activity which can be performed together with others and which integrates the singers both physically and mentally. This presupposition resulted in three ways of gaining

data: participant observations, interviews (including questionnaires in the second field phase), and video recordings.

The participant observation provided subjective singing-related data through the researcher feeling the bodily vibrations resulting from certain sounds. That such data is subjective may on the one hand appear to be a flaw, but on the other hand it has the big advantage that the researcher was able to sense the emotions himself and to physically share in the atmosphere with other singers. Interviews and group discussions broadened the data based on the subjective feelings of the researcher by including the perspective of other singers and their experiences. I was not interested in gathering opinions about the singing, rather I was concerned with the – unique and unrepeatably – feelings and experiences generated through the singing of a particular hymn. Thus the interviews took place directly after the singing in question and took only a few minutes. In the second part of the field research questionnaires were used to inquire after the singers' feelings regarding a particular hymn. The singing was recorded on video with the camera being placed in front of the congregation. In this way it was possible to recognise posture, facial expressions, gestures and physical movements. The video recordings were used to analyse the sound.

In total the survey investigated 41 sung hymns from nine events:

- 22 hymns taken from the »Evangelisches Gesangbuch« (German Protestant Hymn Book)
- six »Neue geistliche Lieder« (contemporary Christian songs)
- a psalm with a chorus sung by the congregation
- twelve Gospel songs

The main result consists of 41 »thick« descriptions¹ of the experiences of a typical participant based on the evaluation of all the data collected and entitled »Description from a typical participant«. As such this can be seen as a phenomenological result. A second outcome results from the »ethnomusicological analysis« for the hymns. Each »Description from a typical participant« was subjected to the same question from five different angles: religious, communicative, aesthetic, psychological and social. Unlike analysis, experience cannot be broken down since experiences are a holistic and integral process. In this study, the singing of Christian hymns is understood as a communicative process. Hymns, their sound, rhythms and words are communicated as aesthetic objects. Within the singing process aesthetics and emotional experience are similar, and when people talk about their experiences during singing they use the same words for both aesthetics and emotional description. While singing many people have a strong feeling of togetherness and of great transcendence.² The questionnaires asked about such experiences using the concept of the semantic differential – evaluation, potency, and activity – as well as the dimension of community with regard to the hymn just sung. On each questionnaire responses for up to four different songs could be given. Altogether information was gathered from 583 singers with reference to 1,737 hymns. Through cluster analysis the sung hymns were classified into groups, some being experienced as »stimulating/cheerful« and others as »soothing/overwhelmed«. There are also some hymns best described as »unsuccessful« in terms of how their singing was experienced. The final step of this study looks at musical and contextual characteristics connecting hymns within the same cluster.

The act of singing allows the songs to appear as aesthetic objects, the singers being integrated into the process of singing and experiencing the singing in very similar ways. Singing together is a fascinating

¹ Clifford Geertz, Thick Description. Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture, in: The Interpretation of Culture, Basic Books, New York 1973, 310-323.

² Thomas Luckmann, Shrinking Transcendence, Expanding Religion?, in: Sociological Analysis, Vol. 51, No. 2, Oxford 1990, 127-138, 129.

activity. This study aims to explore singing from a phenomenological-ethnographic perspective within the field of systematic musicology. At the same time it contributes for the first time a large-scale empirical study to the German hymnological debate, which, following the performative turn, examines the singers, the process of singing, and the music sung in equal measure.

2. A Definition of Singing

Singing is a cultural activity influencing and communicating feelings and human needs in an aesthetic and emotional way. Singing is a creation of the voice, an organ of the human body. The process of singing binds together body, spirit and soul: the complete person. The singing has an effect back onto the singers as it does onto listeners who may be stimulated to join in. Singing as an aesthetic experience has the potential to evoke a strong and exhilarated feeling of togetherness. Singing can express positive and negative feelings, such as joy or sadness, and at the same time these feelings are mentally processed. It is certainly possible to abuse the subtle influence one has on other human beings during singing for negative ends. Singing is a strong power and it must not be excluded from ethical observation.

3. Singing in German Society Today

An exact and statistical overview concerning places and occasions involving singing in Germany is not currently available. The most recent comprehensive survey was conducted by Ernst Klusen³ in 1970.

Present-day singing in Germany is still influenced by the abuse of music during the Third Reich.⁴ The ideological reinterpretation of German songs almost necessarily led to a complete rejection of German songs after the end of the era of National Socialism.⁵ Theodor W. Adorno played a vital role in this development. In his essay »Kritik des Musikanten« (Criticism of the musician) he wrote the powerful sentence: »Nirgends steht geschrieben, daß Singen not sei.« (»Nowhere is it written that singing is necessary.«)⁶ This statement was to become a keynote criticism of singing in society.

Some places where singing still currently takes place should be mentioned:

- the football stadium: fans support their teams with football chants to give them encouragement and to help them to win the match;
- while taking a shower: as the water cleanses the outside, singing cleanses the inside (catharsis);
- while driving a car: people like to sing when travelling by car and frequently sing along to radio music or other recorded music;
- on holiday or during outdoor excursions;
- in the family, e.g. with children during the evening going-to-bed ritual, or while celebrating family events;
- in kindergarten or at school: singing with children has once again become common and there are numerous programmes designed to improve singing with children;

³ Ernst Klusen, Zur Situation des Singens in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. I. Der Umgang mit dem Lied, Köln 1974. II. Die Lieder, Köln 1975.

⁴ Anne Niessen, »Die Lieder waren die eigentlichen Verführer!« Mädchen und Musik im Nationalsozialismus, Mainz 1999.

⁵ Anne Niessen, Anmerkungen zum Singen aus sozialisationstheoretischer Perspektive, in: Andreas Lehmann-Wermser / dies. (Hg.), Aspekte des Singens. Ein Studienbuch, Augsburg 2006, 35-49, 38f.

⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, Kritik des Musikanten, in: Ders., Dissonanzen. Musik in der verwalteten Welt, Göttingen 1963, 62-101, 75.

- certain TV shows which have a positive impact on the audience suggesting that singing is no longer »uncool«;
- singing at work is a rare phenomenon. But in a recent development singing coaches have been invited by companies to improve the feeling of belonging to a team. Alternatively some companies commission composers to write a company anthem designed to strengthen the emotional bond between the employees and the company;
- singing in the context of music therapy as well as in hospitals is a growing field, increasing the well-being of patients without medical drugs;
- singing plays an important role for elderly people, especially for those suffering from any form of dementia, as music is able to revive people's spirits, awaken old memories, and thus altogether improve the quality of life;
- finally, many people enjoy singing in choirs: from male-voice choirs to mixed Gospel choirs, from children's choirs to those for elderly people.

It is impossible to conduct adequate research on all these opportunities for singing. Therefore, this survey will focus on singing within the Protestant church in Germany.

4. Phenomenology and Singing

In the spirit of Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology, the hymns as sung phenomena from the real-life world must be the focus of this survey. Sung hymns are transient because they sound and this sound fades; therefore the temporality of their appearance is a central component. The effect of singing the hymns is also temporary, but their impact can last longer than their actual sound and they can embed themselves emotionally in the memory. For the singers, the sound of the hymns, the way they experience them and their (ongoing) impact are »subjective facts«⁷ because of their affective and emotional involvement in the process of singing.

From the beginning, there has always been a close connection between phenomenology and the human body. Phenomenology was not intended to merely construct an intellectual edifice, rather the analysis was aimed at the perception of the spatial, material object. Hence it was impossible to observe the whole object in its totality. Every object which appears needs a subject, indeed a perceptual subject. And this perceptual subject has a concrete position in space. Around this subject appears his or her environment. The singers, for instance, assume their positions in the church and are surrounded by the sound of the hymns. Every singer listens to a special part of the sound which is different to that heard by the other singers. The singing body is creator and perceiver of the sound simultaneously. The body is constitutive of being-in-the-world, which is particularly true for singing as an active process of music-making through the body's own instrument.

This subjective perception of singing is absolutely essential from a new phenomenological point of view. But there is a tension between the subjective perception and scientific results, since the latter are striving for generalisation. This tension needs to be withstood within the current process of research since the subject of this survey is the sound and the subjective perception of particular hymns actually sung in time and space, the results initially being captured in the present.

One final important issue must be addressed: affective involvement is centred on the perceiving subject. But in the situations involving singing being investigated, many people are singing together. This brings

⁷ Hermann Schmitz, *Kurze Einführung in die Neue Phänomenologie*, Freiburg ³2012, 31.

the perspective of intersubjectivity into the research. A major term of phenomenology is life-world. Life-world means the world in which we are living. There are two components: on one hand we are co-creating this life-world, but on the other hand, the life-world is always socially pre-constructed. Thus singing almost always has a social component. This is also even true for singing while taking a shower in the case of a well-known melody being hummed. Furthermore, singing is understood as a communicative process and may then include one or more others who may also be fictionally present, or absent, e.g. when singing a prayer to God.

Although this survey explores subjective experiences while singing Christian songs, it is also an investigation of the »we«, that is an investigation of those people singing together. To experience a hymn requires an emphatic feeling for the other singers, a feeling for the hymn itself and the situation, where each singer experiences the singing from a first-person perspective. Without this threefold act of empathising, it would be impossible to create a unison. The intersubjectivity is connected with the subjectivity and the environment, which means: I, the participant observer, experience the hymns subjectively, feel the togetherness with the other singers and sing a song which stems from the available cultural environment.

5. Experience-Orientated Hymn Analysis

An empirical hymnology does not yet exist in Germany. Hymnologists analyse the text and melody and the correlation between the two. They are entirely history-orientated in their work, looking at the time of origin of text and melody and also at the dominant theology of the time in question. However, a new method for improving empirical access has been developed in Germany. It is called »Experience-Orientated Hymn Analysis« and consists of two parts:

a) Description from a typical participant

This is based on the concept of the »small social lifeworld« as developed by Anne Honer.⁸ All data was included – research diaries, interviews, questionnaires, video analysis, and classical hymnological analysis – and used to create »thick« descriptions depicting the experiences while singing individual hymns. These accounts are each known as »description from a typical participant«. Yet the analysis showed that in some cases there were different experiences, for two reasons: firstly, the singers described different experiences and secondly, the media used to gain data – the subjective experiences documented in the field diary, the interviews, and the videos – told different stories. In these cases the story was split into two or three narrative threads. The results are 41 well-defined descriptions depicting how singers came together in a small social lifeworld and sang together in a state of fascination.

b) Ethnomusicological Analysis

These descriptions with reference to particular hymns narrate respectively distinctive and unrepeatable experiences and it is impossible to compare this unique singing – the melody comes into being and is gone in a moment. However, the goal of this survey was to generalise experiences while singing hymns in the context of worship. Thus it was necessary to compare the stories of sung hymns with one another in order to come up with results which would be valid for singing generally. For this purpose, five dimensions significant for singing together within Christian worship contexts were developed. From these

⁸ Anne Honer, *Lebensweltliche Ethnographie: ein explorativ-interpretativer Forschungsansatz am Beispiel von Heimwerkern*, Wiesbaden 1993. Benita Luckmann, *The Small Life-Worlds of Modern Man*, in: *Social Research* 37, 4, 1970, 580-596.

five points of view, each description of singing a particular hymn was subjected to the same questions. This process is called ethnomusicological analysis since the dimensions refer to comparative musicology.

I.) Experience from a religious-transcendent perspective of singing: all hymns analysed in the survey were sung in Germany within a Christian Protestant environment. They form part of the Christian religion. This is obvious because the respective lyrics have strong links to the Bible or to the Christian faith tradition and the musical performance took place in a church building or was part of a liturgical event held elsewhere. This is certainly a major factor in the experience of people singing a given hymn.

»Great transcendences«, according to Luckmann,⁹ are close to religion, but not necessarily religious. So the conclusion is clear: singing constitutes a great transcendence and is thus close to religion. In the questionnaires, there was a parameter »not protected – protected« (nicht geborgen – geborgen). The item was interpreted within this survey in a religious sense. To feel »protected« (geborgen) while singing hymns in a church environment is feeling close to God. Another aspect with regard to the religious-transcendent perspective was the differentiation of »just singing« and »really worshipping« by Adnams.¹⁰ The more pejorative expression of »just singing« was transformed into »fulfilling singing«. »Fulfilling singing« means enthusiastic singing without any religious influence. This type of singing is good in and of itself, and if you attain fulfilling singing within worship contexts people will be satisfied. But it does not have a connection with God in the way that prayer or proclaiming the Gospel would. When this aspect is included, then the singing will be transformed into »really worshipping«.

II.) Experience from a communicative perspective of singing: singing is communication. A major aspect of communication is for it to have melodic sounds, e.g. motherese where communication has meaning but without words. This communicative perspective includes bodily interactions, eye contact, facial expressions and gestures which all carry meaning. The communicative perspective encompasses four parameters: a) communicative connections between the singers; b) those between the leader and the singers; c) those between the singers and God; and lastly d) the investigation of cultural codes such as raising up hands which in particular communities expresses an attitude of prayer.

III.) Experience from an aesthetic perspective of singing: aesthetic experience focuses on the powerful interplay between the singers, the hymns, and the sounding of the music. For the analysis of aesthetic experiences, we shall adapt the model created by Martin Seel.¹¹ The three aesthetic practices constitute a theoretical separation of a holistic experience as well as being difficult to investigate empirically. These models were thus adapted for empirical verification and assigned emotional, physical, and cognitive activations.

a) Aesthetic of correspondence – this means one's favourite music is playing. The current musical experience corresponds to a personal concept of life. This creates a feeling of affirmation and these experiences are close to one's emotions.

b) Aesthetic of contemplation – this means luxuriating in sensual enjoyment. Complementing Seel, this feeling of sensual enjoyment is also possible in an ecstatic transcendence of the everyday world. Such

⁹ Thomas Luckmann, *Shrinking Transcendence, Expanding Religion?*, 127-138.

¹⁰ Gordon Alban Adnams, *The Experience of Congregational Singing: An Ethno-Phenomenological Approach*, Edmonton 2008. <http://www.worshipsinging.ca/profile/Final%20Dissertation%20in%20pdf.pdf>. Gordon Alban Adnams, »Really Worshipping, not Just Singing«, in: Monique Ingalls, Carolyn Landau, Thomas Wagner (Ed.), *Christian congregational music: performance, identity, and experience*, Farnham 2013, 185-200.

¹¹ Martin Seel, *Zur ästhetischen Praxis der Kunst*, in: ders., *Ethisch-ästhetische Studien*, Frankfurt am Main 1996, 126-144, 130-138.

experiences are close to bodily activations in two directions: in complete tranquillity and in ecstatic dance.

c) Aesthetic of imagination – this means one’s worldview will be called into question. Only within this aesthetic practice will it be possible to encounter new aesthetic experiences. This has a close connection to avant-garde art and access is facilitated through understanding.

IV.) Experience from a psychological perspective of singing: within the psychological perspective, the focus is on processes deep inside the singer eliciting emotional episodes and contributing to their well-being. The psychological perspective is not a contradiction to the social perspective. If it were the opposite, it would have to be called »individual«. Psychological means a concentration on the experiences of a single singer in order to find out which emotions he or she feels and what their individual benefits are. There are four items in the questionnaire which are located within the psychological perspective: uncomfortable – comfortable, dissatisfied – satisfied, dislike – like, and emotionally unmoved – overwhelmed. Furthermore, the differentiation between judging and experiencing singing will be investigated: judging means detached observation during singing, the singer not being physically, emotionally, or cognitively integrated into the singing; but to have an experience means being intimately involved in the process of singing. If we listen to a hymn and understand it to be a cheerful song, we are evaluating the mood and are judging it. But if our mood changes we will in fact be happier because the hymn and the singing make us happy, thus we actually experience and feel the actual mood being expressed.

V.) Experience from a social perspective of singing: the feeling of togetherness during singing is often said to have a certain fascination. The focus of the social perspective is to investigate this affective feeling of togetherness as an emotional event. Two items from the questionnaire will be used: disconnected – connected and individual-feeling – group-feeling. Three levels of togetherness can be identified: that regarding a particular hymn which I have perhaps known for many years; that regarding the other singers who are singing together and hence form a community; and finally that regarding God, since the hymn is a prayer or promulgation of the Gospel. How this feeling of togetherness is created is also part of this dimension. For this reason, it will be necessary to explore rhythm, sound and physical movement.

These five perspectives are helpful in comparing the singing of different hymns since the same questions are always asked within the »description from a typical participant«.

6. The Research Process

The starting point of the present survey was regular singing as part of worship in church services on Sunday mornings in Germany. These are many in number and include many similar situations involving singing, pipe organs, trombone choirs and vocal choirs.

The approach was phenomenological, whereby it was possible to put the singers, the singing, the sung hymns, and the liturgical services (the occasions in which the singing took place) at the centre of attention. The liturgical events were recorded on video, including sound and picture. It is unusual to make videos during a religious ritual, at least in Germany. It is certainly necessary to carefully consider the ethical aspects of recording people on camera during their devotion. But in the end, there were three reasons for doing so: firstly, certain data was secured making it was easily possible to bring back to mind the feelings previously experienced while singing; secondly, the sound could be analysed; and finally, the motion pictures gave access to the physical movements of the people singing.

At the beginning, I took part in some liturgical services to develop my method and to find a suitable way of accessing this specific environment. It was evident that the Sunday morning service conducted according to the order of service was accomplished without strong emotions.

Thus, the field of research was expanded to singing in the Protestant church of Germany. Beside regular services, I took part in two singing events as part of the »Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchentag« (German Protestant Church Congress, held in Hamburg in May 2013), the »Internationaler Gospelkirchentag« (International Gospel Church Congress, held in Kassel in September 2014), and a workshop covering »Kreatives Gemeindesingen mit Gesangbuchliedern« (Creative singing from hymns, in Leipzig in June 2014). According to William James, it is helpful to discover phenomena in their extreme varieties because it is like looking at them through a microscope. However, there are some differences between church services and special singing events. In church services, singing is one part of the liturgy and there may be someone there mainly in order to listen to the sermon who does not want to or simply cannot sing. People attending special singing events, on the other hand, have deliberately chosen these events because they enjoy singing and were probably anticipating that they would derive a personal benefit from partaking. At the same time, in church services singing is an important element and most people who are there do like to sing.

Immediately after the singing the interviews or group discussions took place. This temporal proximity was especially important as I wanted to explore the feelings and experiences from the singing without interim reflection.

In the second part of the field research, the interviewees were directly approached, thus singers could be reached who would otherwise never come to an interview. For the second part of the field research, questionnaires were added. The interviewees described their singing experiences, but it was difficult to identify which particular hymns influenced their feelings. The questionnaires asked about emotions and evaluations using 11 parameters. The schedule of the questionnaires followed the semantic differential and was enhanced by the latent factor of »community«.

Within the present study 41 sung hymns were explored. There were 36 different songs altogether and they were sung in:

- 4 church services,
- 2 singing events during the »Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchentag« in Hamburg,
- 2 mass choir sessions during the »Internationaler Gospelkirchentag« in Kassel, and
- a workshop »Kreatives Gemeindesingen mit Gesangbuchliedern« during the »Deutsches Evangelisches Chorfest« in Leipzig.

Two group discussions with 22 participants plus interviews with 87 interviewees took place. The video footage of all singing events lasts around 18 hours. There are 583 completed questionnaires for 1,737 hymns (27 different songs).

7. Results

The results are made up of three intertwined dimensions. Firstly, an example from a »description from a typical participant« relating to the well-known hymn »Amazing Grace« will be presented. Secondly, the same song will be dissected in terms of »ethnomusicological analysis«. Thirdly, the questionnaires will be statistically interpreted. The present survey will finally show the impact of singing in worship environments and conclude on what singing must be like in order to support emotional expressions of faith.

7.1 Description from a Typical Participant – »Amazing Grace«

The singing of »Amazing Grace« took place in Kassel during the »Internationaler Gospelkirchentag« (International Gospel Church Congress, September 20th, 2014).

Some relevant information was provided at the end of the morning rehearsal. M, the host, explains that the two last songs contain the complete Gospel of Jesus Christ. The hymns were »Loved« and »We are changing the world« (both composed by Hans Christian Jochimsen); in other words we are loved by God and that changes the world – It really is as simple as that! The singing is to be primarily led by J.

Now, it is explained, we are going to sing »Amazing Grace«, a song which will be sung by many choirs across the whole world. It represents a movement against injustice in the world. We will be singing together and that should change the world. Additionally a donation will be made for poor people who are living in adverse circumstances. In the evening, a new musical »Amazing Grace« will be premiered, telling the story of John Newton, a former slave captain who changed his attitude to embrace the Christian faith and fight for the liberation of slaves. The hymn »Amazing Grace« recalls this conversion. Two biblical stories have close similarities to Newton's experiences: »I once was lost, but now I'm found«, from the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15; and »I was blind, but now I see«, from Paul in Acts 9. Both biblical stories speak of conversion.

»Amazing Grace« is one of the most widely sung spiritual songs worldwide and is performed in many environments. Each verse has four lines with 8, 6, 8 and 6 syllables, iambic stress and cross rhyme. The melody was first published in the »Virginia Harmony« Hymnbook in 1831 and it was probably composed by James P. Carrel and David S. Cleyton. The rhythm and structure of the melody are regular, in three-four time always with a half note on the first beat and either eighth note triplets, two eighth notes or a quarter note on the third beat. This emphasis on the third beat gives the singing a soulful quality. It is not dance-like and the half note at the beginning of each measure makes for the hymn's calm atmosphere. The melody is in the major and starts with a quarter note upbeat a fourth below the tonic. The tonic sounds in the first measure before moving up to the fifth above, giving a range of an octave. In the middle of the melody, however, is a long high tone. This is an important note, both in tone and text: »a wretch like me«, with »me« being set to the highest note. The music is simple and with a folk-like character.

On the dot of noon we all start singing together and all over Germany 30 other choirs do so, all joining in singing »Amazing Grace...« Those of us singing in Kassel, 5,000 singers, are producing an incredible sound and blowing away my negative thoughts. J leads in a calm manner. He will hold some notes on for longer, but we do not initially understand his intentions which leads to some short confusion. We try again and the second attempt is successful. The sound is powerful though a little static. J faces the singers with wide open arms. It takes a little time to get used to this interpretation of »Amazing Grace«. The singing is calm, strong, and emotional. Many singers close their eyes, singing reverently and visibly moved. Some people have goose pimples, they recount afterwards. Now we can recognise that this is a highpoint of our singing. The masses of singers are standing almost motionless. Their faces show their contentment, some are even smiling. The smallest of movements is halted through the long sustained chords and the rests. On the video it looks like »frozen« people. Most people sing along very well, but are singing without much movement. Thus the song has more of a soothing impact on the singers. The accompanying band plays long sustained chords corresponding to the vocal line. But a bright-sounding cymbal underlines the shorter notes which does not fit exactly with the calm atmosphere and sounds too cheerful. This is not a cheerful hymn but rather an overwhelming one which stirs us. The full and voluminous sound of 5,000 singers envelops us and we have a strong sense of being completely

present in the moment. The voices sound mellow and powerful, gentle and bright. They have a great sense of unanimity.

In the second verse, we sing with more movement. It is still quite slow but we sing without holding notes longer or breaks. In order to feel the pulse it would be helpful to move in rhythm but few people are moving at all and their gestures are small. After a while, the movement and the involvement of the singers become more apparent. By the third verse, several people are moving evenly. The sound is moderately loud and very smooth, almost slightly melancholic. The band is playing in a classical style with quiet drums and a characteristic Hammond organ.

Then the first verse is repeated a semitone higher. The singers hold hands with each other, singing by heart and without the hymnbook. Some people raise their hands and sway back and forth in time. However, there are some people holding mobile phones. The sound is colourful, brighter and more vibrant as the pitches ascend. We feel a connection to the other singers as well as to God about whose grace we are singing. As we hold hands and sway in time we belong together. This is a moving feeling and I must keep my voice in check to keep singing. Some people around me are wiping their eyes. We are singing a message which is emotional and religious, and we are expressing this physically.

The women move more than the men, in a larger and freer manner. The women raise their arms above their heads so everybody can see their joined hands. They demonstrate their own sense of community. The palpable unity of the mass around me, of which I am a part, is comforting, protective and soothing. Yet at the same time there is something eerie about it. What is it that connects this community to which I momentarily belong – 5,000 people here in Kassel plus other singers around the world all singing »Amazing Grace« at the same time? Is it the ethical intention of doing something good? Is it faith? Is it the love of singing and of music? Perhaps all three motives, or none of them?!

This is not an exuberant or cheerful hymn. At the end, there are again long held notes, creating a sound of calmness and power. The main focus is on the sound. The voices sound soft and rounded, and this, too, shows how the singers feel a sense of togetherness within this unity of sound. There is an intense atmosphere right up to the final note. Then, the tense mood bursts into jubilation and hand clapping. As the last tone fades away, there is applause and we literally shake each other's hands before letting go. This simple music leaves behind an unforgettable impression, one regarded as being completely positive.

M makes his final announcements: we will see each other again this evening for the musical »Amazing Grace« and may God be with us. The end is left open – we can sing along with others or leave.

7.2 Ethnomusicological Analysis – »Amazing Grace«

1. Social Perspective

How can the singers' sense of togetherness be described: do they feel disconnected or connected?

26 Questionnaires

Adjective	1	2	3	4	5	Adjective
disconnected	3,8 %		11,5 %	23,1 %	57,7 %	connected

Interpretation:

More than half have ticked the value 5 which means that they feel a strong sense of togetherness. The song was sung in the context of an activity called »Gospel for a fairer world« so this ethical and religious attitude may have had an influence.

Is there any evidence pointing to an increase or decrease in the sense of community?

Yes: the feeling of togetherness increased, made evident by the fact that while singing we were holding hands and swaying in time.

Being connected: a) to the hymn, b) to the other singers and c) to God.

a) This hymn is not only a classic but was also the theme of the Gospel Church Congress. In the evening, the first performance of a musical about John Newton called »Amazing Grace« was to follow. Thus, the lyrics were also well understood. We had a strong connection to this hymn.

b) The singers were bonded together because we were singing this song for a fairer world, to change the world, to speak up against slavery, and thus we had a strong ethical motive. The idea of »together we are strong« was the emotional turning point within the singing.

c) God was also present because we were singing about John Newton’s conversion, reminiscent of Paul or the Prodigal Son. The atmosphere was spiritual because we had sung two songs expressing the whole Gospel just before: »Loved« and »We are Changing the World«. The knowledge that we were singing simultaneously with other choirs scattered over Germany made for a transcendent atmosphere. However, it is still not completely certain that there was a connection with God because there was also an emphasis on our own taking action.

Connectedness:	1 = weak or none; 2 = moderate; 3 = strong (subjective estimate by the researcher)
to the hymn	3
to the group	3
to God	2

»Individual-feeling – Group-feeling« – comparison to »disconnected – connected«

Adjective	1	2	3	4	5	Adjective
Individual-feeling	3,8%	3,8%	11,5%	34,6%	42,3%	Group-feeling

The median of group-feeling is 4. Most of the singers chose 5, but the choice of 4 is much higher than for the item »disconnected – connected«. There are fewer hymns in the present survey for which »connected« is stronger than »group-feeling«. Thus it can be concluded that »Amazing Grace« built a strong relation to the song, between the singers and to the situation of singing.

Are there physical or rhythmic activities expressing community?

In the final verses, the singers held hands and swayed in time. The hymn is not rhythmic yet the performance expressed a feeling of belonging together.

Are there aspects relating to the sound which substantiate the feeling of togetherness? In the final verse, the conductor J held several notes on longer resulting in a very dominant sound and connecting us emotionally to one another.

	1 = weak or none; 2 = moderate; 3 = strong (subjective estimate by the researcher)
Physicality	2
Rhythm	1
Sound	3

2. Psychological Perspective

What are the singers' feelings?

Adjective	1	2	3	4	5	Adjective
uncomfortable	11,5%		3,8%	23,1%	61,5%	comfortable
dissatisfied	7,7%	3,8%	3,8%	19,2%	65,4%	satisfied
dislike	15,4%			23,1%	57,7%	like

Interpretation:

Way over half the singers chose 5 and around a quarter chose 4. The singing of this hymn in this specific environment was a comfortable experience, the singers felt really satisfied and they enjoyed the singing.

Which emotions are mentioned in the description?

a) those which can be attributed to the music: not many emotions were attributed to the music. The song was introduced as being an emotional expression of a turning point in Newton's life and this determined what was attributed to the music;

b) those which were experienced during singing:

the whole song was experienced at an emotional level. Descriptions mentioned in the interviews included: devout, moving, goose pimples, highpoint of singing, palpable unity, comforting, protecting. The sense of transcendent community with others who were simultaneously singing all over Germany was experienced as somewhat uncanny.

Were there individual benefits from the singing?

The goose pimples and tears mentioned in the interviews show that these experiences had an individual benefit, underscored by the sense of community also experienced.

3. Aesthetic Perspective

In which way were the singers integrated into the singing and were they emotionally moved?

Adjective	1	2	3	4	5	Adjective
emotionally unmoved	3,8%			34,6%	57,7%	overwhelmed

The singing was regarded as emotionally overwhelming with more than 90% of the singers marking 4 or 5. They were completely involved, which can also be seen in the video and heard in the interviews.

Making use of Martin Seel’s three aesthetic practices:

a) Singing as a corresponsive-aesthetic practice: does the song approximate to the musical preferences of the singers?

Yes: the sound and the style corresponded exactly to what the singers personally enjoy. The singing thus had an affirmative effect.

How relevant is personal well-being?

In the interviews as well as in the videos it is obvious that the singers feel completely comfortable. This is also supported through the questionnaires.

b) Singing as a contemplative or ecstatic practice: which sensory perceptions can be identified?

While singing this approach became more significant. In particular the repetitions of the first verse, the holding of hands and the swaying in time supported the sensory perception. We increasingly sensed the communally experienced moment.

Are some physical activities demonstrating the singers' involvement without significance?

As previously mentioned the touching of one another and the rhythmic swaying were physical activities without meaning.

c) Singing as an imaginative-aesthetic practice: is the well-being of the singers disturbed in any way?

No: there was no disturbance despite the ethical dimension highlighted in the introduction to the song. However, there was no sign that this introduction had any impact on the singers. There was a strong feeling of belonging together which supported the affirmative effect.

Were any new experiences identifiable?

No: perhaps some people gained new information about the song’s origin or the author’s biography, but this does not constitute an experience.

Do the new experiences have any significance? If so, what?

Before the singing, M gave something resembling a sermon to the audience with a strong appeal to make the world a better place. However, I was not aware of this factor during the singing.

Aesthetic Practise	1 = weak or none; 2 = moderate; 3 = strong (subjective estimate by the researcher)
a) corresponsive	3
b) contemplative-ecstatic	2
c) imaginative	1

4. Communicative Perspective

Which communicative connections are recognisable between the singers?

We were singing together and had a collective sense of connection because the hymn was well-known to us. The physical bonding through holding hands supported the commitment with the other singers of singing together.

Which communicative connections are recognisable between the leader and the singers?

The singing was conducted by a leader. At the beginning there was a short misunderstanding but this increased the level of attention, and in the video it is obvious that all singers were oriented towards the leader. He conducted without using words and thus creating the sound and rhythm, e.g. with long held notes.

What communicative connections are recognisable between the singers and God?

Some singers closed their eyes as is usual when praying.

Are there cultural codes?

Yes: that of choral conducting.

5. Religious-transcendental Perspective

Analysis of the environment: is there a religious framework?

The singing took place in a multi-functional hall. The venue was not in itself religious, but had a positive atmosphere through so many people having gathered there. The occasion was the International Gospel Church Congress, a religious meeting of people who like to sing gospel music. The announcements from M and the choir leaders were of a religious nature and emotionally charged.

Adjective	1	2	3	4	5	Adjective
not protected	15,4%	3,8%	11,5%	34,6%	34,6%	protected

Interpretation – can a sense of being protected in God’s presence be discerned?

The median of this scale is 4, showing that there was a feeling of being protected in God’s presence.

Did the singing of this specific hymn constitute »really worshipping«?

Yes: the closed eyes of some singers clearly support this interpretation.

Did the singing of this specific hymn constitute »fulfilling singing«?

Yes: the singers were completely involved in the singing. Singing in this way together was enjoyable and triggered strong emotions.

Religious Atmosphere	1 = weak or not; 2 = middle; 3 = strong / subjective estimate by the researcher
really worshipping	2
fulfilling singing	3

When the singing was conducted: were there any references from the leader regarding the religious perspective of the singing – whether emotional, from the lyrics or the environment?

The hymn »Amazing Grace« is a song about the conversion from a wretch to a child of God. The references by M and the choir leader J tried to encourage a religious and ethical attitude on the part of the singers.

Are there any statements in the interviews regarding this hymn?

Some people mentioned having been emotionally moved by it.

26 Questionnaires	Number		Rating scale, (Percent)				
	valid	missing	1	2	3	4	5
soothing – stimulating	26	0	26,9	30,8	15,4	19,2	7,7
quiet – loud sound	26	0	15,4	23,1	50,0	7,7	3,8
disconnected – connected	25	1, 3,8%	3,8		11,5	23,1	57,7
uncomfortable – comfortable	26	0	11,5		3,8	23,1	61,5
dissatisfied – satisfied	26	0	7,7	3,8	3,8	19,2	65,4
dislike – like	25	1, 3,8%	15,4			23,1	57,7
emotionally unmoved – overwhelmed	25	1, 3,8%	3,8			34,6	57,7
not protected – protected	26	0	15,4	3,8	11,5	34,6	34,6
sad – cheerful feeling	25	1, 3,8%	7,7	19,2	23,1	26,9	19,2
soft – hard sound	25	1, 3,8%	46,2	30,8	15,4	3,8	
individual-feeling–group-feeling	25	1, 3,8%	3,8	3,8	11,5	34,6	42,3

Table 1

The way in which this hymn was experienced was very consistent (table 1), with one exception: »sad – cheerful feeling«. When many people are singing together, this creates a positive mood and it is difficult to remain melancholic.

7.3 Questionnaires

In the second part of the field research there were questionnaires for each sung hymn. 583 singers completed the questionnaires for 1,737 sung hymns covering 27 different songs.

Beside any question of sociodemographics, the motive to sing and to take part in this singing was an emphasis on 11 items expressing semantic opposites in a five-point rating scale, for example soothing versus stimulating.

A fundamental and truly surprising result is that the singers mostly agreed in their experiences while singing a hymn. It is usual to divide this scale into three parts: 1 and 2 tend to the left, three is undecided, and 4 and 5 tend to the right. If these two values are added, in most cases 70 to 80 per cent of the

singers expressed a similar experience. This observation can be found in all the analysed hymns. A majority of the singers converge at one or two consecutive values. This is an important result since it corrects the idea that everybody has their specific and individual experience which is unique and not comparable to that of others. Some items – four hymns to be precise – are spread over three or four values. This can be mostly explained in terms of the method/style of singing.

Factor analysis

The factor analysis is a multivariate method to find correlations between items and to obtain a better overview of large amounts of data.

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Test		,851
Bartlett-Test for Sphericity	approximate Chi-Quadrat	5212,615
	df	55
	Bartlett Significance	,000

Table 2

KMO- and Bartlett-Test

The data is very suitable for a factor analysis, as the KMO-Test showed (table 2). The communality of the principal component analysis in table 3 also supported the factor analysis since the value is over 0.5 which is suitable for a survey with more than 1,500 cases.

Items	initial	Extraction
soothing – stimulating	1,000	,670
quiet – loud sound	1,000	,668
disconnected – connected	1,000	,634
uncomfortable – comfortable	1,000	,650
dissatisfied – satisfied	1,000	,587
dislike – like	1,000	,668
emotionally unmoved – overwhelmed	1,000	,514
not protected – protected	1,000	,563
sad – cheerful feeling	1,000	,559
soft – hard sound	1,000	,634
individual-feeling – group-feeling	1,000	,700

Table 3 Communality, Extraction method: principal component analysis

The Kaiser-Criterion, which the number of factors suggested, calculated two factors because the third factor has an eigenvalue of 0.932. However, the results of two factors are difficult to interpret. I therefore calculated three factors which were supported through a screenplot. The total declared variance with three factors was 62.25%.

The rotated version is shown in the table 4.

Item	Component		
	1	2	3
soothing – stimulating		,810	
quiet – loud sound		,790	
disconnected – connected	,355		,713
uncomfortable – comfortable	,792		
dissatisfied – satisfied	,601		,473
dislike – like	,813		
emotionally unmoved – overwhelmed	,609		,351
not protected – protected	,715		
sad – cheerful feeling		,443	,531
soft – hard sound		,697	-,301
individual-feeling – group-feeling			,837

Table 4 rotated version. Extraction method: principal component analysis. Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser-Normalisation. Rotation is in 5 Iterations converged. Loading below 0.3 was suppressed.

Interpreting the content according to the following factors:

1. Emotional Feeling: with

dislike – like

uncomfortable – comfortable

dissatisfied – satisfied

not protected – protected

emotionally unmoved – overwhelmed

This factor includes all items with emotional feeling expressing subjective pleasure. This is easy to understand and plausible. Singing should create feelings which are to be found on the right side of the scale. Nobody will sing in order to feel uncomfortable or dissatisfied.

2. Experience and Evaluate: with

soothing – stimulating
 sad – cheerful feeling
 quiet – loud sound
 soft – hard sound

This factor connects two dimensions: the mood of the singers – whether calm or stimulated, sad or cheerful; and the evaluation of the sound – whether quiet or loud, soft or hard. Both opposites are possibilities for singing and both are positive.

3. Feeling of togetherness: with

disconnected – connected
 individual-feeling – group-feeling

In the qualitative part of the present survey, the feeling of belonging together was a strong and highly significant finding. The feeling of belonging together is understood as an emotion with two components: as an emotion or sense of togetherness and as an activity. This means that everybody offered their individual voice – like a fingerprint – for the sound and hence everybody plays an important part in creating this impressive sound.

Any statistical researcher will always be searching for a clear and simple result before being satisfied. Unfortunately real life is not so simple and clear, so it is important to understand that if the results are to reflect »real life«, they are bound to be complex and difficult to interpret. One example is in the item »sad feeling – cheerful feeling«. It falls between »Feeling of togetherness« and »Experience and Evaluate«. If you have the feeling of belonging together, this also has to do with »sad or cheerful« feeling.¹²

Cluster Analysis

The next calculation focuses on groups which expressed similar experiences during the singing. In this cluster analysis items from every factor were included (table 5).

Ward Method N = 1,512	soothing – stimulating	emotionally unmoved – overwhelmed	sad – cheerful feeling	soft sound – hard sound	individual- feeling – group-feeling	uncomfortable – comfortable
1 (N = 661)	4.42	3.96	4.44	2.55	4.74	4.63
2 (N = 168)	4.10	3.49	4.24	2.90	<i>3.06</i>	4.37
3 (N = 356)	<i>1.81</i>	4.15	3.72	<i>1.79</i>	4.21	4.65
4 (N = 178)	<i>3.12</i>	<i>2.51</i>	<i>2.78</i>	3.29	<i>2.97</i>	<i>2.70</i>
5 (N = 149)	3.55	3.70	4.02	2.46	4.30	<i>1.91</i>
in total	3.53	3.76	4.01	2.49	4.18	4.11

Mean for each cluster compared to total. bold = significantly higher than total. italic = significantly lower than total. Table 5

¹² Cronbachs Alpha supported this interpretation because with three items (including »sad – cheerful feeling«) the value is 0.677 and without »sad – cheerful feeling« a little less, at 0.643.

Comparing the mean between the five groups with the total, one can find the characteristics for the respective group.

There follows a short introduction to the characteristics:

Cluster 1 (N = 661)

The singers feel stimulated. The singing sounds cheerful and the singers feel particularly comfortable. They are having a positive experience.

Name: »stimulating-cheerful singing«

Cluster 2 (N = 168)

The singing was slightly stimulating. But the singers did not have any feeling of togetherness with other singers. The mean for the item »individual-feeling – group-feeling« is in the middle. This means they had no feeling of belonging to the group, though without a feeling of being disconnected either. The experience of togetherness is simply missing.

Name: »singing without community«

Cluster 3 (N = 356)

Three items attract attention: »soothing – stimulating«, »soft sound – hard sound«, and »emotionally unmoved – overwhelmed«, since they differ significantly from the total.

Despite the red colouring for two items, it was not a negative experience. Singing in this group was soothing and a reason for this experience was the soft sound of the singing. Through calm feelings and the soft sound the singers were overwhelmed.

Name: »soothing-overwhelming singing«

Cluster 4 (N = 178)

Most of the descriptions of experiences while singing suggested a positive reaction. A surprising result is that this group of singers were dissatisfied. Most of the items for a positive (aesthetic) experience are below the mean value. Some hymns were described as constituting unsuccessful singing.

Name: »unsuccessful singing«

Cluster 5 (N = 149)

A small group of singers showed one item to which they did not react positively. They felt uncomfortable while singing.

Name: »uncomfortable singing«

Every singer was classified into one cluster based on their experiences with the specific hymn they sang. Thus, it was possible to calculate a cross tabulation (table 6) between the hymns and the cluster. The result shows how many singers shared a similar mood during the singing of a particular hymn.

Hymn	1 stimulat- ing- cheerful	2 without com- munity	3 soothing- overwhelming	4 unsucces- ful	5 uncom- fortable	in total
SINGING						
1: Befiehl du deine Wege	1	1	4 44,4%	3 33,3%	0	9
2: Vom Himmel hoch	4 17,4%	4 17,4%	0	13 56,5%	2	23
3: Korn, das in die Erde	5 41,7%	1	5 41,7%	1	0	12
4: Nun danket all	73 44,2%	16 9,7%	31 18,8%	19 11,5%	26 15,8%	165
5: Die güldene Sonne	83 52,5%	27 17,1%	16 10,1%	11 7%	21 13,3%	158
6: Jauchzt alle Lande	7 50%	3 21,4%	1	2	1	14
7: Wohl denen, die da wandeln	6 85,7%	0	0	0	1	7
8: Wir wollen alle fröhlich	17 68%	1	4 16%	1	2	25
9: Auf, Seele, auf und säume	13 59,1%	2	0	2	5 22,7%	22
10: Gen Himmel aufgefahren	11 84,6%	0	0	2 15,4%	0	13
11: Liebster Jesu, wir sind hier	6 23,1%	0	7 26,9%	6 23,1%	7 26,9%	26
12: Komm in unsre stolze Welt	0	1	3 16,7%	12 66,7%	2	18
13: Wir glauben Gott	2	1	5 25%	9 45%	3	20
14: Kommt her, ihr seid	1	0	7 43,8%	6 37,5%	2	16
15: Ausgang und Eingang	1	0	3 42,9%	2 28,6%	1	7
16: Amazing Grace	4	2	16 69,6%	0	1	23
17: Loved 1	24 24%	5	61 61%	3	7	100
18: Gospel-Medley	18 32,7%	9 16,4%	3	21 38,2%	4	55
19: We are changing 1	28 56%	2	14 28%	2	4	50
20: Now 1	48 52,7%	14 15,4%	12 13,2%	8	9 9,9%	91
21: Souled Out 1	57 67,9%	8 9,5%	2	6	11 13,1%	84
22: This is the Day	36 57,1%	8 12,7%	3	11 17,5%	5	63
23: Now 2	50 64,1%	7	14 17,9%	2	5	78
24: Lord, prepare me	28 42,4%	10 15,2%	7	18 27,3%	3	66
25: We are changing 2	72 60%	16 13,3%	21 17,5%	4	7	120
26: Loved 2	22 13,5%	10	114 69,9%	4	13	163
27: Souled Out 2	44 52,4%	20 23,8%	3	10	7	84
Gesamt	661 43,7%	168 11,1%	356 23,6%	178 11,8%	149 9,8%	1,512

bold = more than 50% of the singers in one cluster. italic = more than 30% of the singers in one cluster. Table 6

The result supports the observation that many people have a similar experience when singing together.

From 27 hymns there are 18 with over 50% of the singers in one cluster. These hymns are marked in green. Eight more hymns display over 30% of singers in one or two clusters. Only one hymn is spread over 4 clusters.

Which are the connecting characteristics of hymns uniting many people's experiences into a similar feeling?

We shall look at the five clusters:

1st Cluster: characteristics for stimulating-cheerful singing:

- many enthusiastic people singing together
- singing with many others who are like-minded dispels sadness
- the singing of all these hymns is directed by a leader – communicative situation
- many singers are laughing
- the singers are physically active: standing up, clapping hands, dancing ...
- the rhythm is very important

2nd Cluster: characteristics which may lead to singing without community:

- if the singers are divided into too many groups, the feeling of togetherness will be lost
- suggesting individual activities, e. g. everybody should stand up for a word they deem important
- in proposing complex cognitive ideas such as counterpoint, everybody has to concentrate on themselves

3rd Cluster: Characteristics for soothing-overwhelming singing:

- it is difficult to create a quiet atmosphere in a large group
- the singers should be familiar with the hymn
- the hymn should be led
- the leader has to create a soft and quiet sound, without a strong rhythm
- the sound is most important: long sustained notes or clusters or chords
- many repetitions, as is known from Taizé

4th Cluster: Characteristics to prevent unsuccessful singing:

- it is important to sing new and complex hymns in a church congregation, as it would be a sad reflection on imaginative aesthetic singing if we always sang hymns according to the mainstream. Yet there is also a fine line between boring songs on the one hand and a complexity which obliterates the joy of singing on the other.
- this fine line is different in every situation and group.
- songs without a melody which is simple and easy to grasp need much attention

5th Cluster: probably in every large and diverse group one will find around 10% of people who do not feel comfortable – 149 of the 1,512 singers felt uncomfortable while singing.

8. Conclusion

The ethnographic method used qualitative and quantitative data and connected the data to the main result. The main outcome is the »Description from a typical participant« for 41 Christian songs. It is a result based on phenomenology and it described in detail the emotions, feelings, observations and atmospheres surrounding the hymns which were sung. This unique sound-based experience is not repeatable. Never will the same people in a similar state of mind – shaped in turn by their experiences, their social and religious moods – come together and sing the same hymns in a similar style, as far as pitch level, tempo, sound, rhythm and performance are concerned.

The main challenge in developing the results – the ethnomusicological analysis and the evaluation of the questionnaires – was to find generalities of singing. Thus it was necessary to reduce individual expression in the descriptions. The results show that probably 70 to 75% of the experiences of singing the same song in a certain environment are experiences of community. This is supported by the questionnaires. The concept of »small social life-worlds«, developed by Anne Honer, substantiates this result because growing up and learning to sing Christian songs shape experiences. Singers of gospel music in a gospel choir know how to sing, how to feel, and how to experience this kind of music physically. The same goes for worship contexts and music and singing within them. The experiences constitute embodied knowledge.

Both kinds of data – qualitative and quantitative – correspond and support the results. One example is the well-known Christmas hymn by Martin Luther, »Vom Himmel hoch, da komm ich her« (From Heaven Above to Earth I Come). It was sung in a singing workshop in a challenging style as we were to sing the counterpoint variation by Johann Sebastian Bach. In the video, one can see how the singers lost their pleasure in singing and we lost two whole-tones in pitch – the only example where this happened. Only the will to satisfy the conductor made us continue singing. The video, the research diary and the questionnaires tell the same story: the singing of this otherwise popular Christmas hymn belongs to the cluster of »unsuccessful singing«.

The aim of this present research has been to approach the experiences of singers in environments of Christian worship. Therefore, the analysis and results included the singing, the singers, and the sung hymns. The atmosphere while singing, the interviews, group discussions and videos are characterised by enthusiastic singers who were excited about singing and really enjoyed the experience. They were emotionally moved and well integrated into the process of singing. They experienced the chosen hymns as stimulating and cheerful. A sense of true calmness or sadness while singing together was rare. The feeling of belonging together was impressive but some people did not feel a sense of community. Through singing, the singers were merged into a collective individual because they experienced the singing in a similar fashion. Individual aspects relating to their upbringing (socialisation), their current situations in life and mood, were pushed aside in the moment of singing. The present performance, the moment of singing played the most important role for the singers.

Aesthetic objects such as religious songs and the experience of singing need time and repetition and there are still aspects which remained inaccessible for this survey. However, when aesthetic objects are encountered by singers, then they will have fulfilling and happy experiences. It will be possible for unimagined worlds to open up.

Bibliography

Gordon Alban Adnams: The Experience of Congregational Singing: An Ethno-Phenomenological Approach, Edmonton 2008.

<http://www.worshippingsinging.ca/profile/Final%20Dissertation%20in%20pdf.pdf>

Gordon Alban Adnams: »Really Worshipping«, not »Just Singing«, in: Monique Ingalls, Carolyn Landau, Thomas Wagner (Ed.), Christian congregational music: performance, identity, and experience, Farnham 2013, 185-200.

Theodor W. Adorno: Kritik des Musikanten, in: Ders.: Dissonanzen. Musik in der verwalteten Welt, Göttingen 1963, 62-101.

Clifford Geertz: Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture, in: The Interpretation of Culture, Basic Books, New York 1973, 310-323.

Anne Honer: Lebensweltliche Ethnographie: ein explorativ-interpretativer Forschungsansatz am Beispiel von Heimwerkern, Wiesbaden 1993.

Ernst Klusen: Zur Situation des Singens in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. I. Der Umgang mit dem Lied, Köln 1974. II. Die Lieder, Köln 1975.

Benita Luckmann: The Small Life-Worlds of Modern Man, in: Social Research 37, 4, 1970, 580-596.

Thomas Luckmann: Shrinking Transcendence, Expanding Religion?, in: Sociological Analysis, Vol. 51, No. 2, Oxford 1990, 127-138.

Anne Niessen: »Die Lieder waren die eigentlichen Verführer!« Mädchen und Musik im Nationalsozialismus, Mainz 1999.

Anne Niessen: Anmerkungen zum Singen aus sozialisationstheoretischer Perspektive, in: Andreas Lehmann-Wermser / dies. (Hg.): Aspekte des Singens. Ein Studienbuch, Augsburg 2006, 35-49.

Hermann Schmitz: Kurze Einführung in die Neue Phänomenologie, Freiburg 2012.

Martin Seel: Zur ästhetischen Praxis der Kunst, in: ders., Ethisch-ästhetische Studien, Frankfurt am Main 1996.