

CHANTS OF PSALMS: COMPOSITION AND INTERPRETATIONS BY CHURCH CHOIRS OF THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION IN PORT HARCOURT DIOCESE

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Abstract

The Chanting of Psalms have always held an essential place in the worship of the Anglican Communion. This study is on the challenges and interpretation of Chant and Psalms by the Choir in the Anglican Communion, which hinges on a double Chant for the interpretation of Gloria using The New Cathedral Psalter and The Parish Psalter as a reference point. The Singing of psalms is so significant that Sunday services begin with a procession and thereafter the chanting of the psalm. The singing of a chant, which serves as the first part of the Worship of the Anglican Communion, in which the choir plays an important role in leading the congregation through worship sessions, in singing and chanting of Psalms. Most of the choirs have good voices but fail to pay attention to the interpretation of the Chants, this is a problem. This study seeks to look at. This study is carried out by attending some of the choir rehearsals, church services and being adjudicator in several choir competitions in the Anglican Communion to ascertain their knowledge of interpretation, and gathering relevant materials from books and journal articles. This study

recommends that choir directors should pay attention not only to the notes of the Chant but also to the dynamics, diction and articulation of the Chanting system.

Keywords: Composition, Interpretation, Church Music, Chant of Psalms, Anglican Communion.

Introduction

In the Bible, two New Testament verses emphasise the place of “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your heart to the Lord” (Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:19). The significance of these sacred scriptures lies in the fading tradition of chanting psalms in most Christian denominations, especially in the Pentecostal and evangelical sects, where hymns and spiritual songs are widely practised. Despite the decline of psalm chants even in some old missionary churches, the genre faces another problem: poor interpretation. In this paper, the exploration of revival in psalm chants focuses on the music (i.e., the chants of psalms as a composition) and performance (its interpretation) in the Anglican Communion of the Port Harcourt Diocese.

The interpretation of singing or chanting Psalms 7 is 5% the choirmaster’s responsibility. The choirmaster is like a cook who gathers all the ingredients for a meal before cooking. When the cook fails to use the right ingredient in cooking their meal, the expected outcome shall never be achieved. It is like a choirmaster and his choir. The choirmaster must have a basic knowledge of music interpretation and its application to singing. Where the choirmaster lacks this knowledge, the choir will find it difficult to give a good performance.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of this study include:

1. To examine the interpretation of chants of psalms in the Anglican Communion;
2. To identify how the music of the Psalms can be performed appropriately; and
3. To produce working materials for future related researchers.

Review of Related Literature

Noteworthy in related literature is the tension between 'performance and 'worship in Christian circles. For example, Marcell Steuernagel notes that 'Performance is a bad word in church (2021, p. 1), and identifies 'worship as an appropriate word. Michael Hawn buttresses that 'Performance' is a troublesome word for musical leaders who attempt to understand their role in worship, sometimes seeing spiritual authenticity as incompatible with the complex skills required of a performer in worship" (quoted in Steuernagel 2021, p. vi), On the other divide, McGann (2002, p. 35) states that:

Music unfolds not only in ritual but as ritual, as a mode of ritual performance. An assembly's musical performance inevitably influences the whole ritual process. At the same time, participants' ritual and spiritual expectations and commitments shape the parameters of musical performance.

In other words, church music should be understood and performed within the ritual, expectations and commitments that shape the parameters of musical performance. In this case, the presentational modality is identified as ministration"- choir ministration or song ministration, where the emphasis is on the "text'- an object with a fixed form that is believed to carry inherent meaning regardless of the varying contexts of its performance. Thus. The current paper argues that it is interpretation that provides an inroad into the depths of meaning codified in the text. Performing music not only brings a repertoire to life, but the music with reasonable interpretation brings listeners to life embedded in the composition. The point is that a reasonable understanding of music will enhance the worship in many dimensions. Every church choir aims to minister through songs; however, where the choir sings without proper articulation, the purpose of ministration is defeated. The foundational contributions of scholars with regard to chants in Nigeria are apparent. The researcher sees such contributions from the basis of what is being studied and what can be given to future generations. For example, Nwamara (2009b) discusses the significance of the chanting of psalms in Igbo liturgy within the Anglican communion of Awka Diocese. However, he highlighted the need for indigenisation of chants to serve localised communication. It can be argued that unless the chants are interpreted

according to the tonal system of the Igbo language and its music parameters, and meanings are derived thereby, the music will still not be adequately performed. In recent times, upcoming Nigerian composers do not seem to have much interest in composing chants, not to mention composing in local languages. In most Anglican communions visited in the course of the research, they still perform the old ones where the researcher has lots of reasons to admire the works of some western composers' chants, like Cosmas Gordon Lang, Charles H. Lloyd, and Henry Scott Holland from the part of the west of our country. Moreover, the translation of chants into local languages is flawed with phono-linguistic or tonal inflexion changes, except for work by a few experts in liturgical music, Prof. Dan C.C. Agu and Prof. Alvan Ikoku Nwamara, who are prolific composers in the field of this study and members of the Anglican communion.

Theoretical Framework -Theory of Music Revival

Tamara Livingston defines music revivals as "social movements to restore and preserve a musical tradition that is believed to be disappearing or completely relegated to the past." He argues that the purpose of revivals is twofold: "to serve as cultural opposition and as an alternative to mainstream culture" and to "improve existing culture through the values based on historical value and authenticity expressed by the revivalists" (Livingston 1999: 68; Livingston 2014: 61), In this context, chants of psalms are becoming outdated in church music repertory and lately, gospel styles have raised the issue of revival to existing culture as alternative to mainstream music traditions. In this paper, the focus on composition and interpretation is motivated by the need to uphold or sustain the tradition or, as Livingston observes, to improve existing culture through the [expressive or performative] values. The essence of any music composition is the correct interpretation of the work. Still, considering the gradual disappearance of the genre, the paper seeks a revival of the value and authentic expression of chants of psalms. The argument shows that the importance of music sound and structure (as composition) should be balanced with interpretation (performance), as such expressions are needed for the sustainability of the genre.

Methodology

The study used ethnomusicological methods. Primary data were collected through unstructured interviews with choirmasters and choristers, as well as participant observation with select choirs. Secondary data were gleaned from books, journals, monographs, and the Internet. The field materials were analysed, and discussions are documented in this paper.

The Concept of Chant

A short musical passage in two or more phrases used for singing unmetrical words; a psalm or canticle sung to such music. A chant (from French chanter, from Latin cantare, "to sing") is the iterative speaking or singing of words or sounds, often primarily on one or two main pitches called reciting tones. Chants may range from a simple melody involving a limited set of notes to highly complex musical structures, often including a great deal of repetition of musical sub-phrases, such as Great Responsories and Offertories of Gregorian chant. Chant may be considered speech, music, or a heightened or stylised form of speech. In the later Middle Ages, some religious chants evolved into song (forming one of the roots of later Western music). Chanting (e.g.. mantra, sacred text, the name of God/Spirit, etc.) is a commonly used spiritual practice. Like prayer, chanting may be a component of either personal or group practice. Diverse spiritual traditions consider chant a route to spiritual development. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chant>)

Chants

What is chant? A is a phrase sung repeatedly in a particular rhythm by two or more persons.

For example, in a football match, "we go win oo, we go win"" this phrase is usually said or shouted during a football match to intimidate their opponent. This is different from musical chants. A musical chant is a short musical passage in two or more phrases used for singing unmetrical words; a psalm or canticle is sung to such music.

Types of Chants

There are several chants and chanting patterns all over the world used by religious, organizations, esoteric organizations, social sects, which we may

not be able to exhaust in this meeting. Let the Gregorian chant gave birth to several other chanting styles used by the orthodox churches today.

The Gregorian chant is divided into three types based on the number of notes sung to each syllable. There are three types of chants namely: Syllabic, Neumatic and Melismatic chants,

SYLLABIC CHANT: this is a type of chant in which most or all of the syllables have a single note each. Example

NEUMATIC CHANT: a style of plainchant that sets one syllable of text to one neume. This style is the opposite of syllabic, in which each syllable has one note, and melismatic, where one syllable has many notes. Example

MELISMATIC CHANT: this type of chant includes long melodic passages on a single syllable. Example On a final note, the difference between syllabic, melismatic, and neumatic singing: when singing is syllabic, you find one note for each syllable; when singing is melismatic there can be several notes for each syllable. Neumatic singing refers to a peculiar way in which Christian monks called those groups of 2 to 4 notes that were sung on the same syllable of a liturgical text.

Given that setting a text into music using a syllabic style is easier, it is quite obvious to expect that this is the most common type of singing adopted by the world's musical traditions.

Throughout the history of western civilization, syllabic singing was adopted by those religious traditions and artistic movements that wanted their followers to maintain the focus on the meaning of the words instead of getting lost in the fascinating ornamentation of melismatic passages.

However, religious traditions have deliberately decided to employ melismatic passages to magnify the spiritual effects of sacred texts and prayers. I'm referring to Quranic and Samavedic recitation as well as melismatic organum and Hallelujatic jublations belonging to Christian sacred music.

The idea of previous discussions was to keep us abreast with the fact that chants or chanting have different ideas, formations, and deliveries. Having known a little about other forms of chanting, we shall look at the chants and chanting patterns used in the Orthodox Church today, especially the Anglican Communion.

An Overview of Chanting Patterns of the Psalms

The Anglican Chant

Anglican chant. Also known as English chant, is a way to sing unmetrical texts, including psalms and canticles from the Bible, by matching the natural speech-rhythm of the words to the notes of a simple harmonised melody. This distinctive type of chant is a significant element of Anglican Church music.

The Anglican chant was formerly in widespread use in Anglican and Episcopal churches. However, today, the Anglican chant is primarily sung in Anglican cathedrals and parish churches that have retained a choral liturgical tradition. Additionally, Anglican chant may be sung in Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Presbyterian, and Reformed churches.

The Anglican chant grew out of the plainchant tradition during the English Reformation. When singing a text in Anglican chant, the natural rhythm of the words as they would be spoken by a careful speaker governs how the music is fitted to the words. The majority of the words are freely and rhythmically chanted over the reciting notes, which are found in the first, fourth, eighth, eleventh (et cetera) bars of the chant and the other notes of the music appropriately fit the words at the end of each half-verse. Formerly, the rhythm of the non-reciting notes was strictly observed, but nowadays the rhythm is based on the natural cadence of speech.

Thus, the length of each of these notes bears little relation to the standard musical value of a

Note such as a minim or semi-breve.

The Anglican chant was well established by the 18th century. The earliest known examples are single chants written by John Blow, Henry Purcell, and their contemporaries. Earlier examples by Tudor composers, such as

Tallis, Farrant, and others, are not original compositions. The earliest double chants date back to around 1700.

Chanting Patterns

There are two chanting patterns used in the Orthodox Church, especially the Anglican Communion. These chanting patterns are the Parish Salter and the New Cathedral Salter chanting patterns. The Parish Salter is more of a speech reading, whereas the New Cathedral Salter's chanting method is governed by the black (or bold) syllables.

Scores

An Anglican Chant with the Chords in Different Colours

The text is pointed for chanting by assigning each verse or phrase to a simple harmonised melody of 7, 14, 21, or 28 bars (known respectively as a single, double, triple or quadruple chant).

An example of a single chant is shown above. Below are the first four verses of the Magnificat, with the text coloured to show which words correspond to which notes in the music ("the chant").

1. My soul doth' magnify the 'Lord: And my spirit hath re'joiced in' God
my 'Saviour.
2. For ' he hath re'garded : the 'lowliness ' of his ' handmaiden
3. For be'hold from 'henceforth : all gene'rations shall call me' blessed.
4. For he that is mighty hath 'magnified' me : and' holy ' is his' Name.

Various Psalters have been published over the years, with each one showing how the chant is to be fitted to the words and each having its variation on the precise rules for doing so. The rules used in the Parish Psalter (one of the more popular Psalters, edited by Sydney Nicholson) are as follows:

Each verse is sung to seven bars of music (the whole chant in the example above, though most chants are 14 bars 2 verses long)

The bar lines in the music correspond to the "pointing marks" which are shown above as Inverted commas or apostrophes in the text.

- The double bar line in the music corresponds to the colon in the text.

- Where there is one note (a semibreve) to a bar, all the words for the corresponding part of the text are sung to that one note.
- Where there are two notes (two minims) to a bar unless indicated otherwise all the words except the last syllable are sung to the first minim. The final syllable is sung to the second minim. Where more than the last syllable is to be sung to the second minim a dot (.) (between words) or a hyphen (within a word) is used in the text to indicate where the note change should occur.

Other Psalters use different notation: modern Psalters such as the New St Paul's Cathedral Psalter (John Seott, 1997) have adopted the following convention:

- A vertical bar (|) is used to indicate a bar line.
- Whenever there are 3 or more syllables in a bar containing two minims, a dot (.) or a hyphen is used, even if the change of note is on the final syllable.

Now let us chant the first 4 verses of the Magnificat using the New Cathedral Psalter chanting method.

The New Cathedral Psalter

1. My soul doth magni- | fy the | Lord: and my spirit hath re- |
joic-ed. in | God in y | Saviour.
2. For he | hath re- | garded : the lowliness of his | hand- maiden.
3. For be | hold from henceforth: all gener- ations. Shall |
call me | bless-ed
4. For he that is mighty hath magni-fi-ed | me : (p) and |
holy | is his | Name.

The example above is a single chant. This is mainly only used for very short psalms (half a dozen verses or so).

The most commonly used chants are double chants. These are twice the length of a single chant. The music of the chant is repeated for every pair of verses. This reflects the structure of the Hebrew poetry of many of the psalms: Each verse is in two halves - the second half answers the first: the verses are in the second verse answers the first.

Triple and quadruple chants are considerably rarer. They appeared from the latter part of the 19th century to cover some of the exceptions to this format. They set the verses of the psalm in groups of three or four verses respectively. Psalm 2 (for example) is suited to a triple chant a quadruple chant might be used for Psalm 78.

A double chant is divided into "quarters", each of which has the music for half a verse. Triple and quadruple chants may also be described as containing six or eight quarters.

If the entire text (or a section of it) has an odd number of verses, the second half of the chant is usually repeated at an appropriate point, which may be marked "2nd part". Similarly, "3rd part" markings may be used for triple chants.

An example of a double chant:

Scores

A double Anglican Chant with the chords in different colours

Below are the four lines of the doxology Gloria Patri (commonly known as the "Gloria"), with the text coloured to show which words correspond to which notes in the music (pointing from choir to choir).

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son: and to the Holy Ghost:

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ' ever' shall be: world without' end
A' - -' men.

The New Cathedral Psalter chanting method.

Glory be to the Father and | to the | Son: and to the | Holy Ghost;

As it was in the beginning, * is now and | ever | shall be: world without |
end. | A ' - -' men.

The doxology Gloria Patri, usually sung at the end of a psalm or canticle, is two verses long.

Depending on the type of chant, it is sung in one of the following ways:

- to a single chant sung twice,
- to a double chant,
- to an appropriate 14 bars (usually specified by the composer) of a triple chant or quadruple chant.

*The Parish Psalter chanting method***SCORES****The New Cathedral Psalter chanting method**

1. I was glad when they said | unto | me: We will go into the | house
| of the | lord
2. Our feet shall stand in thy gates: O- Je- rusa- lem.
3. Jerusalem is built as a city : that is at | uni-ty | in it-|self.
4. For thither the tribes go up even the tribes|of the | Lord to testify
unto Isracl to give thanks unto the Name | of the| Lord.

2nd Part

5. For there is the | seat of judgment: even the seat |of the | house of
David.
6. O pray for the peace of Je-| rusalem: they shall prosper. That love
hee.
7. Peace be with- in thy walls : and plenteous-I ness with-| in thy I
palaces.
8. For my brethren and com- I panious'| sakes :I will wish thee pros-
perity.
9. Yes, because of the house of the Lord our God: I will| seek todo
thee good.

The challenges and Interpretation of the Chanting of Psalms

The interpretation of singing of Psalms in chanting is a challenge to most choirs in the Anglican Communion. These challenges are categorised into two divisions which include;

1. Personal discipline
2. Technical know how

Personal Discipline: This is a vital tool for every chorister to imbibe for self-development and growth. It takes self-discipline for an individual chorister to have their rehearsal without waiting for choir rehearsal days alone. Self-discipline fosters personal rehearsals, punctuality to choir rehearsals, and attendance at choir rehearsals. Personal rehearsals account for 70% of the growth and development of any choir or chorister, while the choirmaster's input contributes 30%. If a chorister is disciplined, that chorister shall make efforts to get his/her personal copies of any song rehearsed in his/her spare time, but the reverse is the case. They only

depend on the choirmaster to teach them at rehearsals, without personal rehearsals.

Lateness and absence from choir rehearsals consecutively: A rehearsal that is supposed to last for two hours, you see some choristers coming in one hour or 30 minutes to the close of rehearsals. The question is, how can they learn or improve in the art of singing when they do not have self-discipline? They go late to rehearsals or absent themselves from choir rehearsals because of divided attention and a lack of passion. This is a challenge faced in most choirs, and because of the late arrival to rehearsals, the possibility of achieving much is limited. When hymns and Chants are introduced in the first choir rehearsal of the week, it is expected that they should be perfected on the last choir rehearsal of the week. But in most cases, it is treated with

levity. It will just be placed aside because the choirmaster and the choristers feel that it is a familiar tune. As a result of that, it is not given a technical and interpretative touch.

The interpretation of chanting a canticle or a Psalm

Chanting of Psalms is an essential aspect of worship in the Anglican Communion, and should be done in reverence for the Almighty God. The Psalms should be chanted slowly and with attention, not rushed through. Most choirs in the Anglican Communion have lost the touch of chanting. They often ignore its interpretation, and in most cases, it is presented in a rushed manner. When it is rushed, the solemnity of the Psalm is lost. The Psalms are prayers provided for mankind to hear God. By chanting the Psalms slowly, we can listen to the Lord speaking to us, as these are prayers, He has provided for us.

Every chant book has its own laydown rules or method of chanting. You cannot apply the chanting pattern of the New Cathedral Psalter to that of the Parish Psalter; neither shall you apply that of the Parish Psalter to the New Cathedral Psalter. They all have their laid-down rules that must be observed and respected. The pattern for the Parish Psalter is speech reading or sung to the bar. But the New Cathedral Psalter observes blacker syllables or bolder syllables in its chanting. Sometimes, what we see is a mixture of the New Cathedral chanting pattern and the Parish Psalter

pattern of chanting in one chant. Sometimes the choir uses the New Cathedral Psalter in chanting the Psalms and ends up using the Parish Psalter pattern in chanting the Gloria.

Paying Attention to the Interpretation of Chanted Psalms

Every Psalm to be chanted carries a message for the edification of the worshipers. The message is conveyed through the singers as they sing and chant the Hymns and Psalms. A choir might have good voice qualities, but be unable to pitch high notes without conveying the message of the psalms to be chanted. This is because they are only concerned and satisfied with just getting the tune of the music without paying attention to its interpretation. In interpreting the Psalms, the choristers should have a full understanding of the meaning of the song and also be able to interpret it.

The following technical areas are: Attack, Harmony and blend, breath control and phrasing. Dynamics and articulation, tempo and accompaniment must be taken into cognisance in the interpretation of the chanting of the Psalms. These technical areas are neglected by most choirmasters and choirs, for practical interpretation and for the message to be passed.

SCORES

The above chant shall be used to interpret the singing of the Gloria in both the New Cathedral Psalter chanting pattern and that of the Parish Psalter chanting patterns.

Discussion of Findings

This study critically and structurally examined the choirs in the area under study and realised that most of the choirmasters are unintelligible in terms of tick note, stressed syllables, and differences between single, double and quadruple chants. While some are negligent about it. The study also found that some choirmasters are not teachable, even when their attention is called for correction, they ignore it, and the choristers do not have a choice but to continue what they are directed to sing. In this way, proper interpretations are ignored or disregarded.

Conclusion

The Psalms have always held an essential place in the worship of the Anglican Communion. In their metrical form, adopted by the Church of Scotland in 1650, they have endeared themselves to the people, and many generations of continuous use have made them an integral part of Scottish thought and speech. As a rule, the Anglican chant was fairly well suited for giving the Psalms a reverent and dignified rendering, in a manner which enabled the congregation to participate, but the recitation of three or more Psalms in a single service led in many churches to a tendency to hurry to reduce as much as possible the time occupied in singing, and eventually in the cathedrals and larger churches the Psalms were sung at a pace which made it quite impossible for the ordinary worshipper to take part. The method of pointing, by which words and syllables, particularly prepositions and conjunctions, were accented irrespective of their importance, often succeeded in distorting the sense of the Psalm.

The Hymns and Chanting of Psalms have always held an essential place in the worship of the Anglican Communion. This study examines the challenges and interpretation of Hymn singing and Chanting of Psalms by the choir in the Anglican Communion, which hinges on A & M Reversed 160 and A & M 382, as well as a double Chant for the interpretation of Gloria, using The New Cathedral Psalter and The Parish Psalter as reference points. The singing of Hymns is so significant that Sunday services begin with Hymns and close with Hymns. The singing of hymns and chant is part of the worship of the Anglican Communion, of which the choir plays an essential role in leading the congregation through worship sessions in hymn singing and chanting of Psalms.

Recommendation

The growth and development of a choir should not only be determined by a yearly competition of the various church choirs in the Anglican Communion, but a deliberate effort of choirmasters to engage their choristers every week by giving them singing tasks part by part and individual choristers to develop themselves. It should be made mandatory for all choristers to have their personal Hymns and Psalters for effective learning. This study also recommends that workshops should be organised from time to time to develop and train the choristers on the art of singing and ministration.

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