

The title page image is a visualisation created by the author of a word frequency analysis applied to the 42,000 words of free-text answers submitted in response to the survey question ‘Why do you go to Evensong nowadays?’. The question was asked in the 2019 ‘Experiences of Evensong’ survey conducted for this study.

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Abstract

Choral Evensong is sung every day in Anglican churches across the UK, attracting thousands of people each week to its congregations. In the context of declining Anglican church attendance overall, Evensong's appeal has been attributed, anecdotally, to its music. This thesis reports the findings of a musicological study conducted to investigate why people go to Evensong, what they experience while they are there, and how the music of Evensong is implicated in these motivations and experiences.

The study took an interdisciplinary approach based on the sociology, and the social and applied psychology, of music. It adopted a multi-method approach incorporating participant observation, 43 in-depth interviews; an immersive, real-time experimental study involving 26 participants; and two surveys which elicited more than 2,100 responses.

Drawing on the findings of each of these methods, the thesis locates Evensong within the framework of music in everyday life, as a powerful and trusted technology of the self. It argues that emotional and cognitive transformation are central to many people's experiences of the service, and it demonstrates that the attainment of tranquillity, transcendence, and a sense of retreat are particularly highly valued and frequently reported outcomes. It suggests that these are pursued through an active and sophisticated listening practice involving both agency and its relinquishment, and argues that notwithstanding participants' often parallel practices, objectives, and results, their experiences of Evensong are characterised as much by plurality as similarity. It is proposed that it is the multiplicity of ways of listening that Evensong affords that enables so many 'sorts and conditions' of listener to be satisfied by it.

The thesis has ramifications for our understanding of the types, modes and practices of music listening in which people engage to pursue cognitive and affective objectives; of the mechanisms by which the same music can elicit different experiences among diverse groups of co-present listeners; and of the creative uses to which listeners can put live musical events.

A note on Choral Evensong

Throughout this thesis, the term ‘Choral Evensong’ (hereafter ‘Evensong’) refers to the choral performance of the Anglican church service of Evening Prayer, as it is sung by the professional choirs of Anglican cathedrals. This ‘cathedral music’ style of Evensong is also commonly found in Royal Peculiars (for example St George’s Chapel Windsor), greater churches, and collegiate chapels.

Lasting around 45 minutes and performed every evening at around 5 or 6 pm, Evensong is a fully choral, highly musical event. Its text comes from the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, and the elements of the service that recur each day – the preces and responses, the psalms, and the *Magnificat* and *Nunc dimittis* canticles, as well as an anthem – are each sung, chanted, or intoned by the choir and/or officiating clergy.¹ The musical repertoire encompasses five centuries of compositions written specifically for the service, as well as pre-Reformation works, and music from other Christian traditions. The musical settings performed are characteristically elaborate and technically demanding.

Cathedral choirs usually comprise up to 16 lay clerks and 16 or more child choristers, singing soprano/treble, alto/countertenor, tenor, and bass, normally divided into two, facing, choirs. Evensong congregations do not join the choirs in singing the service. On Sundays and feast days, it is common practice in many places for the congregation to sing a hymn before and/or after the service, but a defining characteristic of cathedral-style Evensong is that the service itself is sung by the choir alone.

More than 60% of cathedrals reported growing Evensong congregations in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. Precise attendance figures are unavailable as the Church produces data by day of the week rather than by service. Regular services, however,

¹ The full text of the Order for Evening Prayer can be found on [the website of the Church of England](#) (2021).

of which Evensong is both one of the most common, and the most consistently well-attended in nearly half of cathedrals, attract more than 37,000 people each week, including almost 20,000 people on week days (The Church of England Research & Statistics 2019, 2, 7; Holmes and Kautzer 2013, 28).

Other forms of Evensong can be found in Anglican churches in addition to the cathedral-style Choral Evensong that is described above, and that is the subject of this thesis. Along with the small proportion of parish churches that sing cathedral-style Evensong – such as the renowned All Saints Margaret Street, London – there are many parishes that perform musical Evening Prayer services. These services may be sung by choirs of amateur singers with or without congregational singing, or by congregations alone, usually using simpler music than is found in cathedrals. Services of this sort are also often termed ‘Choral Evensong’, as well as ‘Sung Evensong’, or ‘Sung Evening Prayer’. In some settings, the spoken Evening Prayer service is referred to as ‘Said Evensong’. Some churches offer Choral Evening Prayer, which, where it is not simply another name for Choral Evensong, may be a truncated version of Evensong, or an Evening Prayer service using modern liturgy or music. For clarity and consistency, all of these types of service fall outside the scope of this study, because its purpose is to examine the experiences of people who form the congregations of the full Choral Evensong service, as it is performed in the cathedral music tradition.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Field notes

Westminster Abbey: Central London, England. A Tuesday in August 2018.

4.15 p.m. I cross Parliament Square towards Westminster Abbey. The Abbey has been closed until this afternoon following a terrorist incident nearby this morning. There is a conspicuous armed police presence. Parliament Square, however, looks as it usually does: thronged with tourists enjoying the August sunshine, picnicking and taking photographs with selfie-sticks in front of the scaffolding presently surrounding Big Ben. Around a hundred people are already waiting in the queue for Evensong, snaking around the corner towards St Margaret's church... I join the line. The people around me are chatting in Italian, and Spanish, and English with American accents, and photographing one another queuing. There is an atmosphere of excitement and anticipation.

4.45 p.m. Uniformed officials open the Abbey's wrought iron gates. 'Are you here for the service?' they ask each person in turn. Some people do not seem to understand, but almost everyone says yes. I hear a large family group ahead of me – tourists, I think – who have been photographing one another in the queue for half an hour, being told 'The Abbey is closed, you'll have to come back tomorrow'. They wander away looking puzzled at the hundreds of people entering.

4.50 p.m. I reach the gates and say, 'I'm here for the service', opening my bag in anticipation of the security checks that I have learned will come next. I am ushered inside, then guided briskly down a side aisle. I am asked twice more if I am here for the service. I join another queue at an inner gate. When admitted, I am directed to a seat in a block of stackable chairs in the transept, out of sight of the choir. The congregational seating in the area where the choir will sing is already full, as are the first eight rows of the south transept. I take the seat to which I am directed on the ninth. There are two flat-screen televisions mounted on the stone pillars, facing the seating; I see that a still image of the altar is now being shown. From here, it seems, we will watch the service on the television.

5 p.m. There are now around 500 people in the congregation. On the screen, I see the choir enter. I look at the people around me as the opening responses are sung. Most look enchanted...

Westminster Abbey, Central London, England. A Wednesday in August 2018.

4.40 p.m. The weather is warm and sunny. I did not plan to go to Evensong today, but finding myself free to attend, I take the opportunity. Without time to check the service list, I hasten towards the Abbey. I note that Parliament Square is busy as usual, but outside the Abbey there is no queue in the usual place. I wonder if there *is* a service. The gates are already open; have people been admitted earlier than usual? I notice that unlike on my earlier visits, the building is still open for sightseeing. I also observe that unusually for this time of day, there is a long queue of people at the visitors' entrance waiting to pay for admission.

4.45 p.m. I check the Abbey website on my phone. Today's 5.00 p.m. service is 'Said Evening Prayer': there will be no Evensong, and no choir. I walk towards the usual entrance. There is no queue. I approach the gate, but before I can deliver my usual 'I'm here for the service', an official calls over to me: 'Service only here'. 'Yes,' I say, 'I'm here for the service'. 'It's said tonight', one replies. 'Yes, that's right, the said service, please', I say. I sense that this was not the response they were expecting. 'Right then. That way'...

4.50 p.m. Inside, the nave is busy with Abbey visitors, some wearing headsets listening to audio guides, some with guidebooks. Others are lighting candles, or examining exhibits. There are occasional squeals from lively children. I approach the inner gate and see that it is already open. I walk through and, for the first time, I am directed into the choir area. I take a seat in one of the front pews, right next to the choir stalls. I count 40 people already seated. People are still arriving, but in small numbers. Two entire rows of seats in the choir remain empty.

5.00 p.m. Around 90 people are seated for the service. There are still a few places available in the choir stalls. There has been no need for anyone to sit in the transept, which remains roped-off from the service, still open to Abbey visitors. A few stand and stare from behind the rope as the congregation assembled in the choir for Evening Prayer stand, and begin quietly, and with a little uncertainty, to read aloud the normally sung responses from the service sheet...

1.1. 'Just there for the music'?

Every evening in Britain, thousands of people go to Choral Evensong. This thesis reports the findings of a musicological investigation initiated to find out why. It explores their motivations for attendance, and their experiences when they are there.

The study was stimulated by three parallel developments in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. First, an innovative and influential body of ethnographically oriented literature emerged investigating routine music listening and its role in everyday life. With Tia DeNora's seminal text at its centre (DeNora 2000; see also Sloboda, O'Neill, and Ivaldi 2001), and building on Anthony Giddens's (1991) concept of the 'reflexive project' of the self, this body of work established quotidian music listening as an important constitutive feature of human agency, actively deployed in everyday life to support a wide range of emotional and cognitive objectives. Second, interest in the musical experiences of Christian congregations increased markedly, and a new interdisciplinary field of Christian Congregational Music studies was founded. Through empirical research, this identified the church congregation as a site of profound musical experience, and church music as a mechanism for constructing meaning, forming individual and collective identities, and achieving personal transformation (e.g., Ingalls, Landau, and Wagner 2013; Porter 2014). Third, while attendance at Anglican churches continued its steady decline of around 10% per decade (Park and National Centre for Social Research (Great Britain) 2012), Church of England cathedral Evensong congregations began to grow, unexpectedly and significantly (Barley 2012).² By 2013, Evensong attendance had stabilised at a new, higher level, to become the most consistently well-attended weekday service in nearly half of the country's

² For an analysis and discussion of the growth data, see also Holmes and Kautzer 2013, 19-21.

cathedrals (The Church of England Research & Statistics 2019; Holmes and Kautzer 2013, 21, 26–28).

Considering each development in the context of the others raises three overarching musicological questions about Evensong: why do people today go to Evensong? What do they experience while they are there? And how, to borrow DeNora's (2000; 2003) conception, does the music of Evensong 'get into the action' of participants' lived experiences?

Although cathedral surveys had suggested the importance of the quality and popularity of cathedral music (e.g., Holmes and Kautzer 2013, 28; Church Commissioners for England 2014, 21), at the commencement of this study, these questions had not been the subject of systematic musicological investigation. There were, and remain, however, many theories about the appeal of Evensong and its music. One suggests that Evensong is seen by some primarily as a free concert, especially in settings with professional choirs (Brett 2016; see, e.g., Ferret 2017). Some suggest Evensong's attraction is as a cultural experience, in which tourists and sightseers can enjoy a cathedral in action, and without paying the usual entrance fee (Pepinster 2017; see, e.g., Tarheel 2009). Others propose it is the nostalgia for a particular idea of 'the best of Britain' that Evensong evokes that is key, as a country that survives 'unamendable in all essentials' – 'long shadows on county grounds, warm beer, invincible green suburbs, dog lovers and pools fillers and... "Old maids bicycling to holy communion through the morning mist", as John Major put it – an appeal reportedly acknowledged even by Richard Dawkins (Murray 2013).³

³ The 'old maids bicycling to Holy Communion' idea, quoted by Major from an extended essay on England and Englishness by George Orwell (1941), is often paraphrased as referring to 'spinsters cycling to evensong' – e.g., J.G. Ballard (2006), Grant (2016), Maconie (2009), Millen (2020), Rennison (2004).

Further hypotheses suggest that Prayer Book services – of which Evensong is today one the most frequently performed – attract Anglicans who prefer traditional liturgies and styles of worship, and people who value the Prayer Book for artistic, cultural or literary reasons (e.g., Giles Fraser, in Letts 2015, from 00:13:00). Others draw attention to the appeal of the opportunity to ‘sit back and luxuriate’ (Lynch 2014), to find peace (Jenkins 2016; Macintyre 2017), and the freedom from obligation that cathedral attendance offers in comparison to parish church membership (Platten 2006). Other cathedral-centred theories focus on cathedrals’ cultural position as a liminal place – ‘common ground’ – between the sacred and the secular (C. Lewis 1998), and to the anonymity that they allow people who do not wish to discuss their motives or beliefs (Reynolds 2021), especially newcomers exploring questions of faith (Rylands 2006). Practical and logistical considerations, like the convenience of the time of day at which Evensong is sung, also frequently recur in propositions about Evensong’s relative success (Barley 2012, 83–84; Lynch 2014; Reynolds 2021).

The extracts from the field notes with which this chapter begins were taken as part of the participant observation strand of this project. The first service, an ordinary, weekday, but fully choral Evensong sung by a robed choir, drew hundreds of participants, even though there had been a terrorist incident close by just a few hours earlier. The second, a spoken (‘said’) service using exactly the same liturgy, held on an uneventful weekday in the same month, attracted a congregation of only around one fifth of the size. For people who simply want to see a historic building without paying an entrance fee, hear the Prayer Book’s 1662 text performed in a traditional way, attend church at a convenient time, fit a service into a busy schedule, or participate without commitment, for example, the spoken service would seem to offer an equally good, if not better solution: shorter, everyone seated in the choir – or in some cathedrals wherever they wish – and, often, fewer restrictions on access to the rest of

the building before or after it. If these were participants' motivations, as some of the theories suggest, why, then, choose Evensong? Or were people really 'just' there for the music? And if they were, how are we to understand their motives and experiences in musicological terms?

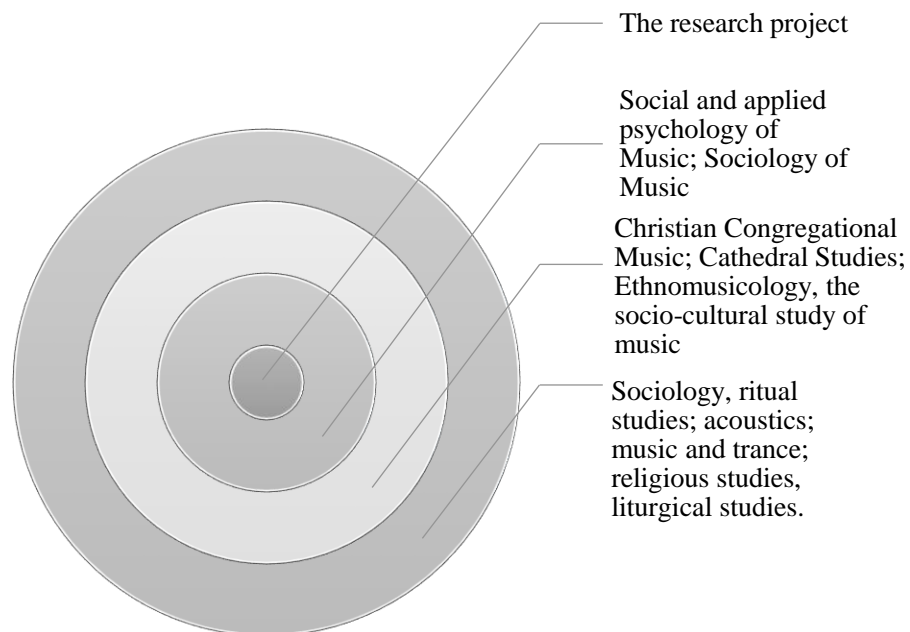
The purpose of reporting the observations of these two services is not to imply any conclusions about the attendance levels at different types of evening service: no safe finding could be based on such limited evidence. Rather, they are presented here because they foreshadow what was to become a powerful overarching finding: 'the music' is central both to the attraction, and to the experience of Evensong for almost everyone who participated in this study, but that experience is very seldom 'just' a musical one. The central aim of this study, therefore, was to explore in respect of Evensong participants the question Christopher Small (1998, 17) posed in respect of the classical concert audience, a population which has, as will be seen, both similarities with, and differences from, the Evensong congregation: 'What', from a musicological perspective, 'is really going on here'?

1.2. Exploring the questions

The study is located within the academic frameworks of the sociology of music and the social and applied psychology of music. Thus, while Evensong's position as a live, liturgical event mean that it could be amenable to a range of alternative, non-musicological approaches – ecclesiological, liturgical, theological, ritual, ethnographic, cultural, anthropological, or socio-economic, for example, among many others – this investigation is focused on developing a musicological understanding of the relationship between music and listener in the Evensong setting. The richness of lived human experience is often not, however, readily divisible into disciplinary parts, and matters that might more conventionally be considered within other disciplines arose during the study, and are included within the thesis where they are relevant to, or intertwined with, the musicological investigation. Similarly, approaches,

writing, and findings from fields and disciplines outside the study's two core areas of focus are drawn upon where they intersect with, or provide a useful perspective on, the musicological discussions. A model of the project's disciplinary location might therefore be presented as a series of concentric circles (see Figure 1), with the psychology of music and sociology of music providing the core principles. The second ring from the centre contains the closely related fields and disciplines with which the study engages: Christian Congregational Music, Cathedral Studies, ethnomusicology, and the socio-cultural study of music. Less central to this study, but providing useful perspectives and contexts for its findings, are works in the less closely connected disciplines, fields, methods, and frameworks of sociology, ritual studies, acoustics, and identity theory.

Figure 1. Disciplinary positioning of the research project



The research methodology was designed around two primary objectives: first, to be exploratory and inductive, because the limited amount of previous musicological research precluded the informed development of meaningful hypotheses. And second, to be wide-ranging in focus, because approaching the research questions from multiple perspectives was

judged to offer the greatest potential for making rich and reliable findings. Details of the study's methodological approach and rationale are set out in Chapter 3, but in summary, it comprised participant observation, interviews involving 43 Evensong participants, a survey strand encompassing two national questionnaire surveys to which 2,100 people responded to a total of 37 questions, and an experimental component, involving a bespoke, immersive study. This was developed to gather information in real time about multiple facets of 26 Evensong participants' cognitive, emotional, and physiological states and processes.

1.3. Exploring the findings

The data generated by each of the methods were analysed separately and together, and the prevalent topics and ideas identified. Three themes were particularly predominant, and their discussion and analysis form the basis of this thesis. All three relate to types of personal transformation. The first concerns the increased inner tranquillity, peace, and calm that emerged as central to many participants' experiences of Evensong. The second is focused upon the multiple states of transcendence that it became evident that Evensong affords. The third theme encompasses the transformations that are catalysed when Evensong is experienced as a retreat, or asylum, from everyday life, and into modes of authentic being and self-expression militated against by the world outside Evensong.

The thesis has ten chapters. After this introductory Chapter One, Chapter Two sets out the evidential basis for the study and the scholarly frameworks with which it engages. It reviews the literature on listening to music in everyday life, explores what is known about experiences of music listening in general, and in religious settings, and evaluates the findings of the few studies addressed specifically to Evensong. Chapter Three describes the methodological approach of the study. It explains the overall research strategy, details its three methodologies, and sets out the rationale for the adoption of each, and the study design and research approaches used in each case.

The thesis then turns to the findings made in this study, taking in sequence its three main themes of tranquillity, transcendence, and the sense of retreat. Chapters Four and Five both explore the first theme, tranquillity. Chapter Four first presents the evidence for the association between Evensong and increased objective and subjective measures of affective calm, before going on to demonstrate the fundamental role of listener agency in this affective transformation. It closes by proposing a model of the mechanisms by which intentional self-transformation might be achieved at Evensong. Chapter Five elaborates on this model, focusing on the musical components of Evensong to investigate how and why they are perceived as peaceful and calming, and how their ability to afford a sense of peace and tranquillity gets into the action of listeners' affective experience.

Chapters Six and Seven address the theme of transcendence. Chapter Six proposes seven varieties of transcendence experienced by Evensong participants, as evidenced in this study. These share with one another the characteristics of ineffability, transience, and the affordance of transformation, but are otherwise distinctive in their manifestation. Chapter Seven explores the plurality of these experiences. It investigates how the music affords transcendence of such diversity, and proposes an explanation based on the unique combination of personal and culturally conditioned meanings and evocations, the private memories, and emotional associations, and the intentional, practiced self-direction of each individual participant.

Chapters Eight and Nine are concerned with Evensong's function as a place of retreat, sanctuary, or asylum. Chapter Eight considers the ways in which Evensong offers an escape from everyday life and an antidote to the external social world that enables its participants to become, for the duration of the service, transformed. Chapter Nine considers Evensong's contrasting but complementary function as a retreat not *from* something, but *to* somewhere: to

a space and time where different ways of knowing, doing, and being are possible, and participants gain the freedom to be their authentic self, to belong, and to flourish.

Chapter Ten reviews the study's findings in relation to the research questions, identifies their connections to and development of existing scholarship, and their wider implications and ramifications. It addresses the study's limitations, and closes by identifying viable directions that future research might take in respect of Evensong, and beyond.

1.4. Key terms

Some of the terms it is necessary to use in a discussion of Evensong have multiple or potentially ambiguous meanings, or are commonly used in ways that do not accurately represent what was found in this study. For clarity, the way that these terms are used in this thesis is therefore set out below.

Book of Common Prayer, The (or ‘the Prayer Book’) is the text from which the Evensong service, which uses the liturgy of the Evening Prayer service, is taken. It was first published in 1549, but the current version widely used is from 1662. Some churches use a version slightly updated in 1928.

Cathedral music here refers to the genre of church music regularly performed in English cathedrals. It incorporates the music sung by four-part choirs and performed on church organs. The adult choir members are usually professional musicians, and the child choristers are highly trained. Cathedral music is also found in non-cathedral churches, most typically the college choirs of Oxford, Cambridge, and Durham; the Royal Peculiars; and the Greater Churches.

Choral Evensong, abbreviated throughout as ‘Evensong’, is defined on the opening page.

Church, the, capitalised, refers to the institution of the Church of England, the Anglican Church, also commonly known as ‘the C of E’.

church, lower case, refers to an individual Anglican community or building.

Congregation here refers to the population of people (‘congregants’) who attend Evensong without having a role in its delivery: what in non-sacred settings would be called ‘the audience’. It is acknowledged that this is a different usage to that applied in churches, where ‘congregation’ typically encompasses the entire body of people assembled at a church service, including clergy and musicians. But in the absence of an established term for the

subset of this population who are the subjects of this study, which excludes the choir, musicians, officiating clergy, acolytes, and church employees and volunteers, like vergers, when they are acting in those capacities, the more everyday use – ‘a body of persons assembled to hear a preacher’, or here, a service – has been adopted (‘Congregation, n.’ 2021).⁴

Evensong participant here similarly does not include those participating in the service as musicians or who otherwise have a role in performing the service, only members of the congregation, as defined above. Many other studies use the term ‘worshipper’ for this population; that is avoided here because, as will be shown, not all those present at Evensong are there to worship or identify as worshippers. The term ‘visitor’ is also avoided because there are many worshippers who do not consider themselves visitors; there are many more whose intentions and activities are complex or ambiguous. ‘Participant’ is thus intended to convey neutrality of activity and purpose.

The people who took part in the **Immersive Evensong Study**, or **IES**, are termed **IES participants**.

Names of participants and interviewees are all pseudonyms. Identifying details have been changed.

The people who responded to this study’s surveys are referred to as **Survey Respondents** or **SRs**. Where it is relevant to the context, anonymised information about an individual SR’s characteristics, taken from their survey response, is provided.

⁴ As will be seen, many of the people who attend Evensong as members of the congregation are also involved in the delivery of Evensong services at other times and places. This study’s focus was, however, on their motivations and experiences as congregation members.

Chapter 2. Foundations, frameworks, and findings: a review of the literature

The question of how music affects those who hear it has occupied philosophers since antiquity (Budd 1992; Clayton et al. 2012, 4; Sterne 2012, 16) and the Christian church since its foundation (Long 1972, 32; Begbie 2005; 2013). Since the twentieth century, it has also been the subject of substantial academic research in disciplines including anthropology (Merriam 1964), ethnomusicology (Blacking 1974), psychology (Hargreaves and North 1997; North and Hargreaves 2008), sociology (Adorno 1976; DeNora 2000; Hennion 2001), cultural studies (Clayton et al. 2012), popular music studies (Frith 1983) and critical musicology (J. D. Kramer 1988; Leppert and McClary 1989; McClary 2002). This chapter provides a focused overview of the existing scholarly foundations, frameworks, and findings of particular salience to this study, in preparation for their further discussion in conjunction with the research presented in the chapters that follow.

Evensong is a highly musical event, and this is a musicological study of experiences of it. The chapter therefore begins with a review of what is known about how and why people choose to listen to and use music in everyday life, including the role of recorded, broadcast or digitally accessed music, and of attending live events. It then considers what research has shown about the nature of musical listening experiences, including cognitive and emotional responses to self-selected music; how music is experienced in sacred settings; and the relationship between music listening and altered states. Next, the literature specifically addressing experiences of religious music, Christian congregational participation, and Anglican cathedrals, is reviewed. The final part of the chapter assesses what has been established with specific regard to the experiences of Evensong participants, by the small number of studies to date to have approached them.

2.1 Listening to music in everyday life

People choose to listen to music as part of their everyday lives because they find that it performs one or more constructive functions (North and Hargreaves 2008, 5; Rentfrow and Gosling 2003; Sloboda, O'Neill, and Ivaldi 2001, 11). One of the most important of these is the moderation and modulation of emotion, arousal, and cognitive condition: using music as what Krueger (2019) calls 'affective scaffolding'.⁵

Self-regulation and affective scaffolding

In a foundational ethnographic study, DeNora (2000) identified an array of creative ways in which she found people to be instinctively, routinely, and purposively deploying technologically-mediated music listening, including to create, change and reinforce a mood, to aid concentration, and as a medium of self-expression. Her findings have been widely confirmed and elaborated, including using experience sampling methods (e.g. Greasley and Lamont 2011; Juslin et al. 2008) and survey instruments: 96% of participants in Lonsdale and North's (2011) questionnaire study, for example, reported using music in this way. The contexts in which this kind of musical self-regulation have now been evidenced include workplaces (Dibben and Haake 2013; Frith 1983; A. E. Krause, North, and Hewitt 2014; Thayer, Newman, and McClain 1994), the private spaces of cars and the home (Sloboda, Lamont, and Greasley 2008), and the public domains of public transport and the city streets (Bull 2000; 2007; 2019).⁶

DeNora (2000, 62) found one of the main affective motivations for listening to music to be 'the care of the self', including for relaxation and stress management, a finding also made by Greasley and Lamont (2011), Juslin and colleagues (2008), Semenza (2017), and

⁵ See also DeNora (2000), Juslin and Laukka (2004a), Krause and colleagues (2014), and Sloboda and colleagues (2008).

⁶ For a review see Cook and colleagues (2017).

van Goethem and Sloboda (2011). The solid evidential basis for the efficacy of these intuitively initiated, self-directed listening practices was laid out at the beginning of the twenty-first century in three texts: North and Hargreaves's *The Social and Applied Psychology of Music* (2008), which draws together the 'scattered and eclectic' literature on the experiential consequences of music listening; Juslin and Sloboda's *Handbook of Music and Emotion* (2011), the first edited collection devoted to musical emotions; and Gabrielsson's *Strong Experiences with Music* (2011), which details the findings of a ten-year project in which 965 people submitted for analysis their own accounts of the 'strongest experience with music' they had ever had. These texts, together with those on which they build, and the large body of works that have followed them, highlight how music can elicit strong emotional affect (Konečni 2008), that is both self-perceived (Gabrielsson 2011; Krumhansl 1997; Semenza 2017), and objectively measurable, for example through physiological responses (Blood et al. 1999; Gomez and Danuser 2007; Panksepp 1995; Trainor and Schmidt 2003).

Many studies have further shown that a heightened state of arousal can be lowered through music listening, including when that state results from an emotional disorder (Gold, Voracek, and Wigram 2004; Kim and Stegemann 2016), a specific, stressful situation (Chafin et al. 2004), or generalised, everyday stress and anxiety (Zentner, Grandjean, and Scherer 2008; Sandstrom and Russo 2010; Seinfeld et al. 2016). Research by Amanda Krause (2017; A. E. Krause and North 2016) has shown that listeners naturally select arousal-moderating music, preferring that with a level of stimulation that contrasts with any elevated or reduced state they are experiencing, while Linneman and colleagues (2015; 2016) found that music's stress reducing effect was most evident when it was listened to specifically for relaxation, and in the late afternoon and early evening (Linneman et al. 2015) – the time when Evensong is sung. They also found that listening to music in the presence of others is particularly stress-

reducing, even where the people co-present are unfamiliar, and no activities which might lead to receiving social support are undertaken (Linnemann, Strahler, and Nater 2016). Overall, music has been found to be most effective in reducing an elevated state of arousal when it is: (i) self-selected, regardless of style and genre (Labbé et al. 2007); (ii) low in arousal and high in affective valence, or positive emotion (Sandstrom and Russo 2010); (iii) listened to with the intention of achieving that outcome (Linnemann, Strahler, and Nater 2016; Linnemann et al. 2015); and (iv) listened to in the company of others (Linnemann, Strahler, and Nater 2016).

Identity construction and acoustic agency

In addition to using music to structure emotion, listeners have also been commonly found to deploy music listening for ‘identity work’ (Snow and Anderson 1987), as part of what Anthony Giddens (1991) termed the ‘reflexive project’ of the self. Using music in this way means invoking it to explore, express, construct, adjust, and ‘reinforce and repair’ self-conceived conceptions of identity (DeNora 2000, 62); and to encapsulate and project the self *to* the self, and to the outside world (Goffman 1971). Antoine Hennion (2001) has accordingly conceived of music listening as a ‘performance’: a reflexive, self-conscious, socialised act involving the construction of space, the configuration of time, the presentation and expression of the self, the rewriting of autobiographies around music listening, and the collective work of co-formation.

Experimental studies have added empirical weight to the important role music listening plays in identity making (MacDonald, Hargreaves, and Miell 2002; 2017), and especially in developing an internal sense of self; in performing that self externally; and in providing information by which to judge others (Chamorro-Premuzic and Furnham 2007; Lonsdale 2017; Lonsdale and North 2009; North, Hargreaves, and O’Neill 2000; North 2010; Tarrant, North, and Hargreaves 2000). Demonstrations of shared musical preference, for

example, have been found to support social bonding and engender a sense of belonging by indicating shared values (Boer et al. 2011; Lonsdale and North 2009).

In sociology, musical engagement has attracted significant interest since the establishment of the discipline. Thinkers like Max Weber (1958) and Theodor Adorno (1976) theorised that Western art music and the circumstances of its production and reception were relational, arguing that social structures were constructive of music and musical life, and vice versa. In 1960s France, and based on a study of cultural activity, Pierre Bourdieu (1984) posited musical taste as a primary marker of social distinction, proposing that ‘nothing more clearly affirms one’s “class”, nothing more infallibly classifies, than tastes in music’ (ibid, 18). While in Bourdieu’s conception, elite status is signalled and sustained through preferences for ‘highbrow’ art forms, like those performed at Evensong, large-scale research in contemporary Britain has, however, suggested a position in which it is through frequent attendance at live music events and publicly displayed engagement in diverse, self-curated listening practices, that distinction is enacted (T. Bennett et al. 2009; Savage and Gayo 2011; Savage 2015).

Choosing to attend live music events

The motivations and functions for attending live music events vary between individuals and contexts, and extend beyond the musical. Christopher Small (1998) has argued that the social dimension of a live concert is as crucial to the concert-goers as its music, engendering a sense of belonging, and creating, in the concert hall, ‘a place where middle-class white people can feel safe together’ (Small 1998, 42; see also Cavicchi 1998). Small particularly emphasised the importance of power relationships and exclusivity in affirming the values of audience members, but also compared the concert hall to a church as a place where encounter with universality, timelessness, and drama are possible, and where ‘magic’ can be made (Small 1998, 11, 17).

The importance of the social dimension of being in-audience has been empirically evidenced by Stephanie Pitts (2005; 2016; see also Burland and Pitts 2014; Dobson and Pitts 2011; Pitts and Spencer 2008), whose fieldwork in a range of musical contexts has found that audience members know or assume themselves to be among like-minded people, with shared objectives and values (2016, 144). Her findings challenge Small's theory of the classical music audience as passively receptive and primarily motivated by social objectives, however, and propose a wider range of motivations that extend beyond the social, individual, and musical to the moral and cultural (2014, 30). Pitts also draws attention to the 'rich, varied, and highly personal' experiences of concert audience members, arguing that they are comparable to those of popular music fans, whose diverse and active uses of live music have been more extensively documented (2016, 96; e.g., Cavicchi 1998; Fiske 1992; 2010).

Based on a study of live audiences at the BBC Proms, Jonathan Gross (2013, 236–39) concluded that it is the reliable, controlled environment of the concert hall that makes rich and unexpected experiences possible for audiences, and that concert goers use these experiences in diverse ways to achieve multiple personal objectives in their everyday lives. These, he found, include organising themselves in time, cultivating aesthetic agency, and experiencing what he terms 'impersonal intimacy' as a group.

Other motivations for classical concert attendance suggested by empirical research include a desire for musical and cultural learning (Benzecry 2009; Pitts 2016; Radbourne et al. 2009); to hear music away from 'worldly distractions' (Pitts 2016, 98); to support live music, the venue, or the event itself (Pitts 2016); and – in amateur performances especially – to support friends and family, or see them in a novel setting (Andy Bennett 2000; Finnegan 1989, 152). Consistent with these findings, arts surveys conducted at a national level have found that people report engaging with live music for social bonding, mood-enhancement, and health and well-being; to have a novel or unique experience; and because live music is

identity-forming, inspiring, multi-sensory, and ‘offers the potential for transcendence’ (Webster et al. 2018, 28–31).

2.2 Experiencing music listening

How an individual listener is affected at any given time by the music that they hear is the result of a complex interplay of cognitive and embodied factors (Iyer 2002; Leman and Maes 2014; Shapiro 2014); situational factors including visual cues, and the physical and social setting (Gabrielsson 2011; Juslin 2008; Juslin et al. 2008); the listener’s state and the activities in which they are engaged before and during listening (Dibben 2004; Juslin and Västfjäll 2008); and their life and musical experiences, as well as the music itself (Juslin and Västfjäll 2008). A listener in a heightened state of bodily arousal, even as a result of an activity unrelated to the music, like recent aerobic exercise, for example, is more likely to have a deeply moving musical experience than a listener who is not (Dibben 2004). Music that prompts the recall of an earlier emotional experience is likely to evoke responses similar to the original experience when it is heard again (Scherer and Zentner 2008). And music heard in classically rectangular-shaped concert halls, for example, is associated with a more intense emotional response than the same music heard in other settings, including in a concert hall of a different shape (Pätynen and Lokki 2016), as is music performed by visible, co-present musicians (Chapados and Levitin 2008; Vuoskoski et al. 2016). Nor is the musical meaning that is heard by a listener fixed by or within the music itself. Rather, it is socially constructed and culturally influenced, dynamically related to the listening context, and resides, ultimately, not in the music itself but within each thinking, feeling, individual (Juslin and Laukka 2004b; Chua 1999; Small 1998; DeNora 2000; 2003; E. F. Clarke 2005; 2011; Shelemay 2011). Accordingly, Arnold (2014, xii–xv) has observed that sacred music sung in a concert in a cathedral can result in very different experiences from the same music sung in

worship in the same building. As Cross (2003, 108; 2008) has argued, musical meaning is therefore ‘floating’, personal, variable, and ‘transposable’.

In summary, the interplay of multiple factors active in the listening experience can result in the same music eliciting different responses in different listeners at the same time, and in the same listener at different times. Some generalisations, however, are possible.

Listening to ‘religious’ music

Sacred music can have a significant effect on listeners’ thought processes, cognitive states, and behaviour. In an experimental study conducted by Lang and colleagues (2016), ‘religious’ people who heard music associated with their own religious practice became more morally-oriented: they were less likely to take an opportunity to cheat. People who hear religious music in religious buildings commonly describe it in eschatological language, regardless of the context of its performance or their own religious affiliation (Arnold 2014; Mountford 2011; Rijken 2020). And for people who are religious, engaging with church music supports the construction of a religious self-identity, and can strengthen spiritual behavioural responses such as calm prayerfulness (Wuthnow 2003), as well as unity, belonging, and affiliation (Clawson 2004).

Listening, trancing, and altered states

A separate body of work attends specifically to musical experiences in which the listener enters an altered state of consciousness, such as trance or dissociation. This has shown that in common with other cognitive and affective responses to music, trance is a product of both the structures of the music and of the cultural and private associations the listeners attribute to its sounds. Once a listener is trancing, however, the sounds themselves play a central role, serving ‘to guide the flow of fantasy and to structure the affective experience, allowing non-verbal associations to emerge which were otherwise inhibited’ (Badia 2001, xii).

Trance-type experiences are not commonly associated with traditional English Anglican religious services, but are highlighted here for two reasons. First, because recent research by Ruth Herbert (2011b; 2011c; 2013) suggests that low-level trancing may be an important part of everyday musical experience. Drawing on a series of subject-centred ethnographies, Herbert (2011b) has argued that what she calls ‘low-level everyday trance’, marked by absorption and dissociation, is both an everyday occurrence and a normal part of psycho-physiological self-regulation. And second, because as will be shown, while Evensong participants have not been considered to ‘trance’ in the orthodox sense that Gilbert Rouget (1985) described in one of the genre’s definitive texts, the experiences they present are sufficiently outside the everyday to be characterised as ‘altered’ in the terms defined, for example, by Judith Becker (2004). Treating trance as a process rather than a state, Becker emphasises the similarity between the emotional responses of what she terms ‘deep listeners’, who are profoundly moved by music, and those of listeners in religious trance states. In doing so she provides a useful alternative framework for considering a range of musical responses that might be frequent in occurrence but are not everyday in character.

Ways of approaching listening in everyday life

As an inherently internalised experience, there are challenges in obtaining rich, representative, and replicable data about the way that music listening is experienced in real-life situations. The number of music perception studies conducted in naturalistic physical, social, and temporal contexts, and with real-world degrees of listener agency, remains small (Greb, Schlotz, and Steffens 2018; North and Hargreaves 2008). Retrospective interviews and reflective survey methods (e.g., Behne 1997; Gabrielsson 2011; Juslin and Laukka 2004a) offer a high level of ecological validity as they are based on participants’ accounts of real-world musical events, but do not provide the continuously evolving experiential data that are needed to investigate the dynamic relationships between specific events (musical or

otherwise) and participants (Masmoudi, Dai, and Naceur 2012; Schubert 2004). They are also subject to the fallibilities of human memory – defective recollections, the privileging of more unusual events over more typical ones, the condensing of a complex trajectory of assorted thoughts and experiences into a simplified summary, and a tendency for the valence of an experience to distort the recall of its intensity, for example – as well as participant bias arising from the interview situation (Kahneman et al. 2004; Miron-Shatz, Stone, and Kahneman 2009; Robson and McCartan 2016; Sloboda, O’Neill, and Ivaldi 2001), or from what Johanson & Glow (2015) term the ‘positive evaluation phenomenon’, where participants’ own cultural values can contribute to their attribution of a positive evaluation to a cultural event. Nor can these methods in themselves capture the non-cognitive, and unconscious embodied responses that are central to musical experience, but are inherently unamenable to logocentric methods of enquiry (Leman 2008, 18).

An alternative empirical approach to investigating music listening is based on James Gibson’s (1983; 1979) ecological perceptual theory. This locates the real-world relationship between the music, the context, and the listener at the centre of the investigation (E. F. Clarke 2005), and enables a focus on how we do things with music, by treating musical sound as ‘an affordance-laden structure’ with a crucial role in constructing and regulating emotional and social experiences in everyday life (Krueger 2011, 1). In practice, this means attending to the mutual relationship between the listener as a perceiving organism and their environment, and to what the environmental information they perceive ‘specifies’ and ‘affords’, in the terminology of the theory. Eric Clarke (2005) has illustrated how applying this approach reflexively to music perception, using a continuous self-monitoring technique, can provide a real-time account of evolving thoughts during a focused music listening study, and in doing so demonstrates the breadth of an individual’s perceptions and responses to musical sounds. In one of several case studies, he notes, for example, how a single 1969 performance by Jimi

Hendrix can specify culture, instrumentation, political ideology, the human body, and sonic, timbral, and pitch events, and afford meanings that vary according to the cultural context of each listener (2005, 48–61; see also Reybrouck 2005; 2012).

A related approach was implemented by DeNora and Sophie Belcher (2000) in an investigation of musical experiences in a shopping mall. In their study, multiple microphone-wearing participants spoke their thoughts aloud as they visited shops in the mall. Their stream-of-conscious commentaries revealed the rapidity with which their responses to the music they encountered evolved, and the extent to which they were felt rather thought, resisted, and, importantly, reflexively ‘woven into the weft of action’ (DeNora and Belcher 2000, 99).

The ecological model has been criticised on the grounds that the perception-action cycle on which it depends is restricted, if not confounded, by the conventions of Western Art Music settings like the concert hall (Andean 2011; E. F. Clarke 2005, 20; W. L. Windsor 2004), and it is true that many of the fullest worked examples provided to date are autoethnographic (e.g. E. F. Clarke 2005; Krueger 2011). As Andean (2011) has observed, however, the organism-environment-stimulus triad at the centre of the model translates readily into a ‘listener-surroundings-music’ model, a dynamic relationship of three active agents which can reveal the uniqueness of each experience. It has thus been used effectively to uncover, for example, the diverse listener perceptions of electro-acoustic music (Andean 2011); the multiple embodied responses of music listening in general (Godøy 2010; W. L. Windsor 2016); and the contribution of performers’ visually-observed bodily practices to aesthetic experiences (Gurevich and Fyans 2011).

2.3 Experiencing music in religious settings

The role of music in churches

While the early Christians were concerned that music's beneficial ability to 'kindle' the mind 'religiously and fervently to a flame of piety' might be outweighed by its detrimental potential to leave listeners more moved by the music than its message, as the fourth-century writings of St Augustine (quoted in Long 1972, 33) record, the report of the Anglican Church's most recent Commission on Church Music asserts that today, music in worship is 'a necessity':

Where [music is absent] worship is likely to be uninspired and lacking in energy, the life and vigour of the Church...attenuated and its efforts in mission enfeebled... inspired worship usually demands the contribution of good music.
(Church of England General Synod 1992, 172)

People attending an Anglican church service in the UK today, therefore, will almost inevitably encounter music, and while in cathedrals the style is generally predictable, in the parishes, a wide variety of musical genres is found, from more traditional choir and organ ensembles to worship bands and multi-media music. The Church considers this to be a beneficial multiplicity, allowing churchgoers to compare the available musical and liturgical combinations and adopt the one they find 'most helpful and congenial' (Church of England General Synod 1992, 70), or, as Grace Davie (1990, 465) has put it, to select their place of worship on 'a market as opposed to a parish principle'. This choice, however, has not slowed the decline in Anglican churchgoing that has been underway since at least 1851 (Voas and Bruce 2019, 20), and in the latter half of the twentieth century, Anglican congregations shrank at an unprecedented rate (A. Brown and Woodhead 2016, 111; C. G. Brown 2009, 187–90).

The field of Christian congregational music studies

Jeremy Begbie has written that in theology today, discussion of the experience of music in worship is 'conspicuous by its absence' (Begbie 2005, 719; see also McGuire 2016). This, he

has suggested, is a result of a desire in the discipline to avoid being seen to be occupied by the trivial and material; of the inaccessibility of musicological discourse to those outside musicology; and of the difficulties music's inherent ambiguities pose to a branch of learning concerned with truth (Begbie 2013, 2). Ritual and liturgical studies have also historically largely neglected musical matters, because, according to Kay Kaufman Shelemay (2012, 3), non-musically trained scholars believe 'that they cannot handle them with the depth and finesse they exercise in their primary fields'.

Perhaps in part for these reasons, investigations of what music actually does for congregations – and what they, reflexively, do with it – began to gain momentum only at the end of the twentieth century, with the publication of several ethnographies highlighting the intrinsic role of music in scaffolding the intensely emotional spiritual encounters central to Pentecostal and African American Christian worship (Hinson 2000; M. Butler 2000; 2002; 2008). A fast-growing body of Christian congregational music studies has subsequently developed, with an initial field-defining edited collection of cross-disciplinary studies by Monique Ingalls and colleagues (2013) a foundational text. The field's first works have focused primarily on explorations of congregations who sing and make music (for a review, see Porter 2014), unlike those of the Anglican cathedral tradition, but they nonetheless highlight themes that resonate with the wider sociological and psychological literature on musical engagement in its broadest sense, and provide informative context for an investigation of Evensong. In particular, they call attention to church music as a site for the development, negotiation and contestation of identities, and for the mediation of socialities – personal, musical, and religious (Dueck 2016; 2017; Hartje-Doll 2016; Porter 2016; 2017; Povedak 2016; see also Edgell 1999). They also underscore the importance to congregations of being moved by music, and the inter-denominational differences in respect of the musical styles, degrees and forms of musical participation, and emotional experiences regarded as

appropriate and effective in church (Adnams 2016; C. Marsh 2015; Stringer 2005). In addition, they introduce the idea of church music as ‘participatory culture’, in which congregation members actively and autonomously (re)construct meaning (Moore 2015; Wagner 2015), and they illustrate how music in churches can facilitate the negotiation of important theological and ethical questions in ways that other forms of discourse cannot (Porter 2016, 202).

Experiences of Anglican Cathedrals

The literature on experiences of Anglican cathedrals comes in three main forms: statistical visitor and worshipper data; user surveys; and scholarly investigations.

The statistical data show that between 2000 and 2010, weekday congregational attendance at British cathedrals was reported by the Church to have more than doubled, to just under 12,000 (Barley 2012). Further analysis highlighted some anomalies in the data collected in the early part of this period, but subsequent years’ data and the substantial evidence gathered to analyse it have indicated that the growth, especially at weekday services, was ‘real and significant’ (Holmes and Kautzer 2013, 21). Choral Evensong was a major contributor to this trend: a 2012 survey of the country’s 42 cathedrals found that weekday Choral Evensong was growing in 21 of the 35 that submitted data, and that Sunday Choral Evensong ‘was also popular and well attended’, and growing in 13 cathedrals (The Grubb Institute and Theos 2012, 26, 28). The latest statistics show that attendance appeared (pre-pandemic) to have broadly stabilised at this new, higher level, with almost 20,000 people attending ordinary (non-festival) weekday services every week, and more people now going to cathedral services on weekdays than on Sundays (The Church of England Research & Statistics 2019).

One of the largest studies of participants’ experiences of cathedrals since this trend was identified was commissioned by two Church bodies and undertaken by the Grubb

Institute with the thinktank Theos (2012). This had a practice and policy emphasis rather than an academic one, but nonetheless, based on 4,000 questionnaire responses, and 257 interviews at six case-study cathedrals, it provides a comprehensive survey of contemporary cathedral visiting. The authors concluded that central to cathedrals' appeal is what they term 'spiritual capital': a special sense of place and belonging with an inherently spiritual dimension, experienced by 95% of cathedral visitors, including 79% of those who visited the building for a reason other than for a 'religious/sacred experience' (The Grubb Institute and Theos 2012, 18, 25, 29). Calling cathedral music 'one of the glories of the English spiritual tradition', the study further found that cathedral choirs and music are important contributors to participants' experience of cathedrals as a sacred and spiritual space, and argued that music was a key component in visitors' individual spiritual experiences (ibid, 30). A subsequent large-scale study by Holmes and Kautzer for the Church Growth Research Programme (2013) concurred, concluding that where cathedrals were growing, music was fundamental to that growth. Based on statistical analysis of attendance figures and qualitative research with cathedral clergy, they noted that 'music' was consistently in the top three reasons given by those surveyed for visiting a cathedral, and determined that Evensong's position as the most consistently well-attended weekday service in nearly half of the cathedrals surveyed was a reflection of 'the popularity of cathedral music' (Holmes and Kautzer 2013, 28, 42).

In parallel, a new body of 'cathedral studies' scholarship, founded for 'the scientific study of religion and for empirical theology' (Francis 2015, 1) has begun to explore the cathedral from academic perspectives, and its early findings appear to further confirm the centrality of music in cathedrals' appeal. David Walker's analysis of survey data from more than a thousand people attending Christmas carol services at two cathedrals, for example, found that the most common motivation for attendance, cited by 95% of respondents, was 'to enjoy the music'. A somewhat smaller, but still substantial proportion – 75% – said that they

went to worship God (Walker 2015, 117), challenging the popular narrative that – the Church is so constituted that ‘its members can really believe anything at all, but of course, almost none of them do’, as Alan Bennett has written (2014, 540–45). Following extensive analysis of questions about participants’ motivations, beliefs, and views about culture and Christianity, Walker’s conclusion was that for these carol service participants, the ‘notions of mystery and of faith as a lived life’ were of more relevance than Christian doctrine (ibid, 111).

Studies focusing on other aspects of cathedrals have also made findings about cathedral music. In particular, they have found that through the choral foundations, it attracts thousands of children to church (Fletcher 2006, 48); that it can function as a mechanism for defining congregations (ibid, 50); that it offers a unique way of communicating with people who are not normally part of the cathedral community (C. Lewis 2006, 62); and that its visitors value it as an aesthetic experience of the highest quality, offered without obligation (Davie 2006, 148), ‘a feast for the senses’ and ‘one of the great treasures’ of the nation (Inge 2006, 27).

The cathedral-specific research can be usefully contextualised by the findings of studies investigating wider church attendance, Christian affiliation, and religiosity. These show that in addition to the decline in Anglican congregations already summarised, Anglican affiliation is also diminishing. In 1983, when religious identity data was first gathered by the British Social Attitudes Survey, two-thirds of the British public identified as Christian, and 40% as Anglican. In the most recent survey, in 2018, the figures had fallen to 38% and 12% respectively; only one third of those aged 75 and above identify as Anglican; for adults under 25, the figure is just 1% (Clery et al. 2019, 22–23). In 2010, for the first time, the proportion of British people who described themselves as having ‘no religion’ reached 50%; for those aged between 18 and 24, the proportion was 65% (Park and National Centre for Social

Research (Great Britain) 2012, 173–81; Clery et al. 2019, 18–46). Specialists in the field attribute this decline to the Church’s stance on matters like sexuality, marriage, and women’s ordination, and to the changes in educational curricula that have displaced the widely palatable ‘County Council religion’ of school assemblies and community groups, and separated the Church from the everyday experiences of most people (Field 2014, 205–6; A. Brown and Woodhead 2016, 35–62; 71–90; Clery et al. 2019, 33). Accordingly, ritualised engagement with the Church has also waned: before the Second World War, the Church of England baptised three-quarters of the English population, but today the figure now is just 15% (Wilson, 2016; Bruce, 2019 cited in Voas and Bruce 2019, 20). Reflecting the declining sense that the Church is personally relevant, one recent survey found that only 12% of people consider a place of worship to be a ‘desirable facility’ to have in their locality; in the list of 22 facilities polled, only a youth club scored lower (TSB Bank plc 2016, 4).

2.4 Understanding Choral Evensong congregations: the field so far

At the time of writing, the only existing scholarly investigations addressed specifically to contemporary experiences of live Evensong services are Hanna Rijken’s (2020) studies in the Netherlands, where Anglican Evensong is performed in three main formats: as a ticketed concert, as a worship service attached to a religious community, and as a hybrid, part-worship, part-concert event (Rijken 2020, 14–21).⁷ Rijken’s work explores from a theological and ritual studies perspective the reasons for Evensong’s success in the highly secular Dutch setting. Based on interviews and participant observation methods, Rijken found that Dutch Evensong performances are deliberately configured to convey a sense of mystery or of the sacred, to connect aesthetic and religious experiences, and that they attract

⁷ See also Rijken, Hoondert, and Barnard (2015; 2016; 2017) and Rijken, Martin, and Barnard (2017).

participants who are looking for transcendence, or a different kind of ‘reality’ (Rijken 2020, 150–51). Like the English cathedrals research, Rijken makes a distinction between religious motivations and spiritual ones, and suggests that it is the latter that are primary for the Evensong audiences in the Netherlands, and that the ability to choose how to engage with the service is vital to its appeal (Rijken, Hoondert, and Barnard 2017, 237). She also highlights the music of Evensong as both a principal attraction, and as key to achieving the ‘special’, ‘sacral’, ‘beautiful’, ‘meditative’ state described and valued by her interviewees (Rijken, Hoondert, and Barnard 2016, 88). In addition, she draws attention to the importance of the non-musical sounds of the service, such as the sound of the spoken English in which the lessons are read. English is used, she explains, because its sound is perceived as melodic, and because, as a non-native language, it suggests otherness (Rijken, Hoondert, and Barnard 2017, 235).

Two studies have looked at aspects of Evensong in the UK. Martin Clarke’s (2019) research investigated the experiences of listeners to BBC Radio 3’s weekly Choral Evensong broadcast. Analysing their comments in an online listener forum, he emphasised the community and identity-making possibilities of Evensong, finding that while the musical and religious attitudes of the broadcasts’ listeners vary considerably, they share a moral and ethical commitment to supporting both the programme and the choral and liturgical tradition of Evensong, and that this outweighed their differences. Additionally, he suggested that the online forum bound them together, and enabled them to manage and develop their diverse identities individually, through their mutual interaction.

Kieran Flanagan’s (1988) article ‘Liturgy as play’ takes a different approach, offering a close ‘hermeneutic reading’ of Evensong through its ritual practices. Drawing on Rappaport, Gadamer, and Goffman, Flanagan theorises Evensong as a controlled performance constructed to ‘safely contain... potentially dangerous emotions’ and ‘a form of

play continually confronting dualisms set up between sound and sentiment' (Flanagan 1988, 350). He discusses music only peripherally, in terms of the role in the ritual that the choristers play: 'enact[ing] angelic parts in song in the choirstalls, and in so playing, they manifest what they are clearly not' (ibid, 351). He argues that there is a tension in the ritual between social and theological objectives, and that the theological meanings Evensong is intended to convey can be easily compromised by meanings 'unintentionally given off' by the actors performing it (ibid, 367). This tension, he suggests, is further reproduced when a sociological reading of Evensong is attempted because theological intentions operate outside the rational reasoning on which sociology is based. Thus, while he agrees with Rappaport that 'liturgy's acts may also speak more clearly than words' he proposes that Evensong is better understood as a mutual collusion in an act of 'ritual play' concerned with 'enlarging and developing ontological sensibilities amongst actors and audience', and in particular their sensibilities in relation to the numinous (ibid, 347, 353).

A third text, Simon Reynolds's (2020) book on the subject of Evensong, by contrast, is a brief introduction to the service for people discovering it. The text is not intended to provide a comprehensive scholarly investigation, but it does highlight some of the key themes of the scholarly literature: the special atmosphere of cathedrals, the anonymity they afford, their stillness and silence, and the time to reflect that they offer.

Writing on sacred music more widely, and with a focus on contemporary Britain, Jonathan Arnold's (2019; 2014) explorations of the relationship between sacred music and faith, and of why traditional religious choral music is thriving outside sacred contexts, have led him to emphasise sacred music's transformational potential. Drawing on in-depth interviews with theologians, musicians, and thinkers from a variety of other backgrounds for whom music and faith are both important, he proposes that music and faith are so closely aligned that the experience of one can evoke the experience of the other, or the two

experiences can be almost indistinguishable. He argues that sacred music often attracts people seeking a different meaning to those offered by popular culture, and that the traditional music and silence of the Anglican church speaks to a pervading hunger for quietness and stillness of mind and body (Arnold 2014, 128, 129). He further suggests that because sacred music is perceived as conveying something that cannot be put into words, it offers a different way of understanding reality that people value as a way of making sense of who they are. He identifies the embodied and communal nature of musical and religious experience as central to their transcendent potential, and argues that sacred music ‘meets a deep and intrinsic human need for the spiritual, mystical, transcendent, or unearthly’, that can be ‘received by everyone alike’ (Arnold 2014, 147; see also 2018).

Drawing on theology, ritual and liturgical studies, sociology, and musicology, and grounding her conclusions in her own experience as a practitioner, June Boyce-Tillman (2006; 2014; 2016) has also argued that Anglican sacred music can catalyse positive affect, spiritual experience, and wellbeing within church settings. Her narratives are also consistent with wider musicological and sociological scholarship in their emphasis on music’s community-building affordances and its multiple meanings. She further conceives of musicking in church as a series of encounters in which ‘the fusion in the experience of the musicker’ produces a liminal space linked to the spiritual and to the soul, and posits spiritual experience as a negotiated relationship between the musicker and the music (Boyce-Tillman 2016, 346).

2.5 Summary

The evidential foundations and scholarly frameworks relevant to the questions of how and why people experience Evensong in twenty-first century Britain are wide-ranging. Inherently interdisciplinary, they encompass the literature on why people choose to listen to music, the research into how music is experienced, the scholarship on Christian congregational music-

making and reception, and the field of cathedral studies. These bodies of work have different histories, terms of reference, methodologies, and degrees of maturity, and have developed with little interaction between them. In many areas salient to this study, they have, however, reached similar and consistent conclusions. They show that listening to music in order to change physical and emotional states is part of everyday life in the West, and is a reliable means of reducing stress – especially when employed with that intention and in the company of others. They demonstrate that music listening, concert-going, and church attendance preferences are also related to personal characteristics, and that musical responses, perceptions and experiences are affected by a wide range of individual and environmental factors that vary between individuals, and within individuals over time. They further establish that music and the wider soundscape are significant to cathedral visitors and to attendees at traditional choral services, and that sacred music affords a much-desired sense of the spiritual, transcendent, or the ‘other’, as well as influencing thoughts and behaviours in unrelated contexts. What they have not done, however, is attended empirically to why people in Britain today go to Evensong, and to their experiences while they are there. That is the aim of this project, which for the first time, explores participant experiences of Evensong from a musicological perspective.

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Chapter 3. Research methodology: windows on the aquarium

3.1. Introduction and overview

The philosopher Mary Midgley (2013, 101–2) has compared studying human life to looking into ‘an enormous, ill-lit aquarium’. This, she says,

... we never see fully from above, but only through various small windows unevenly distributed around it. Scientific windows ... are just one important set among these. Fish and other strange creatures constantly swim away from particular windows ... reappearing in other places where different lighting can make them hard to recognise. Long experience, along with constant dashing about between windows, does give us a good deal of skill in tracking them. But if we refuse to put together the data from the different windows, then we can be in real trouble.

A principal objective of this study was to observe Evensong participants’ experiences through a variety of different windows. The methodological strategy therefore incorporated a multi-method approach. There were four reasons for this. First, because, as Midgley and others have argued, putting together data from different sources can enrich any exploration of human experience, as well as reducing the risk of misinterpretation (see, e.g., Hegelund 2005). Second, because at the commencement of the research project, the limited nature of the pre-existing data precluded accurate prediction of where and how the richest data might be found. Adopting a multiple-method approach therefore offered the additional advantage of potentially mitigating the risk of inadvertently excluding the most informative sources. Third, the project’s three central research questions (why do people go to Evensong? How do people experience Evensong when they are there? And how does the music get into the action?) are qualitatively different, with the first focusing on motives and intention, and the others on lived experience. It was therefore anticipated that they could be most fruitfully explored using different methods, tailored to obtaining the specific information most suited to investigating each question. And finally, because Evensong’s inherently sacred setting and purpose, combined with its limited opportunities for visible self-expression among participants, militate against many *in situ* research methods, new approaches were required that could be

deployed outside of the service setting. It was considered that adopting a multi-method approach would enable the findings of these novel procedures to be triangulated with more established methods, allowing them to be tested, validated, and contextualised.

Three methodologies were therefore implemented: (i) an interview and participant observation methodology; (ii) a new immersive experimental methodology designed by the author specifically for this study; and (iii) a survey methodology including a national Evensong participation survey and a follow-up, lockdown-period, ‘absence of Evensong’ survey. This chapter will describe in turn the three methodologies and the methods within them; explain the rationale for their adoption; and set out the study design and research approaches applied in each case.

Research ethics

The research was reviewed by and received ethics clearance through the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee, reference R56317/RE001 and R61984/RE001.

3.2. The interview and participant observation methodology

Overall design and purpose

This methodology comprised in-depth interviews and participant observation. Classically anthropological open-ended and non-linear methods of data collection were used, including adopting analytical protocols defined in ongoing analysis rather than in advance. The intention in taking this approach was to elicit a broad range of data about what is done at Evensong and what is said about it, without attempting, before the investigation, to limit or focus the content or materials that might arise (Strathern 2004, 5; 5–7).

It was determined in advance that this research should be undertaken at multiple sites, for two reasons: so that findings that were site-specific would be more likely to be revealed as such, and so would not be misinterpreted as applicable to Evensong participants in general;

and to increase the size and diversity of the population available for observation and interview. Three sites were considered a suitable number to achieve this while also allowing adequate time to engage appropriately in each. It was not the intention to compare and contrast the sites, only to identify the themes of greatest overall significance, so that conclusions reached might be more likely to have wider applicability.

The research settings

Prospective research sites were identified among the churches which regularly sing cathedral-style Evensong, using data about their historical, physical, geographical and demographic contexts, and levels of Evensong attendance (e.g., Holmes and Kautzer 2013). Westminster Abbey, Coventry Cathedral, and the chapel of Magdalen College Oxford were selected, appropriate approvals obtained, and it was at these sites that the research began, before being expanded more widely.

Westminster Abbey

Located in central London, Westminster Abbey ('the Abbey') was selected because it reports some of the largest Evensong congregations in the country, has an internationally renowned professional choir, and as one of Britain's most popular tourist attractions, draws in visitors with diverse motivations. Belonging directly to the monarch, the Abbey is not classed as a cathedral but a Royal Peculiar. The present building dates from 1245 and has Grade I listed status. It is part of the Westminster UNESCO World Heritage site, and contains the shrine of a saint and the tombs of 17 monarchs (Westminster Abbey 2021). It receives more than one million paying visitors each year (The Church of England Research & Statistics 2019, 2).

The Abbey choir was founded in the fourteenth century and today comprises twelve professional adult singers and thirty boys, all of whom are boarders at the selective, independent Abbey Choir School. Evensong is generally sung six times per week, and daily

services are free to all. They are attended, on average, by a total of around 4,500 people each week (The Church of England Research & Statistics 2019, 24).⁸

Coventry Cathedral

Coventry Cathedral was selected because it occupies a different historical, geographical, and social space. The cathedral building is one of the country's most recently constructed, designed by Basil Spence, and consecrated in May 1962 after its medieval predecessor was destroyed by an air raid in 1940. Located in the centre of the city of Coventry in the English Midlands, it is Grade I listed, and seats more than 1,500 people. It is classed as a parish church cathedral in the Association of English Cathedrals and ECOTEC typologies.⁹ It is open daily and free to enter for visitors and for services, and attracts many visitors, including for its daily litany of reconciliation, but it does not publish visitor numbers.

The Choral Foundation was established in 1959 in connection with an independent school, but was opened up to boys attending any school within the city, including state schools, in 1976; a girls' choir was formed in 1993, and operates in the same way (Coventry Cathedral 2021). Evensong is usually sung three times per week. The boy and girl choristers normally sing services separately, but occasionally they also sing together. At the time that the fieldwork was undertaken, volunteer Choral Clerks provided the lower voices, although the cathedral has subsequently appointed four professional adult Lay Clerks to the choir. There is also an auditioned adult Chamber choir, and an auditioned cathedral chorus. Evensong attendance figures are not published, but during the fieldwork, congregations for ordinary Evensong services were observed generally to range from fewer than 20 to more

⁸ The Church's 'usual attendance' statistics include not only the congregation as defined in this thesis, but 'all people...including those leading services' (e.g., The Church of England Research & Statistics 2019, 40).

⁹ See also 'The Economic and Social Impact of Cathedrals in England' (2004) and Ecorys (2021)

than 60 people. The cathedral has a Harrison & Harrison organ considered to be of outstanding national significance.

Magdalen College Chapel

Magdalen College chapel was selected because it is representative of the other main type of site where Evensong is sung today: the collegiate chapels of Oxford, Cambridge and Durham, where regular services are attended by around 7,000 people each week (The Church of England Research & Statistics 2018a). Located within the walls of Magdalen College in Oxford, South East England, the chapel dates from the fourteenth century. It is considerably smaller than most cathedrals and Royal Peculiars, seating around 110 congregants in the inner chapel, and up to 36 more in the antechapel. It exists primarily as a place of worship for the college's students, fellows, and staff, but also attracts visitors, tourists, alumnae, and other attendees from the wider local community.

Magdalen College is one of Oxford's three choral foundations. Its choir was established in 1480 and is one of the oldest, and considered one of the 'finest' college choirs.¹⁰ It comprises 12 Academical Clerks, normally undergraduates of the college, and 16 auditioned choristers, who are educated at Magdalen College School, an independent day school. Evensong, or its variation Choral Evening Prayer, is sung in the chapel on six evenings per week during term time. Chapel attendance data are not published, but total attendance at Evensong during the period of study, while varying by service, was observed to be broadly in line with the published pre-pandemic Oxford chapel average of 83 attendees per service (The Church of England Research & Statistics 2018b).¹¹ Attendance was generally

¹⁰ See for example Martin Randall (2021), Magdalen College (2021), and Lapwood (2015)

¹¹ As for cathedrals, the Church's chapel attendance data includes all people, including clergy and musicians.

higher at weekends and in Summer, with Sunday Evensongs throughout the year normally filling at least the inner chapel.

Additional recruitment

Soon after the fieldwork began, the launch of the survey methodology (see §3.4) resulted in the project attracting substantial interest from the mainstream media and in social media, and Evensong attendees began contacting the author to volunteer to share their experiences of Evensong in an interview. Some of these people had participated in Evensong at one of the three central research locations, but many of these had participated more frequently in other cathedrals or churches. An additional cohort had not attended any of the three research locations, but had extensive experience of attending Evensong elsewhere. From these contacts and from the initial interviews, it became clear that many Evensong participants have experience of, and/or regularly attend Evensong services at more than one location. In addition, the ‘looser connection’ cathedrals had previously been suggested to permit in comparison to parish churches (Platten 2006, 7), was evident in that some participants associated their Evensong attendance with the service itself rather than with any one cathedral, chapel or church. Furthermore, while some participants considered themselves to be part of the church community at the place(s) where they attended Evensong, and had connections, involvements, or another role there, some did not, and emphasised the absence of intersubjective interaction in their Evensong experiences. It was therefore decided that the pool of interviewees should not be restricted to people with a connection to the three hub field sites, and instead extended to include people with experience of cathedral-style Choral Evensong at any UK church in the interviews. From this larger pool, interviewees were selected to reflect different elements of the Evensong-going population, as indicated by existing research and this study’s survey.

The data collection process

Participant observation and field notes

The purpose of the participant observation was to obtain information about Evensong participation as it occurred, and to complement data generated through the retrospective survey, experimental, and interview methods. It was also intended to inform them by highlighting potentially productive areas of enquiry, and to assist in the triangulation and contextualisation of the data from the immersive methodology. It was conducted through regular Evensong attendance. Field notes were made before and immediately after, but not during services, in order to enable full participation, and to respect the event and the other participants.

The researcher is a member of the Church of England, and so was a full and sincere participant in the Evensongs attended as part of the research. It was, however, also made explicit in conversations with other participants that musicological research was being conducted, and leaflets about the project which identified the author were made available. This overtly dual, participant-as-observer position was taken so that relationships could be built openly and transparently, and so that Evensong participants encountered during attendance at services could be invited for interview. At all the sites, the researcher was welcomed into formal and informal groups by participants. These relationships facilitated greater understanding of participants' motivations, experiences, and the context of their Evensong participation. Very few participants asked about the author's religious affiliation, identity, or beliefs; but this information was shared on the few occasions that it was requested.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore motivations and experiences in a less directed way and in more depth than is afforded by survey questionnaires, as well as to

understand participants' perspectives on what was observed in services, and to attain information about factors not visible from observation. 43 people who attend Evensong were interviewed.

Interviewees were recruited using a range of approaches: through leaflets in churches where Evensong is sung; advertising at the three research settings; introductions and conversations arising from the author's participation in services; via introduction from other interviewees; through the project's website; through the survey method and the publicity generated by it; and, to achieve a more diverse sample, and particularly to ensure that the voices of less frequent Evensong attendees were incorporated into the study, by approaching participants proactively and opportunistically. This included distributing invitations to participants to share their experiences to the several hundred people queuing before Evensong at Westminster Abbey.

Together, the study's interviewees have experience of a large number of churches at which Evensong is sung, and include, for example, frequent and infrequent Evensong attendees; people of different faiths, religious affiliations, and none; people who attend as students, local residents, visitors, tourists, and members of the families of choristers; people of different ages, sexes, and ethnic and socio-demographic backgrounds; and people with varying levels of musical training and interest.

An interview guide was used to structure discussions. This covered original and current motivations for attending Evensong; the context for attendance; in-Evensong experiences; engagement with and opinions of the music of Evensong; the value of Evensong and the criteria by which it is judged; other musical and churchgoing practices; and biographical and background information. In accordance with the accepted procedure for semi-structured interviews, the structure was modified in each case in response to each interviewee's comments (Robson and McCartan 2016, 285). Most interviews lasted between

around 45 minutes and two hours. All were conducted in person, except for eight, which took place on online video platforms and by telephone due to the 2020 national lockdown or other logistical reasons. Interviews were audio recorded where participants gave consent for this, and notes were taken. Recordings and notes were transcribed for analysis. Throughout the thesis, all interviewee names are pseudonyms, and identifying details have been changed.

3.3. The Immersive Evensong Study (IES)

The IES is an original methodology devised and created for this project. Its purpose was to provide new insight into what Evensong attendees think and feel during an Evensong service.

The case for a new real-time, ecologically valid methodology

Evensong is sung in the unusual setting of architecturally iconic, atmospheric religious buildings, and follows a fixed liturgy that unfolds with its own narrative arc. Research has shown that situational factors are fundamental to listeners' experiences of music (Gabrielsson, 2011; Juslin et al., 2008), and that both music and emotion unfold over time, with thoughts and feelings changing continually and sometimes dramatically during the course of a listening experience (Schubert, 2010). A real-time research method was therefore sought that could capture participants' evolving thoughts, emotions, and experiences – including the non-cognitive and unconscious embodied responses that are a common feature of musical experience – in a controlled environment, so that the responses of multiple participants could be investigated consistently, and with a reasonable degree of ecological validity.

Research challenges

The challenges of empirically researching experiences of Evensong as they happen arise primarily from its ritualised practices, the sacred purpose of the event, and the consecrated nature of the space in which it takes place. These respectively limit the evidential potential of the participant-observation techniques used successfully in other Christian congregational

music studies (e.g., Ingalls, Landau, and Wagner 2013; Porter 2017), and militate against the real-time recording methods used effectively in other everyday life studies (e.g., DeNora and Belcher 2000). Even the unobtrusive physiological monitoring deployed in concert hall audience research, for example at the Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics (2015), can be problematic due to ethical considerations.¹² The challenge was therefore to obtain rich, representative, and replicable data about musical experience in a real-life Evensong situation, in real time and on a continuous basis, while also addressing the ethical and practical demands of the setting.

The opportunity presented by new immersive technologies

‘Virtual reality’, or ‘VR’ are broad terms encompassing many different technologies that attempt to replicate the sights and sounds (and increasingly other sensory inputs) of the real world within a digitally created ‘virtual environment’ (Bailenson 2018, 466; Psocka 1995). This might comprise a synthetic recreation of reality, an entirely imaginary, computer-generated world, or something between these, entered and experienced via a VR headset with an internal screen, headphones, and sometimes kinaesthetic devices (Bates-Brkljac 2012, vii). VR is now widespread not only in recreational contexts, but also in a range of commercial and therapeutic applications where interaction with the relevant real-world environment is not possible, practical, or desirable (Fuchs 2018, xii), for example in treating phobias (Rus-Calafell et al. 2018), or training neurosurgeons (Winkler-Schwartz et al. 2016).

VR offers additional benefits for research. It allows multiple participants, separated in time, to engage with exactly the same replica environment (Blascovich et al. 2002). It affords practical flexibility by enabling the delivery of the same study at different times and in

¹² See also the International Laboratory for Brain, Music and Sound Research (BRAMS) and the Centres for Interdisciplinary Research in Music, Media, and Technology (CIRMMT) at McGill University and the University of Montreal.

greater numbers than could be accommodated in a simultaneous laboratory study. And it enables the controlled monitoring of additional measures which can be problematic in real-world settings, such as tracking heart rate and skin conductivity (Jang et al. 2002), and the implementation of VR-specific research technologies, such as gaze-monitoring software (Poole and Ball 2005; Duchowski 2007). Confirming the research potential of the technology, a major review of the literature on research studies using VR in the clinical, affective, and social neurosciences concluded:

A virtual environment provides the researcher with an ecologically valid platform for presenting dynamic stimuli in a manner that allows for both the veridical control of laboratory measures and the verisimilitude of naturalistic observation of real-life situations... Virtual environment-based assessments can provide a balance between naturalistic observation and the need for exacting control over key variables (Parsons 2015; see also Chirico et al. 2017; Riva et al. 2007).

Design

A new method was therefore designed for the study to allow people's experiences of Evensong to be recorded in real time, as they happened, using VR technology.

Recording

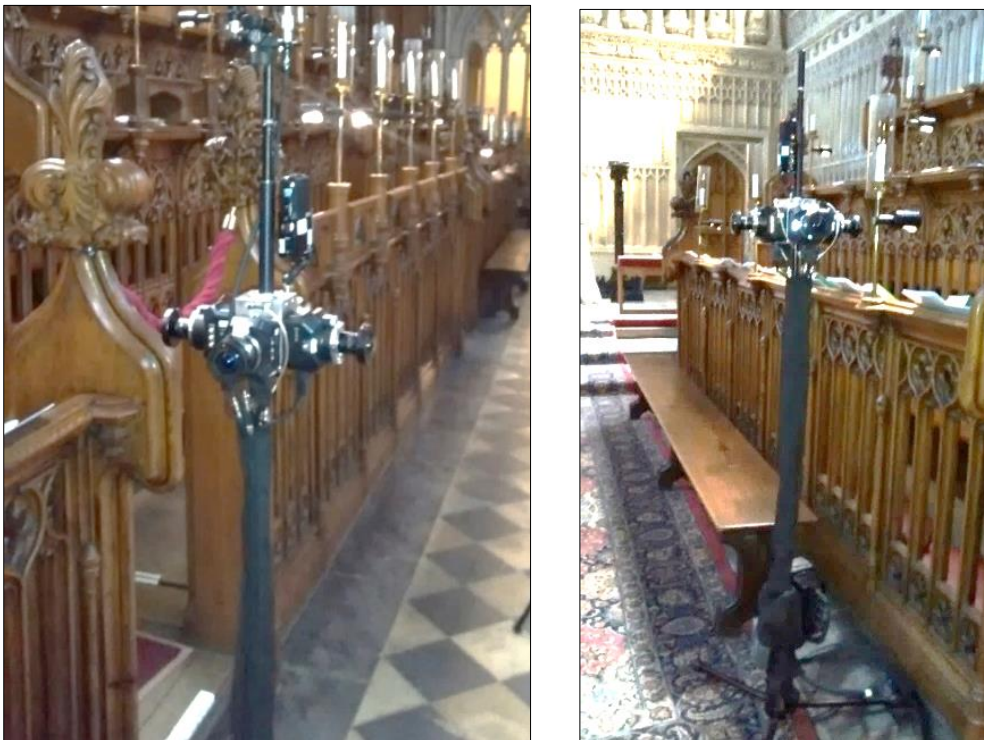
An immersive audio-visual recording of a real Evensong was made in May 2018, on an ordinary weekday in the chapel of Magdalen College Oxford ('the chapel'). The chapel was selected because as one of the three research sites, its officials were already familiar with the research and willing to consent to the recording; its relatively small size meant that its entire interior could be captured by the film; and its closure to the public for part of each day meant it would also be available for the subsequent experimental trials.

The Evensong service filmed was selected as a representative example of a typical weekday Evensong, and because its music was without copyright limitations. The service and its performance were not altered for the recording, except for a slight change to the choir's departing procession, to avoid their walking directly in front of the camera. Everyone

involved gave informed consent to participation, including the choir (or their parents/guardians, where they were under 18). Congregation members were alerted to the recording by posters outside the chapel and in the antechapel, and by information leaflets in each pew, and had the opportunity to opt out.

Focal Point VR, a specialist virtual reality production company with expertise in live events and ultra-high-resolution streaming, was commissioned to make the recording.¹³ They filmed the service from a single fixed position in a location normally used for congregational seating. Four 4k Black Magic ultra-high-definition, broadcast quality cameras, mounted on a tripod at head-height in a 360° construction (Figure 2), were used to create a spherical panorama for the viewer (Figure 3).

Figure 2. The four-camera recording rig in situ



¹³ This element of the project was funded by the University of Oxford Knowledge Exchange Seed Fund.

Figure 3. A two-dimensional image from the three-dimensional VR film



A specialist music producer with expertise in ambisonics, a sound recording method which captures and plays back audio in a full-sphere, three-dimensional 360° format, recorded the audio component. The microphone system, a Soundfield ST450 MKII, was situated in the same location as the camera, so that the audio heard by the VR participants would be perceived as correctly located in space, direction, and distance (Zotter 2019).¹⁴

The recording was made live, in one take. The recording is 47 minutes long, beginning nine minutes before the 38-minute service, just after congregants begin to enter the chapel. Including this pre-service period on the recording had two purposes. First, it allowed study participants time to adjust to the experimental situation and the virtual environment before the service began; and second, it increased the realism of the experimental trials (see below) because study participants entered the chapel – by putting on the headset – at the same time that other congregation members were arriving, a few moments before the choir enter and the service begins. No editing was undertaken, so that the unplanned naturally-occurring dimensions characteristic of live performance – passing sirens, striking bells, and any

¹⁴ The sound producer was Daniel Hulme, Electronic Music Studio Manager at the University of Oxford.

performance imperfections, for example, that might normally be removed in film production – remained just as they occurred in the original service.

The audio-visual film was then loaded on to an Oculus Go VR headset running a bespoke application designed with the researcher and created for the project by Focal Point VR to run on their Ubiety player app.¹⁵ The application was optimized for nine-channel ambisonic playback, and incorporated two channels of audio and head-tracking software which adjusted the sound played through the stereo headphones (Beyer dynamic DTX 910) according to the participant's head position. The app was also configured to capture participants' gaze direction once per second.

An abbreviated version of the film used in the study, that omits the pre-service period, can be viewed in 360° and heard binaurally, with spatialized sound, online (*The Choir of Magdalen College, Oxford - The Choir of Magdalen College Oxford Sing Choral Evensong on Thursday 17 May 2018*. 2018).¹⁶

Pilot study

A pilot study was conducted in Autumn 2018 on an exhibition stand at the Oxford Science + Ideas festival, during which participants ($n = 39$) watched a five-minute extract of the film. This confirmed that even in a bright, loud environment and with minimal preparation, participants reported that a strong sense of presence and immersion were quickly achieved. In a questionnaire completed immediately after participation, 90% agreed that they adjusted to being in the virtual environment 'straight away' or 'almost straight away'. 79% agreed that

¹⁵ For more information, see Focal Point VR (2017).

¹⁶ <http://www.facebook.com/magdalencollegechoir/videos/370168640373718/> (*The Choir of Magdalen College, Oxford - The Choir of Magdalen College Oxford Sing Choral Evensong on Thursday 17 May 2018*). N.B., due to the abbreviated nature of the film posted online, the timings on that film are different to those of the full-length recording using in the IES.

their experiences in the virtual environment ‘felt like real-world experiences’. Of these, 54% never went to choral church services, and 50% had not experienced VR before.

Figure 4. A visitor to the Oxford Science +Ideas Festival undertaking the pilot study



Research methods within the IES

Five research methods were incorporated into the IES to encompass each of the three systems that are widely recognised as sources of information about human experience. The three systems are physiological indicators; observable acts or behaviours; and language and other oral communication (M. M. Bradley and Lang 2002; P. J. Lang 1993). The five methods included in the IES were thinking/speaking aloud, observation, gaze tracking, physiological monitoring, and post-IES follow-up interviews.

Thinking aloud

Participants’ thoughts and feelings, articulated aloud, are the focus of this part of the methodology and provide data that is unique and valuable in five main ways. First, they trace each participant’s professed thoughts and feelings through the disorderly, unpredictable, and non-linear journey of their unfolding experience over the 47 minutes of the film, with an

authenticity and in a depth and detail elusive to most other methods. The following extract, for example, shows the comments of one IES participant over two and a half minutes, beginning during the reading of the lesson from the New Testament, and ending during the choral singing of the *Nunc dimittis* that followed it:

[Lesson being read]

What's the side chapel for? Perhaps they have the morning service in there. I'm not sure. I've never seen it used...

[Pause]

The glass is all nineteenth century. It would have looked different at the Reformation when the first Taverner was Informator. He never thought his music would come back and be sung again here.

[Pause]

On a Tuesday the boys often now sing the *Salve Regina*. It's really quite moving. People would have thought that was dead forever. Pre-Reformation liturgy has become okay again.

[The choir begin to sing the Nunc dimittis]

The Weelkes is unaccompanied. As it should be.

By tracking participants' thoughts and perceived emotional trajectories across time, it is also possible to compare different individuals' experiences with one another, and to analyse them in direct relation to the music that was being heard at the time they occurred. This affords the analysis a precision, and the accounts a specificity, often unavailable through retrospective methods.

Second, the monologue approach elicited fluent, frequent, and apparently unselfconscious articulations from most participants. It is well established that an individual's choice of words, tone of voice, and the focus of their comments provides 'a virtually unique window' on the human experience, and in ways that are both complex and subtle (Robson & McCartan, 2016, p. 286). Here, unrestricted by questioning, and without the social dynamic of a visible or audible researcher presence, most participants seemed to offer direct expressions of their thoughts and feelings with little attempt to filter or otherwise

process them. By the middle of the film participants generally seemed immersed in the experience. Many joined the congregation in saying the spoken responses; some spoke aloud private prayers, sometimes about quite personal matters ('I noticed during the prayers, actually, I was praying like I would do in Evensong', as one commented in the post-IES interview), and during quieter parts of the service, many spoke their commentaries in a low voice, because 'I feel that if I speak, I'll disturb them', as another said, referring to the congregation in the film. Generally, participants reported what one called 'an overwhelming sense of veracity':

...even though you're conscious you're using a headset I'm pretty sure the thoughts I was having were as I normally would.

(IES participant, post-IES interview)

This seems to be supported by the greater degree of self-reflexivity evident in the interviews; asked later to clarify one response made spontaneously in the IES, for example, one participant responded that '...I kind of feel bad because it seems to reflect badly on [me]...'. The live commentaries also provided unique experiential insights. In one, another participant gave an articulate account of their response to the text of the anthem. This account was consistent with their initial response, but a different perspective on the character of that response is offered by the spontaneous in-study reaction: '[Laughing] Man, oh, man! [pause] Sometimes you just hear it, right?!'.

Third, the 'live' nature of participants' commentaries, and their contemporaneity with the experience of the thoughts and emotions they described, exposed some of the physiological changes that accompany some emotions: an altered tone of voice or pace of speech connoting enthusiasm or boredom for example (Cumming 2000, 91–92). It was also common for participants to make non-verbal expressions, such as laughing, sighing, and 'mmm' and 'ah' sounds, that they did not explain but that in themselves conveyed a response. In interview some participants said that they did not remember making these gestures and/or

were not aware of them, but most, when reminded of the specific moment in the film, were able to recall what they had been thinking in that moment, identifying thoughts which might otherwise have been unavailable to the research.

Fourth, the unstructured nature of the method allowed participants to comment on anything that came to mind. Consequently, their remarks seemed less likely to be influenced by the research objectives and took in a wide range of subjects that were unlikely to have been raised in a more controlled study. Several participants, for example, expressed quite profound responses to the ambulance sirens that can be heard outside the chapel at one point in the IES recording (see Chapter 5), but the thoughts and feelings that these sorts of sounds can elicit were not mentioned by any of the interviewees, nor in the survey responses, although they are a frequent feature of many city-centre Evensongs.

Finally, the composite, time-synchronised transcripts of the commentaries provide a rich source for content analysis, and one that is amenable to coding for key words, subjects, and themes described, offering the potential for a systematic examination of participants' individual and collective perceptions across the service, with direct reference to the music.

An obvious limitation of all the methods used in the IES is that while the experiment sought to simulate attendance at a live Evensong performance, it was not that, participants knew it was not, and, moreover, they were aware that their responses were being recorded as part of a research project. In the absence of real-world results for the same Evensong service, it cannot be known for certain to what extent the experiences of participants in the IES replicated the experience they would have had if they had attended the filmed service live, or their experiences of other live Evensong services more generally. Each participant was therefore asked about the perceived comparability in the follow-up interview, and as described above, most considered their thoughts and feelings to be similar to those that they

would normally have had. Where differences were identified, these were explored in more depth.

Furthermore, self-report methods are susceptible to self-presentational bias, and it is not possible to determine with certainty the extent to which participants' expressed comments conveyed their actual experience in the IES. However, it appeared that most participants spoke naturally and without inhibition. In addition, although eloquence and extroversion varied between participants, and it was clear that some found it considerably easier than others to speak fluently about their thoughts and feelings, verbal reticence, where it occurred, could be mitigated to an extent by the recording of non-verbal expressions, the post-IES interview, and researcher observations.

As in most verbally-based approaches, the 'problem of meaning', in which participants are certain about what their comments mean but third party interpretation is different (Bryman 2012), is a further risk. This was, however, moderated by the ability to observe the context in which the comments arose, and to explore meaning in the post-IES interview.

Finally, this method can produce a very large amount of data very quickly: the 26 commentaries and attendant post-IES interviews amount to nearly 90,000 words, making transcription and analysis onerous, especially given the need for precise time synchronisation. Overall, however, these practical challenges were considered to be outweighed by the powerful insights the method elicited, the opportunities for comparison and synchronization between sources and subjects, and the rich original data generated.

Observation

Facial expressions and bodily movements are reliable indicators of emotion, intention and mental state (Ekman 1999; Emery 2000; Lundqvist et al. 2009). They can inform and articulate emotional responses without conscious awareness (McGuinness and Overy 2011),

influence the experience of musical meaning (Leman 2010), and demonstrate entrainment and empathy with co-present others and the music itself (Clarke et al., 2015). For these reasons, participants were observed during the experiment and notable physical activity was documented. The value of this documentation is threefold. It provides a source of evidence that contextualized and added depth to participants' commentaries, including by indicating the presence of unarticulated thoughts or responses that could be further explored in the post-IES interviews. Second, it assisted in the interpretation of the physiological indicators because these are affected not only by psychological arousal but also by visible physical activity such as changes in posture (Perini and Veicsteinas 2003) and shifts in respiratory frequency (Bernardi et al. 2000). And finally, it enabled responses not captured in any other way – like pianistic finger actions during the organ voluntary, for example – to be incorporated into the analysis of participants' experiences, include to assist in the interpretation of the physiological response data.

Gaze tracking

Humans look at what attracts their interest, so the focus of a person's attention is generally discernible from the direction of their gaze (Duchowski 2007; Emery 2000; Stiefelhagen 2002). Because attention is closely linked with perception (Gibson 1979; Wright 1998), a gaze tracking facility was incorporated in to this study. Gaze tracking data is particularly reliable in large, 360-degree scene-viewing settings like the IES film, where it is necessary to turn the head to attend to different elements of the visual environment (Nyklíček, Thayer, and Van Doornen 2002; Stiefelhagen 2002).

The method's main limitation is that it is not always clear what has attracted a participants' attention, though that was mitigated in part in this study by participants' simultaneous commentary. Moreover, the purpose of recording gaze direction here was to investigate the general pattern of participants' attention, and no attempt was therefore made

to record gaze direction with the high precision that is required in some other research contexts – for example, to analyse attentional focus in relation to webpages – nor to record the duration of fixations (Liversedge and Findlay 2000). The technology was well-suited to this objective and illustrated clearly how each individual’s attention settled and shifted during the service, at what or whom they were looking (to the level of the individual face), and how the focus of the attention of the virtual congregation members variously divided and coincided.

Physiological measures

The potential of physiological measures as a tool for investigating the emotional effects of music has been demonstrated in studies by Krumhansl (1997), and Nyklíček and colleagues (1997). Both studies deployed a large range of cardiovascular, respiratory and electrodermal measures in conjunction with participant self-reports to show that music can produce physiological changes associated with emotional responses. Subsequent investigations have shown that a response to an unexpected musical harmony can be detected in electrodermal activity within around two seconds (Steinbeis et al., 2006), and that variations in heart rate can indicate changes in arousal – excitement or relaxation – induced by music listening (Iwanaga, Ikeda, and Iwaki 1996; Iwanaga, Kobayashi, and Kawasaki 2005).

In this study, heart rate (HR) and electrodermal activity (EDA) were monitored as secondary indicators of participants’ emotional response, rather than as primary evidence, taking into account that physiological responses can be influenced by a large number of variables not controlled for here, including activities prior to the study (Dibben 2004), changes in activity during the study (Serrador, Finlayson, and Hughson 1999), talking (Bernardi et al. 2000) and respiration patterns (Sanderson et al. 1996). Steps were taken to mitigate the risks of misinterpretation arising from these variables. There was a set-up and briefing period of around ten minutes immediately before the study; a nine-minute adjustment

period was built into the film; participants' temperature, movements, and position were monitored using the EDA and HR sensors throughout; and periods when participants were speaking or otherwise active was observed and noted, so that these could be accounted for in the analysis. Accordingly, while physiological monitoring does not provide a simple index measure of musical emotion, its ability to indicate arousal and valence is considered to make a valuable contribution to a study like this one.

Post-IES Interviews

After each IES, a post-IES interview was undertaken. This was designed to ascertain the degree to which the participant felt that their responses in the IES were representative of their responses in a real Evensong; to probe and clarify responses spoken or observed during the study – for example, ‘You mentioned the Lakes, can you tell me about what brought that to mind?’; and to follow up any points of interest raised – ‘You said that you would never normally sit in this part of a chapel, why is that?’. In many cases, these questions also led to wide-ranging, and often rich, discussions about wider questions related to Evensong participation.

Data collection

The IES experimental trials were conducted between September and December 2018. The majority took place in the chapel in which the recording had been made, to maximize the ecological validity of the experience and promote consistency between the sensory inputs experienced from outside the recording – the distinctive olfactory experience of an historic chapel, the room temperature – and those of the context that the recording was intended to replicate.¹⁷

¹⁷ For logistical reasons, a small number of the trials ultimately could not be conducted in the chapel. In those cases, other rooms within the college were used.

Participants ($n = 26$) were recruited via publicity and to broaden the sample, by invitation. They were eligible if they were Evensong attendees aged 18 or over, and were accepted after confirming they had no medical conditions which contraindicated using a VR headset. They had an age range of 18 to 75+, and like the interview participants (see §3.2 above), were selected to encompass the range of people who typically go to Evensong. They therefore included frequent and occasional attendees from a variety of backgrounds, people with different – and different degrees of – faith and religious affiliation and musical experience, and none, and people with a diversity of motivations for attending. Some participants had previously attended Evensong in the chapel where the IES was recorded, others had not.

Before attending, participants were given written information about the study, and completed an online form with physical data (height, weight etc.) to facilitate processing of the physiological monitoring data, and information about their Evensong attendance, to contextualise their commentaries. Participants then attended one at a time and gave informed consent. They were seated on a chapel bench in the location previously occupied by the VR recording equipment. They were briefed, and fitted with the VR headset, headphones, and, for the 23 participants who consented to it, monitoring equipment to measure the physiological indicators of heart rate and electrodermal activity: a wireless Movisens EcgMove 3 electrocardiograph (ECG) sensor and Movisens EdaMove 3 electrodermal (EDA) skin sensors.¹⁸ The ECG sensor was positioned in the centre of each participant's sternum using a chest belt, with dry electrodes to acquire a single-channel ECG signal of

¹⁸ These were generously provided on loan, free of charge, by Movisens. For further information see Movisens (2021).

electrocardiogram data, acceleration in three directions, air pressure and temperature. The skin sensors were attached to the palm of the participant's non-dominant hand.¹⁹

Participants were briefed that once the film began, they should think aloud, while allowing themselves to be immersed in the service as if they were there. Participants were informed they should express verbally all thoughts, feelings, recollections, sensations, or experiences as they became aware of them, at any time, regardless of what had prompted them and whether they related to the music they heard or anything else in the recording. These commentaries were recorded using either a standard sound recorder or a mobile sound recording app. This was an original method, based on two other real-world models: Clarke's (2005) self-reflexive ecological approach to music perception, and DeNora and Belcher's (2000) thinking-out-loud method (both discussed further in Chapter 2).

Each participant therefore generated six separate datasets: (i) a live verbal commentary; (ii) ECG monitoring data; (iii) EDA monitoring data; (iv) gaze-tracking data; (v) retrospective interview comments; and (vi) researcher observations.

Data processing and analysis

At the end of the VR study, the in-trial, simultaneously collected datasets were synchronized with one another and with the audio-visual film. Participant commentaries and post-experiment interviews were transcribed to enable the observational notes to be integrated, to facilitate comparison between participants, and to support the identification of themes. They were then coded using NVivo 12 software to identify and analyse key themes.

The gaze-direction data were converted into a series of fixations, presented on a heatmap – 'a two-dimensional graphical representations of data where the values of a

¹⁹ The EDA sensor's two electrodes were filled with electrode gel and affixed using disposable adhesive stickers. An exosomatic measurement was obtained by applying an external direct current (DC) voltage of 0.5V to the skin to measure conductance with a sample rate of 32 Hz. The measurement range was from 0 μ s to 100 μ s with accuracy of >1.5%.

variable are shown as colours' (Bojko 2009, 30, 37) – to show gaze duration, distribution and focus, superimposed over the film. This displayed each participant's gaze individually and collectively, for each second during which the film was viewed, on a frame-by-frame basis (see figures 7 and 8), synchronised with each individual's recorded commentary.

Figure 5. A volunteer demonstrating IES participation in the chapel



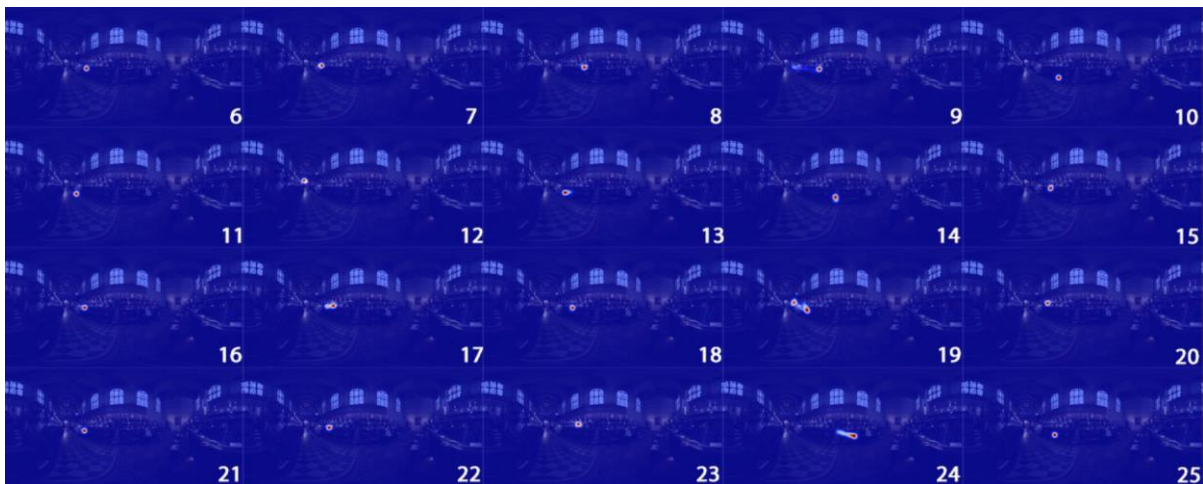
Figure 6. A two-dimensional shot of the participant's three-dimensional headset view



Figure 7. Gaze fixations of IES participants at 32m22s in the IES – composite view²⁰



Figure 8. Gaze fixations of IES participants at 32m22s in the IES – individual participant view (sample of 20)



The skin conductivity and heart rate data were inspected visually using Movisens's proprietary UniSensViewer and analysed using UniSens Data Analyzer and Movisens Data Processing service. The heart rate data was analysed, and calculations and analyses of average and normalised heart rate and inter-beat intervals were made. The electrodermal activity data, however, contained a lot of artifacts. The cause of these could not be identified, and some measurements had to be excluded completely. It was therefore determined to be

²⁰ The purpose of the timestamp on screenshots of gaze fixations was to allow synchronisation of datasets at 18:00 (00:00:00:00 on the timestamp), the time the clock struck six. It has no other function. Where time in the IES is referred to in this thesis, the real runtime in the film recording is used. The beginning of the recording is therefore 0m00s, and Evensong begins with the 18:00 clock strike at 9m35s.

less reliable than the heart rate data. Given the small sample size, and because it became clear that variables and activities not controlled for and present in the study can affect EDA readings (including deep breathing, sighing, and speaking, as well as ambient temperature changes (Boucsein et al. 2012, 1027, 1030–31)) only the heart rate data is reported here.

3.4. The survey methodology

The survey strand of this project comprised two separate questionnaire surveys: a national ‘Experiences of Evensong’ participant survey conducted in 2019; and a follow-up ‘Absence of Evensong’ survey conducted in mid-2020, during the UK’s national lockdown. A ‘snapshot’ survey of the Evensong congregations at two ordinary services at each of the three central research sites had been planned for Spring 2020, with the objective of gathering comparator data to contextualise the findings of the online Experiences of Evensong survey. This was precluded by the 2020 UK national lockdown, and the Absence of Evensong survey was conducted as an alternative.

(i) The 2019 ‘Experiences of Evensong’ survey

The purpose of undertaking a large-scale, online survey of Evensong participants was twofold. First, to engage with the experiences of a larger population of Evensong participants with experience of a greater number of UK Evensong settings than the one-to-one interview and experimental methods permitted, and so to bring breadth and context to the findings and increase the extent to which they might be generalizable. And second, to gather factual data about Evensong participants that could be compared with population-level datasets, including about musical activity and training, religious affiliation and churchgoing, and demographic characteristics.

Design

The survey asked 30 questions in five areas: (i) Evensong and other church attendance practices and motivations; (ii) the experience of being at Evensong; (iii) wider musical tastes,

music listening habits, and musical training and performance practices; (iv) religious affiliation and faith; and (v) demographic factors. Questions were a combination of multiple choice, closed and open, and wording was constructed in line with established principles of social research surveys (e.g., De Vaus et al. 2013, 94–120). Multiple choice options were determined by reference to pre-existing findings, and where possible the same wording used by the relevant comparator survey was adopted.²¹ Five open questions were included to ensure that views or themes of importance to respondents that might not have been addressed in the closed or multiple-choice options could be captured. A full copy of the survey questionnaire is included at Appendix 1.

The sample and data collection

The survey opened in February 2019, and was available online, using the Jisc platform, and in paper form by request. It was open to anyone aged 16 or over who had experience of going to Choral Evensong.

The survey was publicised using the research project’s social media, a dedicated website, advertising materials in the three hub sites and in other churches, and for six weeks from mid-May 2019, through Jisc’s ‘Call for Participants’ facility. The survey received considerable unsolicited promotion in the mainstream media and by some prominent social media users, including the Church of England, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and on BBC Radio. Interviews with the author promoting the survey were broadcast on the BBC World Service, BBC and commercial local radio, and published in the Church Times (Davies 2019).

²¹ The datasets and reports that formed the basis of many of the questions were: Archbishops Council (2017); Astley et al. (2012); Chin and Rickard (2012); Francis and Williams (2015); Finnegan (1989); Holmes and Kautzer (2013); Savage (2015); Village (2018), and Walker (2015).

An article about the study by the author was also printed in the publications of the Prayer Book Society and the Cathedral Music Trust in early 2019 (King 2019a; 2019b).

The deadline for submission of surveys was extended from June 2019 to September 2019, because a television piece about the project had been recorded with the researcher by the BBC's Head of Religion, and was scheduled for broadcast in September 2019. When the broadcast was deferred to December 2019 ('BBC One Breakfast' 2019), the survey deadline was not extended further, because by then 2,030 responses had already been received, including more than 200,000 words of comments.²² Given that weekly attendance at all regular weekday cathedral services is under 20,000 (The Church of England Research & Statistics 2019), and the responses came from a very broad range of respondents, and who, between them, reported experiences of Evensong in all 42 mainland Anglican cathedrals, in Royal Peculiars including Westminster Abbey and St George's Chapel, Windsor, and in many other chapels and churches, this was considered a satisfactory body of data.

The frequency with which respondents attended Evensong was established through a compulsory question (Q3) so non-attendees could be identified in analysis where necessary. Of 2,030 respondents, only 58 said they had not attended Evensong in the previous twelve months; supplementary comments suggested that in around nine out of ten cases, this was for practical or logistical reasons, while the remainder had chosen not to attend. Respondents who attended Evensong because they were a member of staff, musician, or a volunteer at the church where Evensong took place were identified through a further question (Q9). Of the 2,030 respondents, only 6 reported attending Evensong solely for this reason. A further 898, mainly clergy and members of choirs, included this option as one of multiple motivations for attending, and consistent with this, a significant majority (estimated at approximately three-

²² Eight (8) of these responses were generated by the Jisc Call for Participants.

quarters) of those chose to volunteer in their free text answers that in addition to their work-related Evensong attendance, they also attend Evensong as a member of the congregation at other times and/or in other places. Accordingly, these SRs were also able to offer the congregational participant perspective on Evensong participation that is the subject of this study.

(ii) The 2020 ‘Absence of Evensong’ survey

A second questionnaire survey was undertaken in August 2020, five months into the Church of England’s suspension of all in-person events due to the Covid-19 national lockdown. Its purpose was to investigate how the absence of Evensong had affected people who previously attended the service.

The survey asked seven questions, which were constructed following the same approach as the main survey and again included a mixture of open, closed, and multiple-choice questions. These focused on the effects of being unable to attend live Evensong in the preceding months, and on experiences of engaging with online or other Evensong broadcast services. 78 responses were received, including more than 15,000 words of free-text commentary. A copy of the survey questions is at Appendix 2.

Survey respondents are referred to throughout the thesis as SRs. Where it is relevant to the subject under discussion, additional, anonymised, information about them is provided. Words in quotation marks (‘’) are verbatim quotes from participants. Where the quotes are unattributed, it is because they were made by, or are representative of, the comments of multiple participants, or because they repeat an earlier, previously attributed quote.

3.5. Approaches to analysing and reporting findings

The data generated by the participant observation, interviews, IES, and survey methodologies were analysed separately. Qualitative data was coded using NVivo 12 Pro (QSR International Pty Ltd 2018) . The codes and coded data were assessed to identify repetitions, linkages,

properties, and connections with theory, and to find the key themes within them. Word frequency analysis was applied to responses to individual survey questions, and to the interview and IES transcripts. Physiological data were examined, analysed, and visualised using UniSens Viewer (FZI Forschungszentrum Informatik, movisens GmbH, and Institute for Information Processing Technology (ITIV), n.d.), Movisens DataAnalyzer (movisens GmbH 2019), and MATLAB. Gaze tracking data was converted into composite (all participants) and individual ‘heatmaps’ and analysed visually.

Many of the same themes were found to recur across the methodologies, and it was decided that the thesis should be organised thematically, rather than by method. Themes were then grouped together under higher level ideas, three of which, when reviewed in conjunction with the quantitative data, emerged as of particular importance in understanding what people seek and find at Evensong: tranquillity, transcendence, and the sense of retreat.

The findings in respect of each of these three types of experience are presented in turn, in each case drawing on findings from across the project’s methods. As will be shown, these experiences can co-exist, and can catalyse, support, or transform into another type of experience. In some cases, they share common characteristics. Each one, however, represents an important dimension of contemporary Evensong experiences, and considering them together, it is argued, provides the basis for a new understanding of these experiences.

Section One. ‘That peace which the world cannot give’: Evensong, serenity, and self-regulation

O God, from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed: Give unto thy servants that peace which the world cannot give...

Evening Prayer, from The Book of Common Prayer

People who come together through musical activity are people who, potentially, can be transformed.

DeNora, *Music Asylums* (2013, 139)

It’s a bit like when your phone is pissing around. You turn it off and then you turn it back on again and it’s smooth again. That’s me with evensong. My life is pissing around, so I switch it off, go to Evensong and ... I know that when I come out, I’m different.

Kieran, interview participant

The idea that music ‘has charms to sooth a savage breast’ (Congreve 1697, 879) – as well as to quieten distressed minds, calm tortured souls, and alleviate mental maladies – is not new. It is thought that Palaeolithic people used music in health and healing rituals (Fancourt 2017, 5–6). The Ancient Greeks considered that music could relieve ‘excessive emotions’ through catharsis, and practised music therapy (Provenza 2014, 299–300), and in the Hebrew Bible, King Saul was freed from the torment of an evil spirit when David played the harp to him (1 Samuel 16:23).

Today, music’s capacity to engage with the emotions in powerfully positive ways is widely recognised (Västfjäll 2001; Gabrielsson 2011; Juslin and Laukka 2004a, 222–25). Its efficacy in promoting health and well-being has been demonstrated in music therapy contexts, where trained practitioners facilitate relational musical activity for the benefit of groups or individuals (Edwards 2015, 1–5; Ansdell 2014), and in everyday life, where people deploy music strategically, for their own emotional and affective objectives (North, Hargreaves, and Hargreaves 2004; DeNora 2000; Sloboda, O’Neill, and Ivaldi 2001; Sloboda 2010; Kassabian 2013). Real-world studies consistently find these personal, self-

management objectives to be a primary reason for elective music listening (Bull 2000; 2007; DeNora 2000; Sloboda 2010) with the regulation of mood and arousal level (Lonsdale and North 2011, 116) and especially the management of anxiety or stress regularly cited as important motivators (Semenza 2017; Lonsdale and North 2011).

Evensong is often portrayed as a calming experience by those presenting and promoting it. The Choral Evensong Trust, for example, begins its introduction to Evensong by calling it ‘a 45-min long, peace-inducing church service... allowing listeners time for contemplation’ (Hayward 2021). Cathedrals and college chapels similarly describe it as ‘an oasis of peace’ (Liverpool Cathedral 2021), an opportunity for meditation or a time ‘to pause towards the end of a busy day’ (Coventry Cathedral, n.d., 2–3), and a chance, ‘in the singing and in the silence’, to ‘be blessed by the peace that passes all understanding’ (Magdalen College Oxford 2018).

For many of the clergy who preside over Evensong each day, the service’s faculty for catalysing calm amidst the stresses of modern life are a self-evident part of its contemporary appeal for the congregations they observe. Jonathan Arnold (2018), when Dean of Divinity at Magdalen College Oxford, described Evensong as ‘an oasis in the busy working day’ in a society in which ‘quiet reflection is hard to come by’.²³ Angela Tilby, Canon of Christ Church Cathedral Oxford, associates Evensong with a ‘slowing of the heart rate and breathing, the quietening of the mind, the sense of space and mystery and presence’, and she quotes a colleague who proposed that the ‘miracle’ of Evensong was that ‘no matter how flustered, furious, or exhausted you were when you turned up, by the time you got to the Grace at the end you were a different person’ (Tilby 2018). And Sam Wells, a central London vicar, has made similar observations, describing his Evensong congregations as arriving

²³ See also Arnold (2014).

‘tortured’, ‘anxious’, and ‘exhausted in heart and mind and body’, but leaving transformed: ‘drenched in the glistening wonder of God’s love’ (Wells 2004, 74).

As DeNora (2000, 160) has written, however, ‘On its own, music has no more power to make things happen than does kindling to produce combustion’. This section, comprising Chapters Four and Five, takes the findings from the empirical research undertaken for this study, to bring new empirical weight to the anecdotal evidence of Evensong’s ability to afford tranquillity. It explores how and why the experience of Evensong is associated with succour, comfort, and calm, and identifies how music, intention, and situation intersect to afford in some Evensong participants the sense of well-being theologically conceptualised in the Evensong service as ‘that peace which the world cannot give’.²⁴

²⁴ The quote is from the Second Collect at Evening Prayer, as set out in the Book of Common Prayer (1662).

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Chapter 4. Experiencing tranquillity at Evensong: an overview of the evidence

As Juslin (2008) has shown, affective responses to the internal or external environment generally involve some or all of six identifiable components: (i) cognitive appraisal, (ii) subjective feeling, (iii) physiological response, (iv) expression, (v) action tendency, and (vi) self-regulation. The methodology of this study gathered data specific to each of these components, and found in all of them indications that Evensong affords tranquillity: ‘the quality or state of being tranquil; freedom from disturbance or agitation; serenity, calmness; quietness, peacefulness’ (OED 2021c).

Specifically, the data show Evensong to afford transformation, often quickly and quite dramatically, from disturbed, anxious, or agitated mental and physical conditions, to conditions of calm and quiet. They show that the varieties of calm or peace experienced in the service are highly varied, differing in nature, intensity, and the way in which they are subjectively experienced, for different people and at different times. And they demonstrate that Evensong is recognised, valued, and actively sought out by a significant proportion of its participants as a practice that in Greco-Roman philosophy was termed *epimelesthai sautou* – the care of the self; and which Michel Foucault (1988, 18) termed ‘a technology of self’: a tool that permits self-transformation to attain a certain desired state.

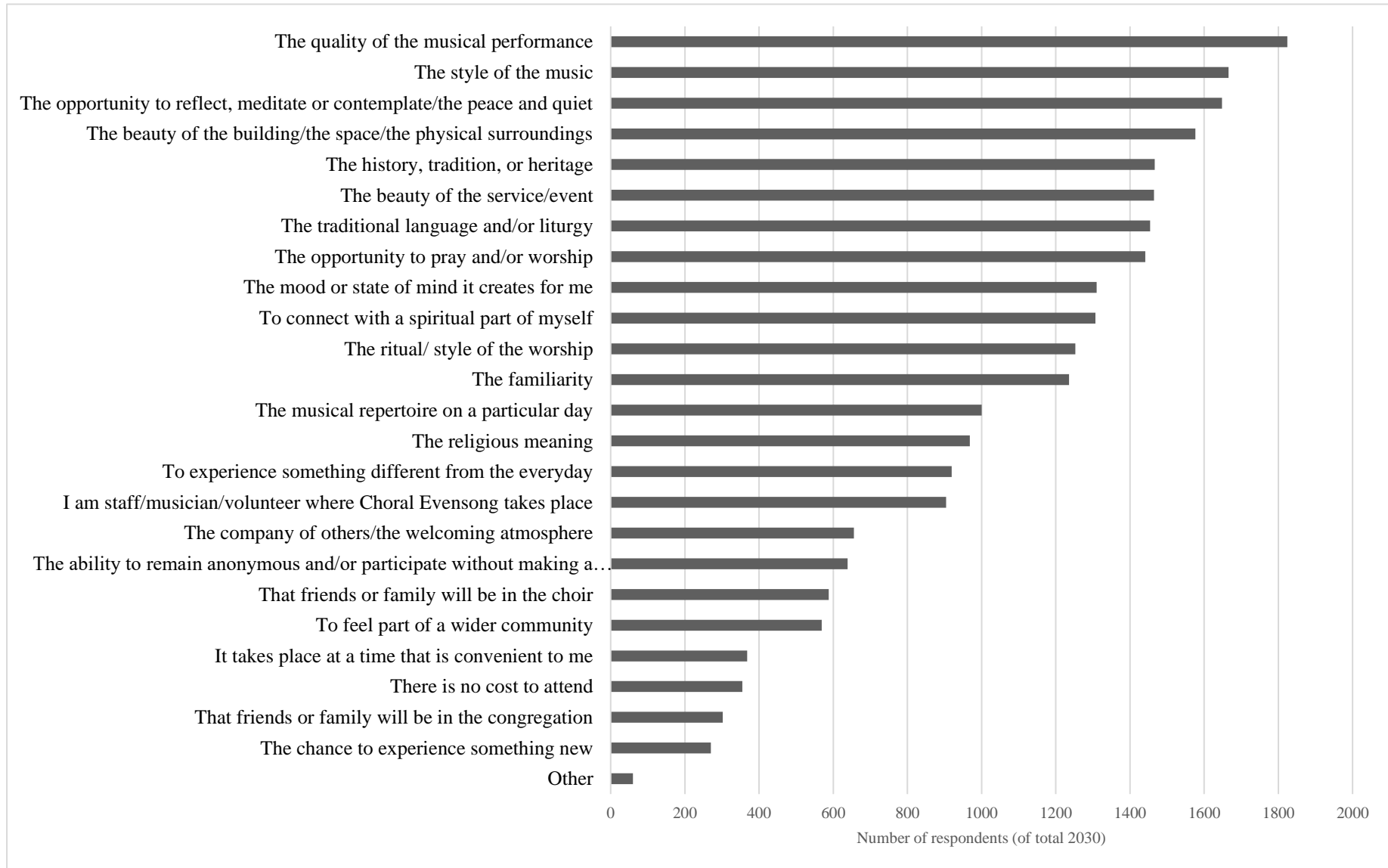
4.1. An overview of findings from the survey methods

Analysis of the Experiences of Evensong survey responses revealed that the two most important overall themes in participants’ reasons for attending Evensong, and in their accounts of what they experienced there, were (a) the music, and (b) the attainment of a sense of tranquillity. Furthermore, it was clear that for a large majority of survey respondents (SRs), these two factors are inextricably linked.

When asked to select from a list of 25 options all the factors of importance in deciding to go to Choral Evensong, the most popular answer, selected by 90% of respondents ($n = 1,824$), was ‘the quality of the musical performance’. The second most frequently selected option, chosen by 82% ($n = 1,666$) of respondents, was ‘the style of the music’. That both of these concerned music is particularly significant since of the 25 options available, only three related to music, in order that all the main hypotheses for Evensong attendance suggested by existing research could be incorporated as available options (see Figure 9). Notably, these factors were of almost identical importance to people who only ever attend the service as a congregation member, and those who also attend to sing or perform there as musician: when everyone who said that they sometimes attend Evensong for this latter reason was excluded from the sample,²⁵ ‘the quality of the musical performance’ remained substantially the most popular factor of importance in attending, identified by 88% of respondents ($n = 993$). The proportion of this filtered sample who selected ‘the style of the music’ as an important factor in motivating their attendance was also similar to the full sample, at 80% ($n = 900$).

²⁵ For the purposes of this further analysis, all respondents who selected option 24 in Q9, ‘I am a member of staff, musician or a volunteer at the church where Choral Evensong takes place’, were removed from the sample.

Figure 9: Summary of responses to 2019 survey Question 9: 'Which of the following factors are important in your decision to go to Choral Evensong nowadays?'



response to Question 6, and respectively were the second and fourth most frequently used adjectives (first and third were ‘beautiful’ and ‘uplifting’), and the fifth and tenth most commonly used terms overall. Concepts related to meditation, contemplation, ‘pausing’ or ‘re-setting’, and releasing stress were also prevalent in SRs’ commentaries, and often occurred in conjunction with references to music and singing:

[Evensong is] A moment of peace and tranquillity for reflection and calm.

Beautiful singing which delivers a tranquil and atmospheric ambience to enable spiritual reflection.

The feeling of peace and tranquillity and the beautiful music which seems timeless.

The study’s Absence of Evensong survey, conducted in the Summer of 2020 after Anglican church services had been suspended for six months, confirms the inter-relationship between music and self-regulation for relaxation. 78 respondents completed the online questionnaire, which asked, *inter alia*, to what extent, if at all, the absence of Evensong had ‘affected your mood, state of mind, emotion, or sense of well-being?’.²⁶ The responses made clear that for a significant number of those who submitted comments, the absence of Evensong directly affected their perceived ability to self-regulate, as the comments of these SRs demonstrate:

Attending choral services used to be one of my primary outlets to aid my emotional well-being... not having this outlet available ... meant that it felt like there was no safety valve to help calm my emotions.

...times of feeling anxious, powerless, isolated, and cut off would have been assuaged by being able to share in Choral Evensong. There is a real sense of divine presence and calm in the service which works against the feelings I describe above.

Evensong is utter mindfulness. The lack of it has removed a slice of peace.... A recording is not a substitute for the balm to the soul that is evensong.

This evidence indicates what the interviews and some of the more discursive SR accounts illustrate: Evensong participants commonly report that they regard and deploy Evensong –

²⁶ A copy of the full survey is included at Appendix 2.

and specifically its music, sounds, and silences – in the care of the self, and to transform their emotional, cognitive, or physical state from less to more tranquil.

Consistent with previous research that found that people who are more musically engaged are more highly aware of the effects of music on their mood, are more likely than others to use music to fulfil therapeutic needs, including to relax (Greasley and Lamont 2011), it was noted that SRs' involvement in music outside the Evensong service was considerable. Overall, 85% reported having had musical instrument or voice training, and 48% said that at the peak of their interest, they practised for more than an hour per day; for almost a quarter (24%), it was more than two hours. To investigate the possibility that these overall results were influenced by respondents involved at times in the performance of Evensong – whom it was hypothesised were more likely to be more musically engaged and to have had advanced musical training – the data were re-analysed after excluding all 904 of those who had indicated that they were at any time involved in the delivery of Evensong, as indicated by their selection of Option 24 in Question 9: 'I am a member of staff, musician or a volunteer at the church where Choral Evensong takes place'.²⁷ This did not produce findings that were substantially different: 78% of the population who never attended the service as staff, musician, or volunteer, for example, had received instrumental or voice training; 42% had practised for more than an hour per day, and for 20% it was more than two hours. Those at any time involved in delivering the service also had similar music listening habits to those who never were: around one in three in each of these two populations said that they listened to music for more than two hours every day on average. Importantly, an almost

²⁷ This was a highly conservative approach, as the comments of many (it is estimated at least three quarters) of this cohort indicated that when they were involved in the delivery of the service it was in a non-musician role, for example as a minister, verger, or chaperone, or that they were equally involved in Evensong as a congregational attendee. But since it was not possible to derive with precision from the survey responses to what extent each respondent participated in Evensong in each role or capacity, this cautious method was taken to remove all possible musician participants from the data.

identical proportion in each group (82% and 81% respectively) said that they attended Evensong for the opportunity to reflect, meditate or contemplate, or the peace and quiet.

The only two areas of significant musical difference between the two groups were (i) membership of a choir, and (ii) having taken musical performance exams at the highest levels. Among those who sometimes performed Evensong, 80% said that as an adult they had sung in a church choir (Q16), the same proportion that said they sing in a choir or play in a musical ensemble now (Q18); 25% of this group said they had also taken musical performance exams at a level higher than Grade 8 of the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM), or equivalent. In the attendees-only group, the proportions were relatively smaller but nonetheless significant: 46% had sung in a church choir as an adult, 39% said they are in a choir or musical ensemble now, and 13% had taken music exams above Grade 8. These are important findings about the musical interests of Evensong participants, because in the UK population in general, it is estimated that just 3% of the total population sing in a choir, including children (Voices Now Big Choral Census, reported in Awbi 2017),²⁸ and that by age 16, only around 0.3% of children have taken exams at even Grade 4 and above – a substantially lower level than above Grade 8 (Gill 2020, 10).²⁹

In combination with the qualitative data gathered from the interviews and the free text comments submitted to the survey, these results highlight four important findings. First, they suggest that a similarly high degree of importance is placed upon music and peace in deciding to attend and experiencing Evensong by both those who only ever attend the service as congregation members, and those who sometimes perform the service musically. Second, they demonstrate that a large proportion of people who actively seek out Evensong as

²⁸ 2.14 million people sing in a choir, including children (Awbi 2017). Based on a population of 66 million people mid-2017, as estimated by the Office for National Statistics (Office for National Statistics 2018), this amounts to around 3% of the population.

²⁹ ABRSM do not publish examinations data but research has been undertaken by Gill (2020).

congregation members also have other roles in the service at other times, including in the performance of Evensong as musicians or officiants, and vice versa. This highlights the fluidity of the boundary between participants and performers at Evensong among the musically trained, and demonstrate that when not performing, Evensong remains important as a congregational activity for musicians, including as a source of peace:

I sing there but I also go when I am unhappy, stressed, or anxious.

I enjoy singing in two choirs which sing Evensong ... I also attend Evensong if I can at whichever place I can get to during the week, since I am usually in a different cathedral city every week for work purposes.

I often sing in them, otherwise I like to go to find some sort of peace. I also like to go if I'm in a new city/travelling... It's like sampling the local wine if on holiday on the continent...

To pray and reflect. I also play the organ and direct the choir for the monthly service at my parish church, but also attend my nearest cathedrals when time and opportunity allow (usually mid-week).

I particularly love the music, and it provides 45-60 minutes where I can take time out of my busy life to channel my thoughts away from work, and think instead about God and other aspects of life. I also regularly sing in choirs ... either as a member of the congregation or as a member of the choir, I am able to be completely immersed in the atmosphere. I am certain that it is good for my health and mental wellbeing!

Third, they underscore the importance of music, and of wider musical engagement, to Evensong participants of all kinds in their lives outside the Evensong service, as evidenced by their unusually high levels of musical participation and training compared with the wider population. Finally, they indicate the appeal of Evensong to people with musical training not only as congregation members, but also as a place where meaningful experiences can be attained while singing or playing. These experiences are outside the scope of this project, but could be a fruitful area for further research.

Respondents to surveys of this sort are inherently self-selecting, and it cannot be known to what extent these highly musically engaged individuals are representative of the wider Evensong-going population. A follow-up 'snapshot' survey, planned for April 2020 to

provide contextual data about two sample congregations at each of the three key sites had to be cancelled due to the national lockdown. Four factors, however, suggest that these findings can be regarded as reliable indicators. The first is the size of the sample. 2,030 complete and valid responses to the Experiences of Evensong Survey were received; weekly attendance at all cathedral services, including the traditionally best-attended Sunday mornings, is 37,000; usual midweek attendance (i.e. excluding Sundays) is less than 20,000 (The Church of England Research & Statistics 2019). This suggests that based on a sample size of 2,030, a reasonable level of confidence can be taken in the findings. The second is that although the respondent group was self-selecting, the survey was widely publicised through a range of music- and non-music-related media, as described in Chapter 3. It is therefore considered there was wide awareness among the range of people who attend Evensong. Third, analysis of the survey data about the religiosity, faith affiliation and wider church-going practices of respondents, together with assessment of their qualitative comments, did not suggest they were distorted by an unrepresentative proportion of SRs with purely musical motivations for contributing to the study. 67% of respondents, for example, self-identified as religious, and 70% said that they either believe in God or know God really exists. In both cases, this is significantly more than in the UK population as a whole, in which only 5% of people self-describe as religious, and 34% believe in God or know God exists (Voas and Bruce 2019, 25, 29). Similarly, almost 80% of SRs identified as Anglican (compared with 12% of the UK population (ibid, 22)), and more than 80% go to Evensong at least every three to four months, with more than half attending at least once per month. More than half (58%) also said that they went to another type of Anglican church service at least once per week. And finally, that high levels of musical engagement are widespread among Evensong congregants was supported by the fieldwork and interviews, where it was not unusual to encounter people in

congregations whom it later transpired had high levels of musical training, and/or were, or had been, involved in musical performance.

4.2. Physiological data

The survey data that evidences participants' subjective perception of Evensong as a calming experience is strongly supported by the physiological data gathered in the IES. This shows through objective measures that during the IES, participants experienced calmed emotional states.

Emotional responses manifest in measurable physiological events such as changes in heart rate and electrodermal activity, even if they originate and persist outside of conscious awareness (Mauss et al. 2005; Lane, Nadel, and Ahern 2002; Taruffi et al. 2017).

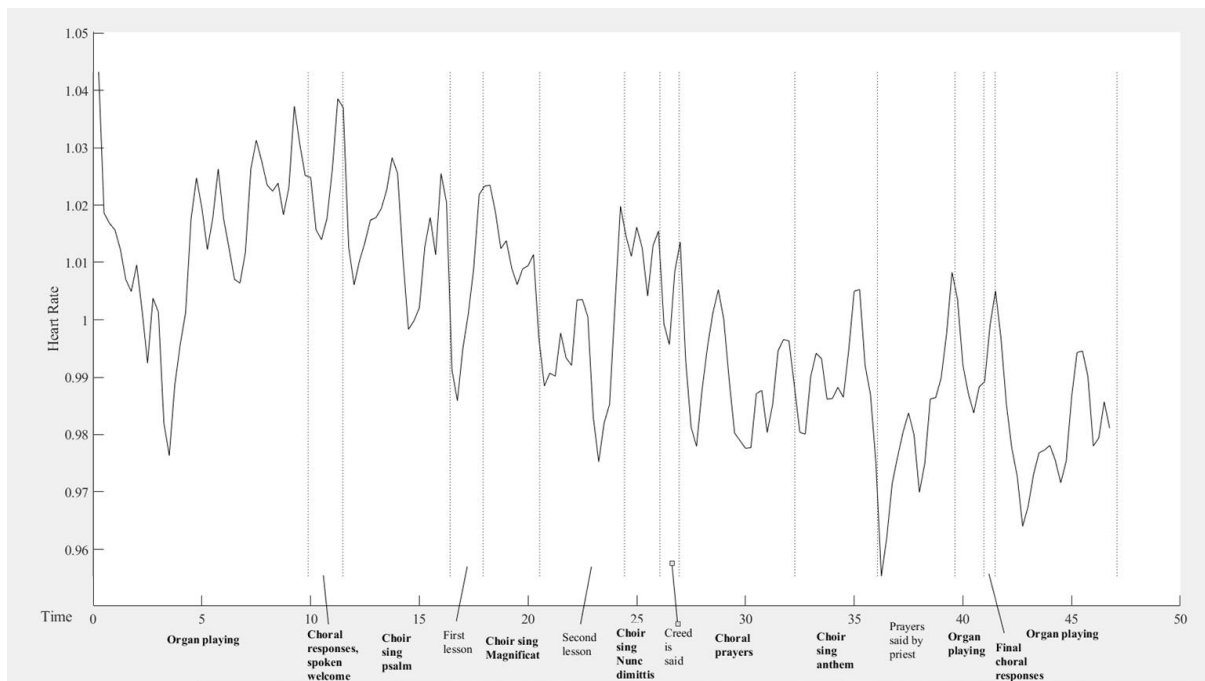
Physiological data are therefore considered to offer an objective indication of emotional responses (Juslin and Västfjäll 2008; Scherer and Zentner 2008; Steinbeis, Koelsch, and Sloboda 2006; Appelhans and Luecken 2006; M. M. Bradley and Lang 2002; Boucsein 1999; Krumhansl 1997; Nyklíček, Thayer, and Van Doornen 1997). Variations in heart rate can indicate changes in arousal – excitement or relaxation – induced by music listening (Iwanaga, Ikeda, and Iwaki 1996; Iwanaga, Kobayashi, and Kawasaki 2005). Participants' heart rates were therefore monitored in the IES as an indicator of their emotional trajectories during the course of the immersive Evensong service (details of the methodology, its implementation, and its limitations are set out in Chapter 3). One important finding emerged: even after taking account of all shortcomings of the methodology, the data show a significant and consistent reduction in participants' heart rates, and an increase in their high-frequency heart rate variability, across the duration of the IES.

Heart rate

Decreases in heart rate can be the result of decreased activity in the sympathetic nervous system – the so-called 'fight or flight response' – which becomes less active when there are

no perceived threats; or increased activity in the reciprocal autonomic nervous system, which is most active in unchallenging situations (Choi and Gutierrez-Osuna 2009). Participants in the IES consistently recorded an overall declining heart rate across the 47-minute duration of the film, and completed it with a distinctly lower rate than when they began (see Figure 12).

Figure 12. IES heart rate data in normalised units across film duration over time in minutes: all participants (musical elements of the service are marked in bold)

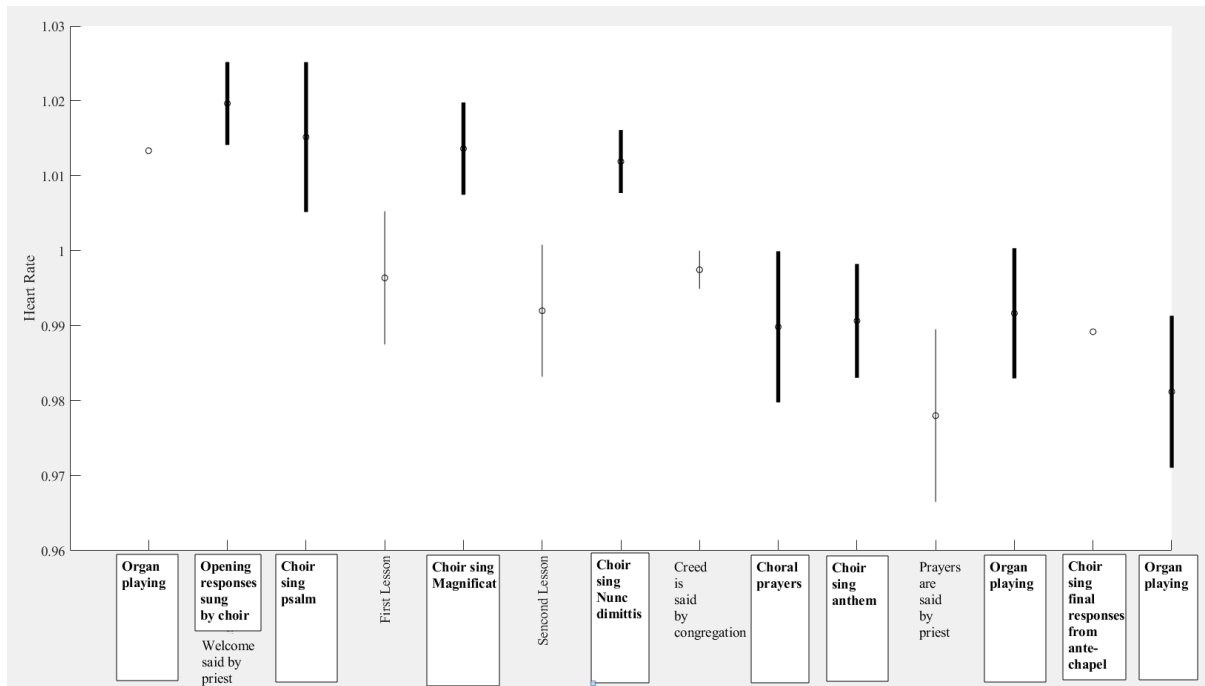


The service begins with the chapel clock striking six, at 9m 35s in the study, followed immediately by the choral opening preces and responses. The choir leave at 41m 29s, and the closing organ voluntary then plays until 47m 05s.

Participants' heart rates do not consistently fall across the duration of the film, however. Figure 13 shows the average of all participants' normalised heart rates during each separate element of the service, in the order that they occurred in the IES service, from left to right. This makes clear the overall downward trajectory, with the heart rates at their slowest during the closing prayers spoken by the priest and ending in a short period of silence, after the anthem, and also shows the temporary elevation in heart rate that occurs during every

choral episode except the psalm (that is, in the opening responses, the Magnificat, the Nunc dimittis, the anthem and the closing responses) – potentially indicating an increase in arousal, before a further stepping down.

Figure 13. IES heart rate data in normalised units across the film duration, by service element: all participants (musical elements are in bold)

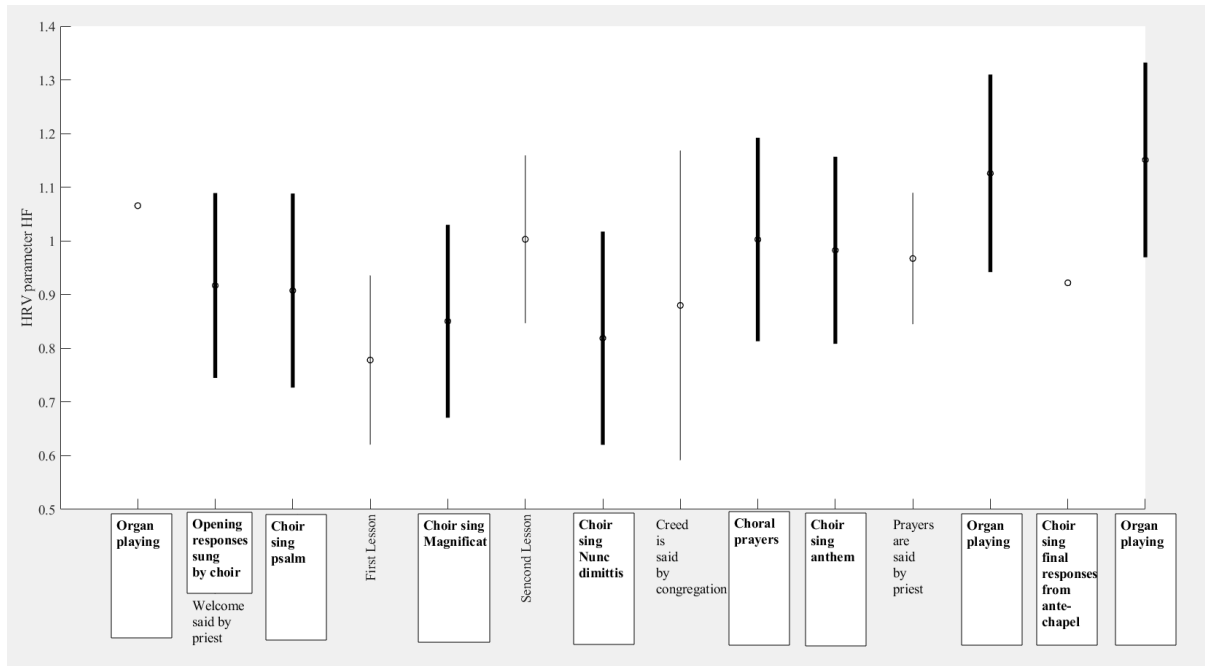


Heart rate variability

The heart rate data also showed a significant and consistent increase in heart rate variability (HRV) in the high frequency range (see Figure 14). This is a measure of the beat-to-beat interval, where increases in variability are associated with increased activation of the parasympathetic nervous system, and of tranquil affect (Iwanaga, Kobayashi, and Kawasaki 2005; Iwanaga, Ikeda, and Iwaki 1996). Together with the heart rate data, this is considered a reliable indicator that participants became calmer and more at peace, and less agitated or stressed, as the IES progressed, and that by the end of the IES, their state was significantly more tranquil than when it began.

Figure 14. IES high frequency heart rate variability (HRV) data in normalised units by service element

(musical elements are in bold)



Were the physiological measures the only data available, it would be prudent to view these findings with caution, as physiological responses can be influenced by a large number of variables intentionally not controlled for here (see Chapter 3 §3.3 above). For three reasons, however, it is considered likely that the physiological results reported here indicate a real effect. First, extensive evidence exists that participants' experiences of VR environments can closely match experiences of their real-world counterparts, including as indicated by objective physiological measures (e.g., Schoeffler et al. 2015), and that this was the case here was widely endorsed by IES participants' behaviour and comments, the majority of whom said that their experiences in the virtual environment felt like their experiences in the real world (see also Chapter 3).

Second, the physiological findings obtained here are consistent with published experimental studies of emotional experience conducted in controlled environments, including studies which have found that listening to music characterised as melodious, delicate, and harmonic, like that heard in the IES, is subjectively experienced as tranquillity-

inducing, reduces listener heart rate, and increases high frequency HRV (e.g., Iwanaga, Ikeda, and Iwaki 1996).

Most persuasively, however, the results are consistent with the observed behaviours and articulated comments of the IES participants, for whom in general, postures and demeanours appeared visibly more relaxed as the service progressed, agitated movements and fidgeting reduced or stopped, breathing slowed audibly, and as will be explored further in Chapter 5, participants routinely and abundantly commented on their growing sensation of relaxation:

(Organ playing) This is where I always start to feel sort of, I start to look forward to it. It's very often a rush to get here on time, and I start to relax when the organ's playing.

Siobhan, IES (2m34s)

(Psalm being sung) So I find myself closing my eyes at this point. Just [pause] relaxing.

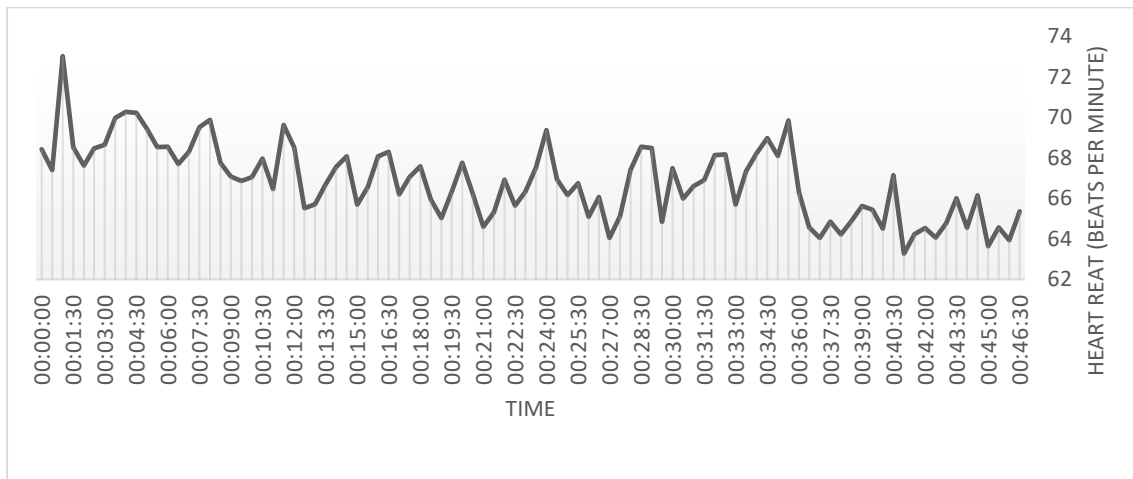
Amy, IES (27m39s)

(Choral prayers) [pause] And then the Amen, that's a moment when you're- [deep exhalation, then pause] __ calm.

Ash, IES (27m56s)

Crucially, they are also consistent with the findings from the other methodologies employed in this study, both in generality – as an overall subjective perception of increasing calm attributed to engagement with the service – and in their specific timing in relation to identifiable events within the service itself. To illustrate, the graph below shows the changing heart rate of Owen, an IES participant, across the duration of the film.

Figure 15. Heart rate data for IES participant Owen, across the film duration



The chart shows Owen's heart rate gradually falling overall, but with several peaks, for example at around 35 minutes, when the choir began singing the 'Allelujah' section of the choral anthem (at 35m05s). From these data alone, it could be speculated that Owen found this a more arousing or exciting part of the service. His commentary and observed behaviour confirmed that this was the case, but it is also of note that his heart rate is likely to have been affected in part by his behavioural response to these choral parts of the service. When the well-known and rhythmic melody of the 'Allelujah' section began, he became visibly more engaged, nodding and tapping his foot in time with the music, for example, while watching the choir and conductor intently, and at times vocalising the melody. Immediately after the anthem concluded, however, the prayers began, and he became bodily still, quieter, and lowered his gaze to the floor, speaking only softly and in response to the prayers. This correlates with a significant slowing of his heart rate, and then a continuing of the overall downward trajectory. At the end of the IES service, when the film stopped playing but before removing the headset, his heart rate indicated a significantly reduced level of arousal, and he commented very quietly 'The most relaxing time of the day'.

4.3. Evensong as an affective technology of the self: problems and potentialities

Foucault conceived of technologies of the self as resources that allow individuals to perform ‘operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality’ (Foucault 1988, 16). Music is now well established as an effective, important, and, in the West today, almost ubiquitous technology of the self, routinely mobilised in ‘creating, enhancing, sustaining and changing subjective, cognitive, bodily and self-conceptual states’ (DeNora 1999, 34–35), in a vast variety of situations, and for a range of social and psychological objectives (Rentfrow 2012).

Choral Evensong is not, however, an obvious technology of the self. As a live event taking place in a limited number of places for a short period and at a fixed time, it is significantly less accessible than the recorded, broadcast, and streamed music to which many adults now listen for several hours every day, available on demand almost anywhere, at any time (Nielsen 2017). People who want to experience Evensong cannot command its performance on impulse, as they would a streamed service. They have to conform to its schedule, waiting for the appointed time of day, and travelling often considerable distances for a performance, with all the planning and practicalities that entails: one SR reported routinely travelling 45 miles for Evensong, another weekly attendee referred to a four-hour round trip. Nor does Evensong permit participants the individual agency of private listening: they cannot select the repertoire, control the music by skipping to the parts most efficacious for their purposes, or ever fully predict what they will hear, and how they will respond to it.

As one SR wrote:

Unless you know the music going to be sung at the service ... [in which case] you might be able to predict how you are going to feel by going ... Anything can happen. It can be calming, reflective, invigorating, stimulating, awful, sublime, slow, quick, sorrowful, joyous, uplifting... No service of Evensong is exactly the same.

In addition, the protocols of Evensong's sacred setting deprive listeners of many of the opportunities for outward expression or embodied musical engagement that are inherent in most live, group-listening activities, and which can reinforce musical experience (Webb, Miles, and Sheeran 2012). Even the restrictive listening practice of the classical music concert permits applause, but at Evensong, such embodied responses have no legitimate place. Corporeal conduct is regulated by the ritual, and there is little room for external self-expression. Participants are informed by the liturgy when they shall, variously, kneel, stand, kneel 'devoutly', and recite specified text 'with a loud voice',³⁰ acting, as Kraus (2006, 541) observes, in unison, and 'according to some script that is not always obvious'. Applause is normally considered inappropriate, and is almost always absent. Evensong might therefore appear to be a better fit with Foucault's concept of technologies of power, rather than as a technology of the self. Technologies of power, Foucault (1988, 16) says, 'determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject'. He also emphasises that this subjection can be obtained through ideology as well as violence, and can be a subtle strategy in a network of power relations. These relations, he says, take a hold upon the body, in that 'they invest it, mark it, train it ... force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs' (Foucault 1995, 34–35). At Evensong, the visible embodied acts, signs, and ceremonies enacted by those who participate in them appear to be derived from the requirements of the ritual rather than their own self-care objectives, leading to the widespread idea that they are passive recipients of it, not active agents in it (e.g. Barley 2012, 86; BBC Radio 1993). As will be shown, however, this is not what this study found.

A further, and important difficulty both with adopting Evensong as a technology of the self as a participant, and treating it as such from a research perspective, arises from the

³⁰ The Order for Evening Prayer, The Book of Common Prayer (1662), 16-24.

service being an act of divine worship and devotion. Since the writings of the early Church Fathers, some commentators have considered it theologically problematic to attribute meaning, purpose, and effect to the musical elements of religious ritual outside their role in supporting worship (for a discussion see, e.g., Begbie 2013, 2; Flanagan 1988; Long 1972, 33). In some Anglican settings, this remains a live concern. Based on a recent ethnomusicological study in one Anglican church in the charismatic evangelical tradition, for example, Mark Porter (2017) concluded that because the dominant ontology of that tradition positioned music as a neutral medium, dependent on its text and the associated spiritual practices for meaning, music was perceived to be located outside the fundamental matters of worship. As a result, he argued, members of the church considered that talking about the music itself imbued it with a power it did not or should not have in a religious setting, and a detraction from the real business of worship:

Christians worry that talking about music and potentially ascribing power to it in a setting where direct encounter with God is expected risks ascribing power to an aspect of the experience that should not become powerful and potentially confuses the source of encounter (Porter 2017, 33).

Such an ontology seems to preclude approaching music in church as a technology of the self, except in so far as it furthers religious objectives, for example by supporting the attainment of a worshipful state. This position was reflected in the comments of one respondent to the Experiences of Evensong survey:

I was really, really surprised by the number of questions you asked on music...once you realise that church services are about WORSHIP, and engaging with the widest possible community, and the music is there to ENABLE that, not as a purpose in itself, it changes the perspective...

...Worship in church services isn't a hobby or a relaxation so it's not comparable with going to the theatre or walking or having a meal in a restaurant. Where were the questions about what other services recipients go to ... and where choral evensong fits into their worship priorities? (SR, emphasis original).

One of the most notable features of this response, from which the above is a short extract, however, both in the context of the literature and the other responses, was its unusualness.

Very few other SRs suggested that they were uncomfortable with the focus of the survey or indicated that they considered it inappropriate to discuss Evensong's music, its meaning, or its effects independently of its role in supporting worship, even though a substantial majority self-identified as Anglican (80%), and/or professed a belief in God (71%). In fact, Anglican respondents were almost exactly as likely as non-Anglicans to identify the musical elements of Evensong as important in their decision to attend the service. 'The quality of the musical performance' option, for example, was the most frequently selected reason for attending the service for Anglicans and non-Anglicans alike, being identified by 90% and 91% of each respectively. At the same time, 69% of Anglican respondents who cited the quality of the musical performance as an important motivating factor in their attendance also identified 'the opportunity to pray and/or worship' as a significant motivator, suggesting that they considered an active appreciation and enjoyment of the music of Evensong to be compatible with, to complement, or to be intrinsic to, the service's prayerful or worshipful potential. As will be demonstrated, this hypothesis was strongly confirmed by the interview and IES data.

The explicit prioritisation of music as a reason for attending Evensong by the survey's religious respondents, and their identification of it as an important part of their experience was, in the context of the foregoing literature, an unexpected finding. The literature and the responses themselves, however, offers a prospective explanation. At Evensong the music, the worship, and the nature of participation in the service are interwoven: the service itself is sung in its entirety, so there is no real question that the music might detract from the worship: as several SRs pointed out, the music *is* the worship. Participants who do not experience it as such, will, according to the rules of Davie's worship-market principle, choose to go to another type of service that they find more 'helpful and congenial' (Church of England General Synod 1992, 70; Davie 1990, 465). This seems to be borne out by this study's data: neither the SR quoted, nor most of the other small number who expressed discomfort with

either this study's or the service's musical focus, were regular Evensong attenders; almost all were Anglicans who attended other kinds of service.

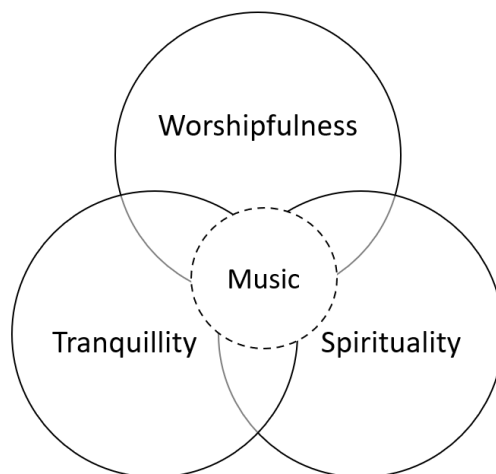
Also significant in the survey data is the positive enthusiasm Evensong attendees have for the service's musical style. Not only were more than 80% attracted by the type of music performed at Evensong, but when asked elsewhere in the survey about their wider musical tastes and listening preferences, 92% said that the music they most enjoyed listening to was 'traditional church music', second only to 'classical music' (93%). More than half also attended classical music concerts at least every three to four months. This might seem to be a predictable finding, but that is not necessarily the case. In congregations where contemporary Christian music is used, for example, the presumed neutrality of the music as a simple 'tool for worship' means committed congregation members choose to attend and engage enthusiastically in services with musical styles that would not be to their taste if they were to hear them outside church (Porter 2016, 213; see also Ingalls 2008, 248). As Porter has shown, sometimes they successfully suspend their musical value judgements, and at others, they reconcile themselves to listening to music they might find 'lame', 'awful' or 'cheesy' because of their love for and commitment to the church and its worship (Porter 2016, 211–12; 2017, 108). At Evensong, by contrast, the survey results suggest there is no such tension: participants overwhelmingly reported finding the music enjoyable, rewarding, and enriching both of itself and as a vehicle for worship, and appeared comfortable with experiencing and discussing it in all of these ways.

Most important, however, as the next section will demonstrate, is the relationship between music and affect in the achievement of participants' objectives in attending Evensong, whether those objectives are religious and spiritual, self-directed as a means to attaining religious or spiritual ends, or focused on self-care without a religious or spiritual dimension. Participants who wish to worship at Evensong frequently considered the music to

be essential to their attainment and maintenance of a cognitive, emotional, and embodied state conducive to worship. Participants who attend to get in touch with a spiritual part of themselves, or with the spiritual in the abstract, widely believed that the music promotes spirituality; and participants who have no religious or spiritual goals, but are seeking tranquillity, often regarded the music an important resource in effecting the affective transformation they desire.

The interwovenness of these objectives is illustrated by the survey results. 80% of SRs who cited ‘the mood or state of mind Evensong creates’, or ‘the opportunity to reflect, meditate, or contemplate/the peace and quiet’ as motivations for attending Evensong, for example, also identified as Anglican; of these, 82% of those seeking peace and quiet and 87% of those seeking a particular mood or state of mind also cited music as an important motivator, while three quarters (76% and 73% respectively) were also looking for an opportunity to pray or worship. As the next section will show, for many participants, each one of these three elements supports the other two, affording – if it is sought, and obtained – a unified experience in which tranquillity, spirituality, and worship combine in a unified experience that support one another, supported by musical experience.

Figure 16. A diagrammatic representation of the suggested relationship between music, worshipfulness, tranquillity, and spirituality at Evensong



4.4. ‘Church mode’: expectation, intention, and agency

One of the striking aspects of the affective impact of Choral Evensong, as retrospectively reported in the interviews, and evidenced in real time in the immersive Evensong study, was the degree to which participants had very clear affective goals and consciously sought to self-manage their state to achieve them. This was not universally the case, but was notably prevalent among both participants who identified Evensong’s state-changing affordances as a reason for attendance, and among those with non-affective motivations and objectives.

Jerry, for example, is a Christian who attends Evensong at least once per week, on weekdays for ‘spiritual recollection at the end of the day’, and on Sundays for ‘fellowship’. He came to the study directly from work, and was initially visibly restless and agitated: looking around, shuffling in the pew, expressing frustration that the VR headset meant he was unable to read anything or keep track of time on his watch, and noticing everything that happened in his sphere of vision. Then he recalled how, after ‘adjusting’ for a few moments to being in church, he would normally begin a reflection on the day, and would actively ‘Try and sort of slow down and get in a prayerful state of mind’. At that point his speech slowed, he became more physically still, the periods of silence became longer, and his next comment, after a long pause, was in a different, more reflective, mode.

IES commentary: Jerry, from 2m35s [Organ prelude playing throughout]

- 2m 35s: Hmmm.
2m 53s: Te-te-te-te-te-te-te. [restless tongue clicking]
2m 59s: So yes, at the moment I’m sort of, waiting ...
4m 38s: Well, I think ordinarily now, having adjusted myself to being here, I’d be sort of going over the day. Where’ve we been, what have we done, who have we seen, how’s it all gone, how’s God fitted into that? Hmmm.
5m00s: Yeah. Try and sort of slow down and get in a prayerful state of mind [very slowly, then long pause].
5m53s: It’s very pretty, isn’t it?

Julia, a weekly Evensong attendee, called the state of mind Jerry was purposively trying to attain ‘church mode’. Julia is also a Christian. She says she goes to Evensong for

‘religious observance and artistic appreciation’, and like Jerry, her commitment ‘to getting in the right headspace’ before the service is a focused act of agency. During the opening organ voluntary in the IES, she commented ‘So this is probably the moment when I’m getting myself ready to receive rather than to judge’. Describing herself as an introvert with a predisposition towards the intellectual rather than the emotional, she later explained that her first experiences of religious practice were in a Christian evangelical tradition. She said that this was ‘very emotional’, and emphasised ‘really feeling the music and the prayer’, and finding in yourself ‘enough passion and energy to commit’ to the worship. This, she said, sometimes left her with an anxiety that she did not always ‘feel’ enough in services. She said that at Evensong, however, she is reminded that God also listens to what she says, not only what she feels, and that it can be enough to commit to praying for others ‘intellectually and verbally’. To ensure that she is making this commitment, Julia, like Jerry, regards her self-preparation practices as a vital part of her pre-service ritual, necessary for a fruitful engagement with the service, and so to be maintained until the closing organ voluntary at the end of the service:

IES commentary: Julia, from 41m41s:

[Organ playing postlude]

41:41 At this point if there’s someone with me, I reassure them that we don’t have to be in church mode anymore...so whereas in the opening of the service I’m usually pretty committed to getting in the right headspace, at this point I’m usually just thinking about dinner... [looking at stained glass windows]

Ryan, by contrast, usually attends Evensong twice a week, but is not religious. With a demanding work schedule, his motives for attending are about ‘reflecting, contemplating, being in a location and a space outside of day-to-day life’, although he says he also has what he called an ‘ecclesiastical disposition’: a love of churches for their history and aesthetics, and their ability to enable him to access something that exists beyond humanity. In our interview, he returned repeatedly to the way he feels at Evensong, recalling that when he is

participating, ‘it’s calming me down mentally, and then emotionally, and obviously calming me physically’, and explaining that by the time he leaves the service, ‘I can just feel my sort of reset button pressed, it’s great’.

In common with many other participants in all parts of this study, Ryan presented Evensong as a subject with agency, and himself as the object of Evensong’s influences: his responses are the result of what is done *to him by* Evensong. Ryan’s comments make clear, however, that he is by no means a neutral or passive participant and illustrate that rather, it is his conscious intention to enter a different affective state at Evensong:

Q: You referred to the mental and the emotional experience of being in the service. What does that feel like? What happens to you?

Ryan: ...mentally, I can feel myself as I physically slot into a pew and sit down, I physically make sure I focus a bit more on my breathing and breathe kind of slowly and steadily. I feel myself sort of calming mentally, and again, it’s because - my brain’s shifting down a gear or two, it’s been running in kind of fifth gear - so I’m downshifting into, say, third ...yes, it’s calming me down mentally.

In deciding, for example, to ‘make sure I focus a bit more on my breathing and breathe kind of slow and steadily’ Ryan is acting on his affective intention, and becoming an active agent in co-producing that state *with* Evensong – its sounds, its performers, its environmental and social space, with all of which he also interacts. In addition to the effects of Ryan’s tranquillity-directed actions, there is evidence that the expectation of an experience can predispose an individual towards actually experiencing it, either by triggering ‘target-based expectancies’ or priming a state of ‘affective readiness’ (T. Wilson et al. 1989; see also Huron 2006). Accordingly, Ryan’s expectation that he will become mentally and physically calmer during the service will, according to this evidence, predispose him to interpret his experience of it as calming, and to retrospectively (re)assess it as such (Croft and Walker 2001; Klaaren, Hodges, and Wilson 1994).

It is not only those with direct personal experience of Evensong that evidence affective readiness tendencies. Many first-time Evensong participants also have clear expectations, usually derived either from the direct accounts of others, or from what Jones and McGillis term ‘category-based expectancies’, and Hochschild calls ‘cultural feeling rules’: the cultural norms associated with an event (T. Wilson et al. 1989). These expectations, their origin, and in some cases their ongoing influence, are evident in many responses to the survey and interview question ‘When and why did you first go to Choral Evensong?’. Ava, for example, did not grow up in the UK, is not a Christian, and until recently, had never been to Evensong. Confronted with some very challenging life events, and feeling that she ‘needed to be somewhere peaceful’, however, she found that she ‘naturally gravitated’ towards the service. She said she could not explain why this was, but she said that she had become familiar with Evensong through reading the novels of Barbara Pym and other twentieth-century English writers, and that this may have ‘subconsciously’ been an influence. Pym’s plots are often set in Anglican parishes, and as Ava put it, ‘her books are full of Evensong ... Evensong is a character in itself’. Many SRs similarly described being instinctively drawn to the service for the first time when they felt that they needed peace or solace:

[I first went to Evensong when]

... I needed some quiet time after a particularly trying working day. (SR)

... I turned 30 ... and my long-term relationship broke down. I needed to find solace and comfort and peace in my heart and soul... I felt safe and welcomed at a time I felt totally alone and frightened. (SR)

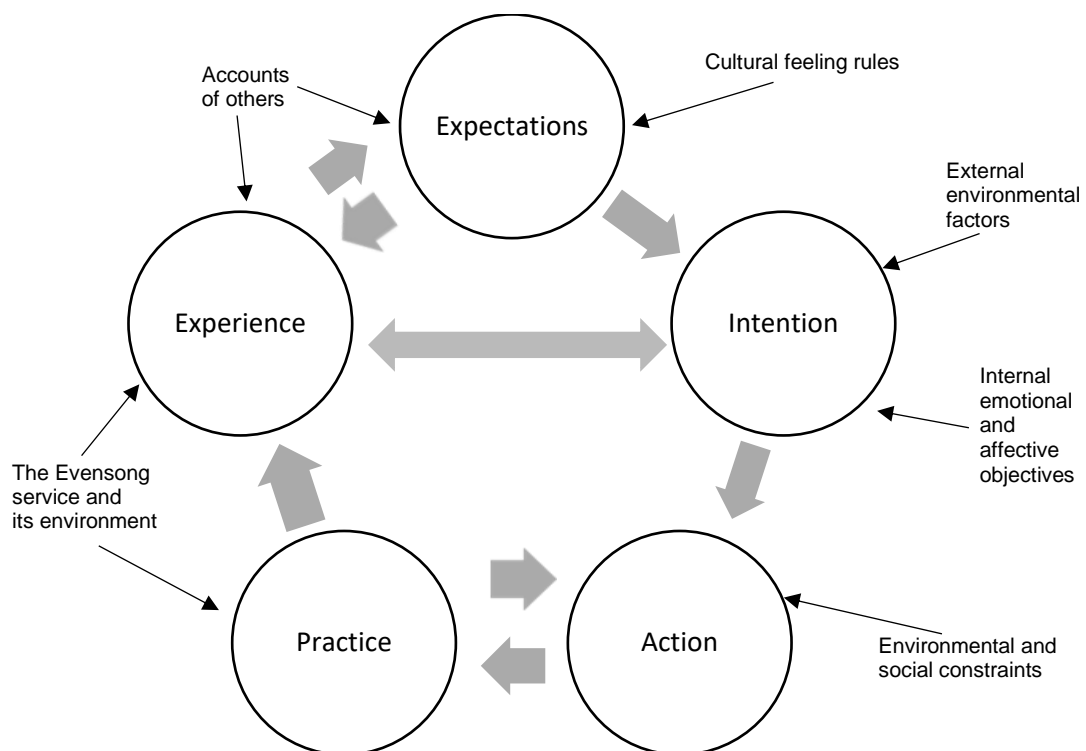
...I became disillusioned after going through a divorce...I felt isolated and not very well supported. I sought solace in my local cathedral... I found real peace at Evensong... [Now] Evensong is, for me, my personal moment of peace and coming close to God and on occasions there are tears in my quietness. (SR)

Thus, what Julia calls ‘church mode’, is not just a manner of conduct, but a way of being that is influenced by a cycle of expectations, derived from a variety of sources, about what

Evensong will afford. These expectations, the evidence from this study suggests, in turn influence intention – ‘to find solace and comfort and peace’; and the intentions direct action – ‘I... breathe kind of slowly and steadily’. These actions affect experience – controlled breathing, for example, directly affects heart rate and heart rate variability, and subjective perceptions of relaxation (Chen et al. 2017; Y.-P. Lin, Yang, and Jung 2014); and these experiences in turn shape live and retrospective reassessment – ‘yes, it’s calming me down mentally’. These assessments become knowledge about what it is like to be at Evensong, which informs future expectations of how the service will be experienced.

The diagram at Figure 17 shows a suggested visual representation of this model, based on the evidence gathered in this study and set out so far, of the mechanisms involved in this affective transformation, and the primary influences upon those mechanisms. At the heart of the process is the self-reinforcing cycle of intention, actions, practice, experience and expectations, each element of which is subject to external influences, while also being continually honed and shaped by the other elements of the process.

Figure 17. State self-transformation towards tranquility through Evensong: a proposed model of the mechanisms



In summary, the evidence from this study suggests that transformation is not something done *by* Evensong, but something that participants *do* with it, through a process and a practice in which nature, culture, music, and individual agency interweave. Essential to each participant's transformation, therefore, is their own agency. Why then, do so many participants appear to present their Evensong experience as passive?

4.5. Agency, passing, and the paradoxical practice of Evensong

Ryan's apparently contradictory description of Evensong as a passive experience, while at the same time, making clear that there were at least elements he was actively managing, was commonplace among interviewees and SRs. Equally prevalent was the opposite but similarly paradoxical narrative that characterised participation as active – 'active participation in listening and praying', 'an active recipient', 'using the sound as a platform for prayer', while at the same time emphasising the passive elements of the experience, as these three SRs comments illustrate:

[How would you describe the experience of being at Evensong?]

A spiritual balm of entering the worship of heaven in a way that allows me to be an active recipient.

I combine attending to the use of Scripture with presenting myself before God (in active passivity) with my concerns for the world...

...being able to spiritually and emotionally connect while not actively participating, using the sound as a platform for prayer, stillness.

Strikingly dominant in this regard was the metaphor of being 'washed over' by the music at Evensong. This exact term was employed, unprompted, by 40 SRs, six interviewees, and one IES participant, for example:

[Evensong is] ...So peaceful ...it's easy to just relax and let the music and atmosphere wash over you. (SR)

Peaceful prayerful end of the day. Just let the music and words wash over you... (SR)

Calming - a half-hour taken out of the day in which I just sit, stand, or kneel, as required, listening and letting the words and music wash over me. (SR)

I'm bathed in- I'm in a beautiful building and I'm being washed in lovely sounds
(Luca, interview)

I really feel like I'm just letting it wash over me (June, IES, during choral prayers)

A further 43 SRs used the word 'immersive' to describe their experience of Evensong, while related ideas of the music acting to gently subsume the listener into the service were also abundant:

[Evensong is] Like slipping into a warm bubble bath and being relaxed and encompassed by comfort and pleasure. (SR)

It is like an ambient jacuzzi of sound as scripture is sung and prayed over you.
(SR)

As soon as you take your pew, the peace, quiet and calm begin to seep into one, aided ...by the organ music. ...there is a wonderful sense of being done to - the congregation ...can sit back and absorb the music, the words, the atmosphere.
(SR)

Comments of this sort are often interpreted as indicating passivity, disengagement, or aesthetic priorities among Evensong attendees – all conditions often considered incompatible with participation in an act of divine worship. Considering participants' wider narratives, however, reveals a more nuanced picture of acts of resistance. It shows, for example, how these participants modulate their attention and emotion across the service, rather than submitting to total, passive immersion. It also evidences the near-universality of reflexive musical interaction undertaken in pursuit of a more tranquil affective state both as an end in itself, and as a mechanism for attaining other cognitive, spiritual-religious, and wellbeing goals, including to 'kindle the mind more religiously to prayer', in St Augustine's terms (Long 1972, 33):

...the music washes over and around me; I can pray during the music. (SR)

I enjoy the music which helps me to examine my own thoughts...(SR)

Peaceful, but not sedative; reflective, but not passive. (SR)

This active-passive relationship was described in more detail by Molly, a regular Evensong attendee. Describing the service as 'the opposite' of meditation, which she characterised as a

‘mind-emptying’ practice, Molly explained that for her Evensong is mind-ful, enabling her to actively think, or pray, or reflect, assisted by the familiar words and music washing over her:

[Thinking, praying, reflecting] ...these all happen, interchangeably and very quickly ... it’s familiar, so I can let it wash over me, so I can think about whatever I’m thinking about... [Evensong’s] the opposite of that, of meditation. It’s stilling or grounding, probably, or mindfulness...

Others described the music of Evensong as assisting meditation, prayer, worship, and reflection on the readings, and supporting the deepening of prayer and the relationship with God.

Making the music work

Elsa, another regular Evensong attendee, who also commented that at times at Evensong, ‘you can just almost close your eyes and let the music wash over you’, also contested the idea of passivity, and like Molly, used the analogy of mindfulness – a practice which stresses paying attention to experience and engaging in the present moment – to illustrate the reflexive nature of her Evensong practice. Describing a series of Evensong services that she had been involved in organising, she explained how it felt to attend them like this:

Elsa: ...it was a nice way to un– again, find a little slot in the day...

Q: Were you going to say ‘unwind’ then, and did you stop yourself?

Elsa: I do mean unwind, but I mean it in a mindfulness sort of way, finding that gap in the hustle and bustle of the day, a little oasis of calm and peace, and that’s quite important.

That Evensong is both an immersive wash of sound and an active, attentive practice, like the mindfulness with which participants in this study often compared it, was especially apparent in the narratives of participants previously unfamiliar with attending cathedral-style choral services as a member of the congregation. Their stories typically presented a duality of experience which distinguished between their first encounters with Evensong – typically portrayed as unmoving, unsatisfactory, and unrewarding; and their subsequent, more

fulfilling experiences when their affective, spiritual, or worshipful goals were met, as the representative comments of these three SRs illustrate:

At first, I didn't like it. I am a Methodist by background, and I found the lack of involvement really difficult... However, I have come to really enjoy evensong and I have found it a time for quiet, reflection, prayer, rest. A place where it's ok to stop and to hand things over to God.

It was strange at first because I had sung evensong as a member of the choir in my church several times a year. To just be still and inhabit the sung prayer offered by another choir was a discipline/gift I had to experience several times to understand.

...[I] initially found the passive role allotted to the congregation in the choral form of the service frustrating. I had a strongly expressed zeal for 'Classical' orchestral music from Bach to Mahler, but was positively antipathetic towards Classical choral music... It took about six months duteous exposure to Choral Evensong *despite* the music to transform my tastes!

The last respondent went on to explain how his self-directed 'duteous exposure' to Evensong while an undergraduate enabled him to stop finding the service 'frustrating', and instead to experience it as 'a contemplative act of worship, an offering up of my time to God, a space for reflection, an unearned gift, and, at moments, a foretaste of heaven'.

There is experimental evidence that 'mere exposure' to a stimulus can increase liking for it (Zajonc 1968, 21; Peretz, Gaudreau, and Bonnel 1998), but participants' evidence here suggests that the entirely different quality of experience achieved after they became accustomed to the service is attributable less to its familiarity than to their learning and practising what the SR above called the 'discipline' of engaging with it effectively.

The active-passive potentializing of music

Disciplines and protocols are common to all music listening activities, and as Small (1998) has observed, finding satisfaction in music listening is tightly bound up with understanding how to act and interact with the music in the situation in which it is heard:

It is very important to realize that in taking part in ritual we do not only see and hear, listen and watch... but we also act, and it is in the bodily experience of performing the actions in company with others that the meaning of taking part lies. The more actively we participate, the more each one of us is empowered to act, to

create, to display, then the more satisfying we shall find the performance of the ritual (Small 1998, 105; see also Hennion 2001, 1).

The accounts just discussed illustrate Small's point, highlighting the tension and conscious movement between states that are variously more active and more passive. They also suggest that because of this, the achievement of affective objectives at Evensong is a performance informed by experience, application, and practice, in a similar way that studies have shown to be the case in activities as diverse as being a music-lover (Hennion 2001), a sexual lover (DeNora 2021; 1997) and a user of recreational drugs (Gomart and Hennion 1999). In each of these circumstances, as Gomart and Hennion write, there is:

a subtle interweaving between being abandoned to an external power and the virtuosity of practices, of manual, and of social skills. The user passes between active and passive. That is, between "I am manipulated" (because I agree to it) and "I manipulate" (an object which is stronger than myself). This "passing" [between active and passive] is at the heart of a theory of attachment (Gomart and Hennion 1999, 243).

Accordingly, in order to reflexively engage in the active state, they contend that is necessary to deploy a range of practical and social modalities:

[s]killed gestures and techniques of the body, appropriate dispositions of the mind, obsessive tidiness in installation, organizational control of time and space, quasi-scientific expertise of the objects involved and adeptness at managing their passion as a collective construction of a "connoisseur's practice" (Gomart and Hennion 1999, 243).

These actions, they argue, while essential, do not work by themselves. Their theory is rather one of mediation, of the 'potentialization' of the resource – the music, the bodies, the drug, or here, Evensong – by a user skilled in creating the conditions for the achievement of the affective outcome they are seeking, but who cannot will its realisation, as that requires abandonment to an external, uncontrolled force. The skill, then, is in learning to 'pass' between activity and passivity, where passivity is not 'a moment of inaction' but an action in itself, a potentializing action of relinquishment that frees the participant to be 'seized' by the experience (Gomart and Hennion 1999, 243).

Consistent with this theory, a key difference between the people for whom Evensong ‘did little’ and those for whom its affordances were significant, appeared to be the degree to which they actively concerned themselves with interacting with the service cognitively, emotionally, and bodily. During the closing organ voluntary in the IES, for example, the regular Evensong participants reflexively observed their involvement in a variety of active processes:

...trying to reflect on the service, to say a few personal prayers (Chloe)

...[feeling] sort of happy and very engaged in what’s going on...A moment of stillness before I get back out into the world’ (Siobhan)

...eyes closed ... relaxing, enjoying the music (Duncan)

...reflect[ing] on the fact that most of my reflections are framed in terms of berating myself for not being holy enough, which is probably not the way God regards me.... (Carla)

...thinking about that organ... That pedal sounds great! Baaaaahmmmm! (Gabe)

By contrast, the participants who were not regular Evensong attendees made comments at the same point in the service that suggested that they felt less actively engaged in, and more an observer of, the event. Stuart, Hilary, and Ned, for example, are all occasional Evensong-goers, who are interested in the service primarily as a musical experience:

‘I see rather reverential-looking people... I can’t say I’m feeling in kind with them’ (Stuart)

‘I’m not really feeling engaged... yes, some people are going, they’ve had enough as well’ (Hilary)

‘.... I think we could stop [the experiment] now... I would certainly stay if I was at a service. It’s very impolite, I think, to walk out... [but] the organ music isn’t really my favourite... (Ned)

The theory is also supported by the evidence that experienced participants monitor the active-passive balance in their engagement, and purposively modulate it. Tess, for example, who identifies as a Christian, explained in interview that during Evensong she is continually self-examining to ensure that she is spiritually and intellectually attentive:

I am always tempted to be thinking, how prayerful am I being? Am I actually getting it? Am I paying attention or am I just sitting here for an hour or half an hour having a nice enough time?

She further explained that she has devised strategies to ensure she maintains theological or worshipful focus during the musical parts of the service, one of which was to try to imagine the biblical Mary singing the Magnificat – her response to the news from the Angel Gabriel that she is bearing the son of God – during the choir’s performance of it. This seemed to be effective: after the choir sang the first phrase of the canticle in the IES (in which Tess had participated several months before giving a separate, in-depth interview), she exclaimed ‘Ohhhh. Gosh, it’s quite sad. Poor Mary. It’s normally quite upbeat.’ In the interview, Tess described how this approach had enabled her to think about the meaning of Mary’s story in different ways:

... she can have some really strange emotions, if you imagine “He hath shewed strength with his arm, He hath scattered the proud”, then you can imagine Mary going, “Wow! Scattered!”. Or this can be meek and mild Mary, “This is actually really scary. I’m not ready to bear the Son of God in my own womb, that’s quite frightening.” But you wouldn’t get that if you were just saying it, because you would just be reading it in your own voice and ...at normal reading speed, and then you’ve moved on. The music gives you the chance to dwell a bit more...

Tess’s commentary offers an insight into the intellectual labour in which many Evensong participants are involved when they appear simply to be passively receiving ‘a wash of beautiful sounds’: their focused thinking, reasoning, and mindful awareness; their conscious ‘allowing in’ of the music, while resisting its purely aesthetic gratification; and their repeated self-examination as they monitor their experience and moderate their practice. It also illustrates how, at Evensong, music commonly becomes what DeNora (1997, §43) calls ‘an active, but perhaps often unacknowledged, ingredient in the practical management of “tuning in”...’. DeNora made this observation in a study of music in the context of erotic encounter, but it can be seen how it is also true for Tess, ‘tuning in’ theologically and to the emotions of Mary. The concept is also a useful way of understanding the variety of types of tuning in

undertaken by the other participants quoted, for example, cognitively – ‘thinking about that organ... That pedal sounds great!’; spiritually – ‘saying a few private prayers’; emotionally – ‘happy and very engaged in what’s going on’; and physically – ‘eyes closed, relaxing’. Like Gomart and Hennion, DeNora also draws an analogy between music and drug use, referring to Becker’s classic work on marijuana users, in which the drug’s ‘so-called “effect”’ is presented not as a pharmacological inevitability but as an interaction between ‘culture and chemistry’, in which the categories for perceiving must be learned. In that context, they codify ‘the “drug”’ as culture/cannabis’ (DeNora 1997, §51); in this one, it is culture/practice/Evensong, the second mediating category reflecting the importance of individual agency in configuring the self in the face of the various encounters Evensong affords.

4.6. Summary

The study shows that at Evensong, entering a state of increased peace and tranquillity is commonplace and significantly valued by many participants. This transformation is perceived subjectively, felt emotionally, cognitively, and physically, and evidenced through objective physiological measures. The attainment of this state is an important motivation for attending the service, second only to the music itself. Closer analysis reveals the interweaving and mutual mediation of music, reflection, and affective state, and participants’ sophisticated deployment of musical resources and personal agency to achieve affective objectives, which may vary within and between services and individuals. Thus, while participants often appear to be engaged in a passively receptive experience, and frequently portray their experience as one of a liberation of agency, studies of their moment-by-moment experience and analysis of retrospective accounts reveal that those who find the service most rewarding are engaged in a dynamic practice of intellectual and emotional labour. This labour, the work of Evensong listening, draws on music as a resource, is informed by cultural learning, and mediates/is

mediated by their intentions in the moment, their actions, skills, and experiences. Using music knowingly and deliberately to balance their active and passive engagement for the achievement of a plurality of varying emotional, spiritual, intellectual and embodied goals, Evensong participants therefore become the actors and directors of affective production, while remaining subject to the ‘uncertain mediations that support each other to make states arise’ (Hennion 2015, 279).

Chapter 5. Devices and desires: how Evensong affords tranquillity

‘Music’, DeNora writes,

is active in defining situations because, like all devices or technologies, it is often linked, through convention, to social scenarios, often according to the social uses for which it was initially produced... (DeNora 2000, 11).

Over time, she continues, additional understandings accrue, and these can be used to construct, convey, and perceive the ‘scenic specificity’ of a situation. By the time the first Anglican evening service was named Evensong in 1549, the term had already been in use for the early Christian evening offices on which it is based and with which it continues to share musical content since at least 516CE, when as *æfensanc* it was mentioned in the rule of St Benedict (Benedictus Nursiensis 1888, 46). Both the word ‘Evensong’, and the event it denotes, have therefore accrued many centuries of significance and signification, independently and in conjunction with those of its liturgy, language, and rubrics, its ritual practices, and its constituent sounds. Some of these are shared, inscribed in the service as cultural meaning; others are profoundly personal, deriving from autobiographical memories and associations, private beliefs and ideologies, and musical training; a very large proportion in both categories relate to ideas of peace, calm, and serenity. This chapter explores how the music and sounds of Evensong get into the action of tranquillity, and become tools of transformation in quietening the minds, bodies, and souls of its participants. It investigates the roles and relationships of social, cultural, and musical factors in the transformational process; and examines further how the ‘passing’ between activity and passivity identified in the last chapter is mobilised in this pursuit of quietation: the practice of Evensong.

5.1. ‘Over the threshold and into worship’: the organ, liminality, and transition

The English congregational minister, musician, and musicologist Erik Routley once observed that the organ music played before Anglican church services performs the same function as

‘the smoke of incense’ in traditional Roman Catholic rites: ‘It lifts you over the threshold and into worship’ (Routley, quoted in Church of England General Synod 1992, 47). Threshold crossing, or liminality, to use Victor Turner’s term, is a process of passage, transition or disruption that occurs when a normal or stable state or time is interrupted, transformed or suspended (Turner 1996). Originally identified by van Gennep (2013) in the context of rites of passage, the concept of liminal experience has subsequently been applied much more broadly across a range of ritual and non-ritual experiences which involve a disconnection from the social ties that bind a person to a given position and its associated practices, and the creation of a new position and practices, and a transformed mode of being (Stenner 2017, Chapter I).

As participants in an act of divine worship, the Church expects members of its congregations to inhabit a state that is different from the everyday: ‘stirred up to the remembrance of one’s duty to God’, as the Prayer Book (1662, xi) says, or what is today more commonly called ‘prayerfulness’ (e.g., Church of England General Synod 1992, 41). The contrast between this state and the one in which people reach Evensong is particularly acute because of the service’s location at the end of the working day, normally at around 5 or 6 pm. As the clergy quoted in the introduction to this Section observed (from page 81), participants often arrive at Evensong preoccupied and in a state of heightened arousal – ‘super-stressed and your mind’s on other things’, as Ben, a regular attender put it – and a focus on concerns that are ‘personal’ and ‘worldly’, as several SRs wrote. The Church Archbishops’ most recent Commission on Church Music advised that to catalyse the transition from worldly state to church mode, churches should deploy the ‘unsurpassable of power of music to set a mood’ (Church of England General Synod 1992, 47). It further recommended that church musicians learn from ‘film-makers and broadcasters’ about music’s ‘power’ in this regard, which, they concluded,

...both for and within an act of worship, cannot be over-emphasised. Those who are responsible for [musical] choice and performance wield an influence which is awesome indeed (Church of England General Synod 1992, 47).

This, as Routley observed, is why, since the eighteenth century, when pipe organs replaced the ‘rather raucous local musical ensembles’ in English churches (Percy 2013, 67), it has been customary at traditional Anglican services for an organ voluntary to be played as the congregation arrives (Temperley 2013 §7). A further consequence flows from this: for the English, as Sloboda (2010, 501) has written, the sound of a pipe organ now ‘signifies churches’. This theory is supported by a recent neurolinguistics word association study, that found that among British adults aged 66 and older, the word most commonly associated with ‘organ’, after ‘music’, is ‘church’ (Hirsh and Tree 2001).³¹ This association, and the emotions it evokes, can be so strong that hearing an organ in non-sacred spaces can seem incongruous, even ‘weird’, as Nathan, a churchgoer and regular cathedral Evensong participant put it.

Describing his experience of hearing Saint-Saëns’s Organ Symphony performed in a concert hall, an event he attended with a churchgoing friend, he explained:

... we sat down, and it was all great ... [but] once the organ started, we kind of looked at each other, slightly odd, something sort of passed between us, and afterwards we both said the same thing: we said, “It’s not the same outside church!” It was weird...we’re both so used to hearing an organ in an ecclesiastical setting that it felt slightly odd ... yes, funny!

The organ prelude at Evensong therefore signifies church in more than (just) the Peircean sense of indexing or symbolising it: it also has the potential, through association, cultural conditioning, or personal memories connected with its sound, to signify emotional states and modes of conduct. As one correspondent to *The Musical Times* wrote in 1930,

It is to be doubted whether [the] “ordinary listener” ever hears the organ or its music as it really should be, so infused has it become with ...emotional and blurring non-musical “associations” ... I mean the religious emotions of Worship, Mysticism, Love, and other such like abstractions that accompany any church service...’ (Stuart 1930).

³¹ Among those under 30, ‘church’ was the fourth most common association, after ‘heart’, ‘music’ and ‘piano’.

But more than that, the sound of the organ also stimulates and supports these states and modes of conduct. Evensong is a formal, sombre, serious service, ‘a vehicle of quiet, meditative worship’, as Diarmaid McCulloch describes it (Letts 2015), and the epitome of what Martyn Percy calls the ‘passionate coolness’, ‘restraint’, and ‘moderation’ considered characteristic of Anglicanism (Percy 2013, 77). For those enculturated in it, therefore, these are the temperaments the sound of the organ that marks its approach evokes. Nathan’s practice, like many other regular attendees encountered during this study, is to arrive at Evensong very early, to spend time alone in what he called ‘the quietness’, with the organ prelude playing: ‘I love to sit there for half an hour before the service and just be still, and be quiet in that space with those people’. For him, the organ music is central to the process of pre-Evensong liminality.

A majority of participants in the IES described a similar sense of entering a calmer, more reflective, or more receptive affective state during the seven minutes of opening organ music, and/or they demonstrated this through the content and nature of their articulated thoughts, as the extracts in Figure 18 (page 125) show. These, and the accounts from interviewees and SRs, point to three related ways in which the organ music affords the transition to a more peaceful condition. First, it helps to delineate the physical space and create a sense of entering a place that is different from the everyday. Most directly, it does this by masking the environmental sounds that ground the listener in the mundane, like the ‘muttering’ of other participants that was distracting Gabe until the music began (Figure 18), and which militate against the sense of a ‘special’ atmosphere.

Figure 18. Selected IES participant commentaries during the opening organ prelude

Hilary	Siobhan	Hayley	Ben	Gabe	Jerry
01:22 Organ begins to play improvised prelude, softly, in a baroque style					
04:00 ... It's funny, it has that sort of mixture of solemn and everyday quality about it, that often think you get in churches, when ...the organ is being played but nothing really formal is happening yet, so people are being quiet and sort of respectful, but not yet in the ritual.	02.24 This is where I always start to feel sort of, I start to look forward to it. It's very often a rush to get here on time, and I start to relax, when the organ's playing. 08.44 [smiling] I just feel very calm and ready. Everything is in place. Everything feels right. 09.14 So it shows I'm a bit of a creature of habit. I find that routine comforting.	01.22 Now the organ starts... 05.00 Strange, dead time that you have before a service begins. ... 08.19 It's beautiful. There's always a special quality of light in this chapel. It's like ivory. Carved ivory. I've seen reliquaries that are like the reredos... Hmm. [pause] Intricacy. Even the music is intricate.	03:10 The music is very restful, the organ... 05:30 The organ music is very calming. It feels as though everyone is settling down. Nice stained-glass windows. 08:57 It sounds like the organ music is going to come to an end.	01.44 That's really good, the organ's started playing. You don't hear all the muttering... 02.28 I'm thinking it's quite nice to have an organ voluntary from a similar sort of period as the music that is going to come up. 03.00 It's really striking to see what impact the playing of the organ has. The people opposite are now completely silent. 06.37 We're entering the final section of the organ piece. It must be nearly six.	02.00 Well I have nothing to read. [sigh] And no way of looking at my watch either. [smiling] 02.35 Hmmm 02.53 te-te-te-te-te-te [restless] So yes, at the moment I'm sort of, waiting... 04.38 Well, I think ordinarily now, having adjusted myself to being here, I'd be sort of going over the day...how's it all gone, how's God fitted into that? Hmmm. 05.00 Yeah. [very slowly] Try and sort of slow down and get in a prayerful state of mind. 05.53 It's very pretty, isn't it?

The importance and power of the sense that Evensong is taking place in a kind of space different from the everyday was highlighted by IES participants' responses to the sirens heard passing the chapel later in the service – 'a reminder of the little haven we [are in] inside a very busy city', as Neville commented, while simultaneously disrupting or unsettling it:

Another siren...It does take you out of this slightly "bubble world" that the chapel and Evensong represent because it's completely alien ...It's sort of weird the way in which these extremely traditional and sort of ancient things go on completely entangled with these twenty-first century ambulances going past... (Hilary)

Hearing a siren...reminds you how calm and still the chapel is compared to the busy hustling and bustling. It really helps force home the contrast. You remember that there is a world outside of the chapel that you're in, but it's not impinging on your world inside the chapel during the service... We are all sitting cosily in here while something's happening. (Siobhan)

The organ music also affords the transition to a more peaceful condition more indirectly, by cuing reverent and reflective states. One way to understand this process is through the psychological mechanisms codified in Juslin and Västfjäll (2008)'s model³² of musical emotion elicitation as Evaluative Conditioning, in which the music's cultural associations come to induce a particular affective state, and Episodic Memory, where the music evokes a specific memory and the emotion associated with that memory, sometimes referred to as the "Darling, they are playing our tune" phenomenon (Davies, 1978, in Juslin and Västfjäll 2008, 567). For Suzanne, for example, who attended a traditional Anglican church school and sang in the choir, the organ at Evensong assists in evoking religious feeling both through positive, personal autobiographical memories, and through its historic and cultural associations, and the emotions they elicit. She has since attended Evensong in numerous different churches, and for her, a good service is one with 'a good sermon', if there is one; familiar hymns, if a hymn is sung; and an atmosphere in which there is 'a sense of history

³² The BRECVEM(A) model.

weighing down on your shoulders’. This, she said, comes partly from traditional, or traditional-style church architecture, ‘not a steel and concrete building’, and from the organ:

Suzanne: ...definitely a good organ helps, we don’t want people in leather jackets and guitars...

Q: Can you say why not?

Suzanne: I suppose it’s a question of taste, and I don’t feel that guitars and drum kits are necessarily sacerdotal ... [they are not] sort of sacred enough for the worship of God.

Others made more explicit connections between the feelings that Evensong evokes and earlier life experiences. One SR, who described the service as ‘a calm moment between stressful work and busy family’, for example, said that the ‘wonderful music ...reminds me of my university days singing in the college choir’; another commented that ‘the intimacy of the service reminds me of going to church in my childhood. The music brings the beauty of the architecture alive’.

The church organ is particularly effective in affording a sense of being outside of everyday life because it evokes a different era: organs are thought to have been used in Christian churches since the sixth century, and there is known to have been one in Winchester Cathedral since at least the tenth century, for example (Scholes 1960, 741). For several IES participants, its sound evoked images of the past, of medieval monasteries, and ‘magic’, and one SR, who loves the sound of the organ, said that it ‘seems to emanate from the stonework’ of the church.

The organ’s strong contemporary cultural associations with the church also mean that for the majority of people today, who experience church and church music mainly on festive occasions or for rite-of-passage rituals, including televised state occasions, it does not signify the daily office or Sunday routine, but rather specifies the special events of weddings, Christmas, and events of national significance. In Walker’s survey of cathedral carol service congregations, the largest category of attendee ‘by far’ was of those who attended church

between one and five times per year (Walker 2015, 115). The interviews conducted for this study, weddings and Christmas were mentioned more than 40 and 60 times respectively, commonly in the context of experiencing cathedral music before becoming Evensong attenders.

More practically and directly, the organ is also set apart from other instruments and most of the soundtrack to modern life by its unique and unusual sounds. Spanning a vast array of timbres, a ‘colour palette that ranges far beyond that of any other single instrument’, the full spectrum of pitches audible to the human ear (Scholes 1960, 744), and volumes from the almost indiscernible to the ‘notes that sound in your chest’, as several interviewees described them, the sound of the organ is unlike any other. This sonic singularity functions to signal to participants that they are in an environment in which different modes of thought and conduct are appropriate, as Hilary and Jerry noted in different ways in the immersive experiment (Figure 18), the former observing its ‘solemn and everyday quality’ that configured people as ‘quiet and respectful’; the latter remarking on his own instinct ‘to try and get in a prayerful state of mind’.

IES participants’ comments suggest two further mechanisms of emotion induction are invoked by the sounds of the organ: ‘visual imagery’, where the music affords the conjuring of a mental picture, to which the listener then reacts emotionally, and ‘emotional contagion’, the empathic process whereby a listener perceives an emotion in the music, and mimics its expression internally (Juslin and Västfjäll 2008, 565–66). For Leanne, for example, an IES participant and Christian who usually attends Evensong at least once per week, the opening organ voluntary evoked images of the Lake District in Northern England, a place where she goes with her family to relax:

[organ playing opening voluntary] ...the echo of the pipes helps you to see the mountains, like in the Lakes. ... It’s like the water, moving inwards and outwards. Very gentle movements... I feel secure listening to this.

In the post-IES interview, asked about these comments, she explained:

[The place] where we relax together is the Lake District. The music at the beginning is a preparation, when you enter... and sit down, you leave all your complications outside... and for the next 45 minutes you are in for a great treat... This music takes me to the place that makes me feel relaxed...

While for Leanne the music of Evensong transports her to a place she associates with feelings of calm, for many others like Ben, an agnostic who describes himself as spiritual, and who also attends Evensong regularly, it is identification with the music itself that affords tranquillity. In the IES, he remarked that the music was ‘restful’ in character, ‘serene’, and ‘very calming’ in effect.

Juslin and Västfjäll (2008) have argued that emotion can be induced by music through a process by which the listener perceives the emotion being expressed in the music (sad, calm, joyful), and then mirrors or mimics it internally, resulting in them feeling the emotion expressed by the music through what they call ‘emotional contagion’. The opening organ music in the IES was, as is typical, played softly, was not musically complex, was not arousing, and did not draw attention to itself; instead, the organist improvised with restraint and repetition on the musical themes from the service to come, in contrast to the often-virtuosic voluntary which generally follow the service. While emotional contagion remains speculative in relation to music, there is evidence for it in other settings. In the context of Ben’s IES comments, it suggests one explanation of how Ben’s emotional state and Evensong’s music were interacting.

An alternative or additional explanation is offered by Don Ihde, specifically in relation to the sort of steady, repetitious background that the opening organ prelude provides. Ihde suggests that sounds like this provide ‘auditory stability’, which in turn, he argues, create a psychological sense of certainty, peace, and safety:

...[these] sounds are not effervescent or abrupt comings and goings of sound but an auditory texture and background that provides an auditory stability to the world. The lack of such a stable background, or a dramatic change in its rhythm, is

the occasion for human anxiety. On the seashore the rhythmic splash of waves with the tide is both comforting and hypnotic, but the disruption of the hurricane or the sudden storm augers disquiet for the shore dweller (Ihde 2007, 87).

The ability of the organ music to afford this state of peacefulness was evident even among IES participants who were not consciously aware of it. Stuart, an atheist and musician who goes to Evensong occasionally, and only to hear the choral music, commented in the IES that he enjoyed the understated opening organ improvisations: ‘... there’s something so distracting and directionless about them. They don’t go anywhere but are very pleasant to bob along to’. After making several further observations, he commented ‘I’ll stop asking questions now. I need to get in the zone’ and fell silent for the next three minutes of organ music, speaking only to comment ‘ah, here we go’ when the choir entered.

Martin Stringer (2016, 178–79) has called this type of introductory organ music, played in many traditional English Christian churches as the community gathers and leaves, ‘background, almost “wallpaper” music’. Suggesting that this music is played at times when ‘people are unlikely to listen to it’, he comments that it ‘establishes a comfortable, secure space, setting the worship apart from the danger and horrors of the world’, and draws a parallel with ‘bland’ hotel lobbies, where ‘the desire for a “safe space”’ results in manufactured environments carefully managed to create the illusion of security and protection. He argues that this sense of safety denies the essence of humanity, and lacks the realness, danger, and stimulation he considers necessary conditions for a meaningfully transcendent worship experience. This study found, however, that while as Stringer proposed, few Evensong participants listened attentively to this opening music, for many, it was this very distance and separation, and in particular the security and stillness it affords upon which their affective transformations and deeply profound musical and spiritual experiences relied.

As Arnold has written:

Good sacred music is not manipulative and does not indicate how the listener should feel at any given moment.[it] takes us beyond ego, drama, and

entertainment. Thus, purely instrumental music can also provide an imperative to sit still, be silent, to listen and create a space in which an encounter with the ineffable is possible' (Arnold 2014, 109).

The imperative to be still and silent to which Arnold refers not only supports the sense of being in a different kind of environment to the everyday, and hence a different kind of performative mode, but may also intensify the experience of musical emotion through the suppression of action tendencies. Sloboda has suggested that when emotional effects cannot be translated into action, including outward expression, they are more likely 'noticed, savoured, held, and fed back and integrated into the attentional response' (Sloboda 2010, 501). Accordingly, while an Evensong opening organ voluntary will generally lack the energy and dangerous quality that Stringer (2016) argues supports transcendence – one participant said an organist he knew affectionately referred to the opening organ improvisation as 'holy doodles' because of its apparently aimless quality – it is the absence of this quality, and the alternative presence of steadiness, softness, and safety that enables the participants who internalise their responses to it, in their silent stillness, to achieve the internal transformations they describe.

A further mechanism by which the organ affords the attainment of a settled state in advance of the Evensong service is by drawing attention away from sounds that are distracting and un conducive to peaceful reflection, and providing cognitive focus during 'the strange dead time' before the service begins, as Hayley (see Figure 18) experienced it. The importance of this for scaffolding a positive and peaceful state should not be under-estimated. In 1654, Blaise Pascal wrote that 'all the unhappiness of men' arises from the single fact that we cannot sit quietly alone in a room, because without distraction, we are soon overwhelmed by 'the natural poverty of our feeble and mortal condition, so miserable that nothing can

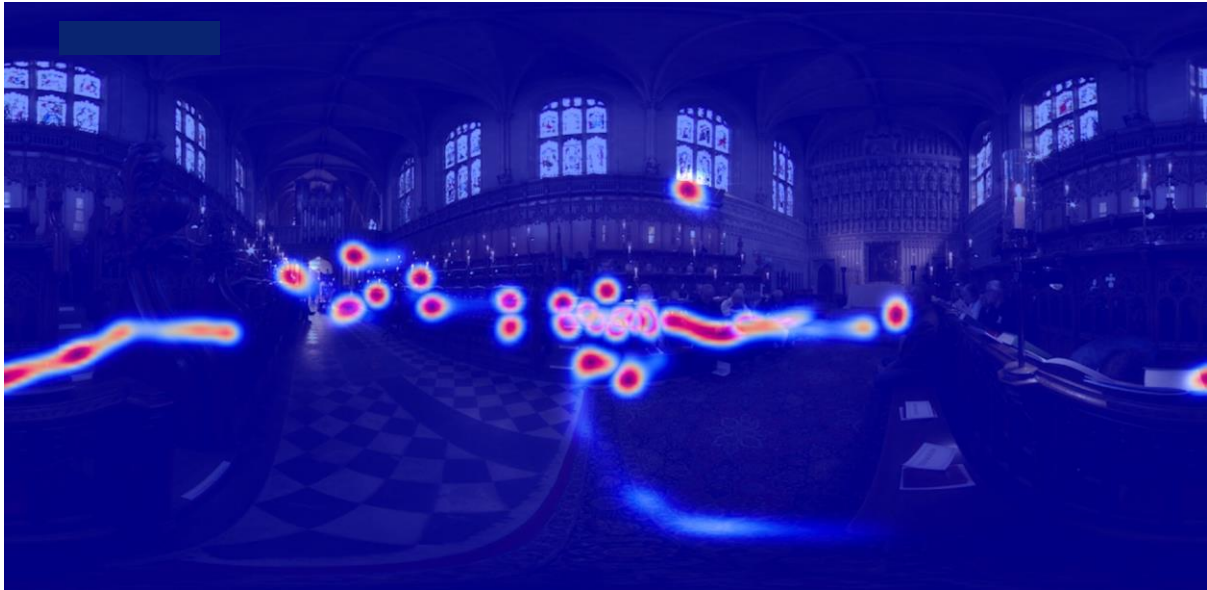
comfort us when we think of it closely’ (Pascal 1958, 139).³³ Pascal’s principle is supported by research by Wilson and colleagues (2014) that found, for example, that when left alone for twelve minutes with no distractions but their own thoughts, rather than doing nothing, 70% of men and 25% of women chose to self-administer an electric shock that they had previously said that they would pay to avoid. The researchers concluded that because without distraction people untrained in meditation find it difficult to control their thoughts, they will choose ‘doing’ over ‘thinking’, even if the only thing to do is painful. In this context, listening to the organ can therefore be seen as something ‘to do’, and to think about, while waiting for the service, and hence a means of mitigating over-thinking ‘our mortal condition’, as Pascal put it. In an 1840 treatise on ‘Church Principles’, WE Gladstone recognised the importance of this in the context of churchgoing:

If it has been ordained that the senses shall be the channels of a large part of our perceptions, why should we not make them monitors of heavenly truth, instead of leaving their avenues to be occupied exclusively by things mischievous, things secular, or things indifferent? (Gladstone 1840, 337)

Evidence for the organ’s function as ‘an abstract focus for the assembling congregation as they wait for the service to begin’, as Clarke and colleagues (2010, 3) characterised it in their discussion of a state funeral at Westminster Abbey, is found in the gaze-tracking data gathered as part of the IES. The data show that before any music began, participants’ gazes were scattered across the scene, typically shifting frequently between different elements, and especially the faces of other congregants, rarely settling in one place or fixation for more than a second or two, and rarely coinciding with the gazes of other participants (see Figure 19).

³³ As it is often paraphrased; the translation reads ‘stay quietly alone in their own chamber’.

Figure 19. Gaze fixations of IES participants, at 01m 11s, nine minutes before service begins, no music playing.



As discussed in Chapter 3, people tend to look where their attention is focused, and the commentaries and observations confirm that during this pre-music waiting period, participants were scanning the scene, noticing, and commenting on the people and objects around them, and skipping quickly between unrelated thoughts. Once the organ began playing, however, the composite gaze map indicates a material coming together of the congregants' attention, recording a significant majority of gaze fixations quickly clustering in the same area (see Figure 20). This was not explained by any visual attraction, since the organ and organist were out of site in the organ loft, and the cluster centred not on the organ pipes, which were visible, but on an area of empty choir stalls, in which nothing was happening, located at approximately 45 degrees anti-clockwise from the forward position. Observation suggested that these gaze fixations resulted from participants assuming a head position directed towards the apparent source of the sound, and optimised for the so-called audio 'sweet spot': located in the single best place and orientation to receive 'a spatially accurate sound field with the correct frequency response' from the spatialised sound recording which provided the soundtrack to the film (Kyriakakis 1998).

Figure 20. Gaze fixations of IES participants, at 01m 26s, four seconds after organ begins.

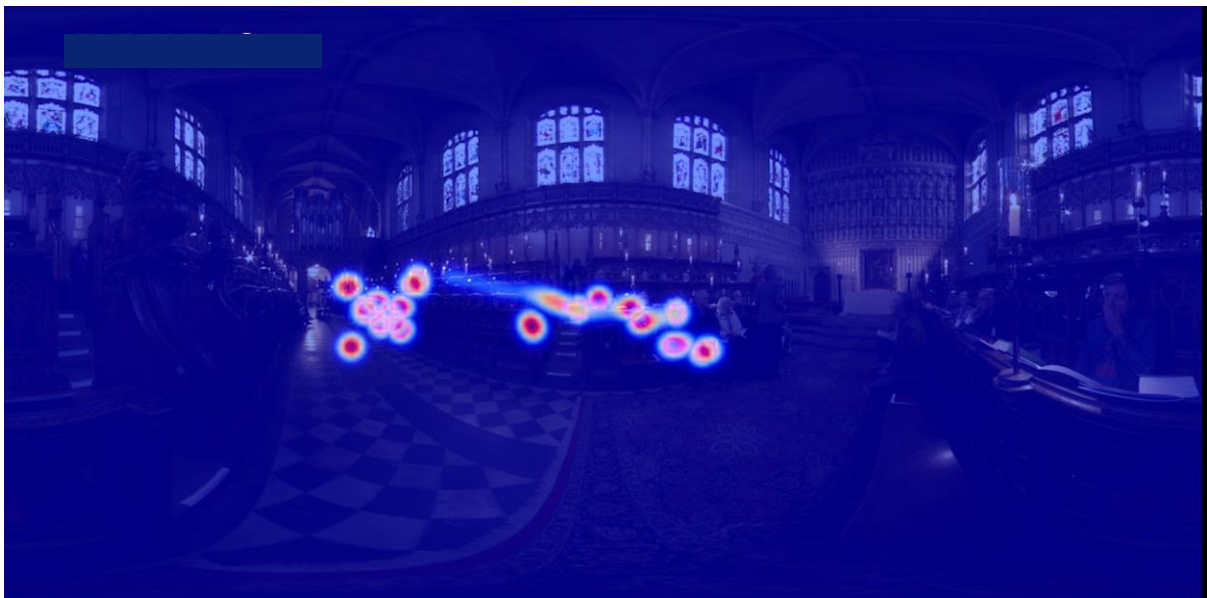


While participants' gazes did not remain focused on this spot, being drawn to the movements of people entering or inside the chapel and drifting to explore the visual aspects of the building, they frequently returned to it. In fact, for most of the seven-minute introductory organ improvisation, a majority of gazes are centred on this location, suggesting that it remained an effective abstract focus – and therefore an effective antidote to the trials of 'sitting quietly alone in a room' – for the duration of this arrival and preparation phase, until the service began (see examples at Figure 21 and Figure 22).

Figure 21. Gaze fixations of IES participants at 06m 27s, organ playing.



Figure 22. Gaze fixations of IES participants at 07m 20s, organ playing.



5.2. The comfortable words: the role of the musical text in affording tranquillity

Getting the musical text into the action

Christianity is a religion of the book, and the Book of Common Prayer's liturgies are logocentric: their intended meaning is conveyed through their carefully chosen, and mostly fixed, words (Mombo 2006, 283). While most of the text of Evensong is set to music, the purpose of that music is therefore 'the enrichment of words' (Church of England General

Synod 1992, 48) and many people pay close attention to them. Ivan, for example, is a Roman Catholic and does not live in the UK, but whenever he visits England, he attends Evensong.

Ivan explained in an interview that he is attracted to the service primarily by the ‘phenomenally good music’ and the quality of the choirs, which, he says, has ‘astounded’ him. When asked how he would describe what he is doing when the choir is singing at Evensong, however, he said that although he is listening to the music and enjoying the music, he was also listening to the words, before concluding, ‘yes, I’m focused on the words’.

Evensong congregations pay close attention to the text for several reasons. In Anglican theology, text is paramount because it is the word of God, and the Church is founded upon it. And there can also be a view that religious experience should be a principally rational, thought-led encounter (Chartres 2011; c.f. Begbie 2013) – *Lex orandi lex credenda* (what is prayed is what is believed) as it is often characterised (Stevenson 2006, 133; see also Huffel 2020). Music and the other aesthetic elements of the service are therefore subordinate to the teachings in the writings they exist to support, and worshippers are expected to concentrate on them consciously and conscientiously (Tucker 2009). For many Evensong participants, attending to the text is therefore an ingrained and important act of religious participation, and many interviewees and participants in the IES commented that they would normally follow the text, either by focusing on the words as they are sung, or by following them in the Prayer Book:

I really like the sound of the chant, and I like it because I can follow the words as they’re always in English and they don’t get lost with polyphony. (Jerry, interview)

I can sit back with my psalm book and follow the words and, you know, relate to the words and the chant, the beauty of the chant. (Peter, interview)

People also pay attention to the words of the Evensong service – written in the sixteenth century by Thomas Cranmer, with psalm translations by Miles Coverdale – for their literary

merit and inherent aesthetic appeal (Stanwood 2006). For 72% of SRs ($n = 1,454$) the beauty of the language of the Evensong service was a factor of importance in deciding to attend:

the language used is invariably so much more significant and important than any modern version. (SR)

...it is a wonderful encounter with God's word. The language of the liturgy is also very majestic. (SR)

Lisa, who describes herself as 'practising Church of England', appreciates the Book of Common Prayer liturgy for 'the peace and the quietness' of it, and what she calls 'the encumbrance of God' that she finds in it. For her, the text of Evensong is 'lyrical':

I cannot bear the argument that "nobody understands language of that sort" ...[because] you're taught it... So, it's learning that language, which is our language, and it flows, I think, and the words are just brilliant. I mean, if you put in some of the modern words...it alters the whole thing. So no, to me- I love the language.

Almost regardless of whether people intend to focus on the text, however, its themes can be difficult to avoid. It was a founding principle of the new Prayer Book of 1549 that the words must be clearly intelligible to the listeners – 'for every syllable a note', as Cranmer expressed it – and each syllable clearly declaimed (Cummings 2011, lxxv; Temperley 2013, § 4).

Accordingly, a culture of precise diction and declamation has developed, and today, even in the more elaborate musical settings, the words of the text are plainly discernible. As Frankie, a Christian who described the choral singing at Westminster Abbey as 'from Heaven', commented, '...you can understand every word they're singing... There's no mumbling, it's all clear.'

Furthermore, the prose itself has a deliberate directness that, despite its sometimes-archaic wording, generally renders the sense of its message, if not its specific meaning, inescapable. CS Lewis called this quality 'pithiness' (Stanwood 2006, 142), for Prince Charles it is 'vivid and memorable' (Chartres 2011), and for participants in this study, confessing to 'doing those things which we ought not to have done', and to being a 'miserable offender', as the Evening Prayer service invites them to do (BCP, 1662, 18),

leaves little room for (mis)interpretation. It ‘reminds me of the powerful requirements of my faith’, as one SR wrote, it ‘speaks to our human condition, reminds us of our failures, assures us of absolution’, commented another.

Moreover, because the same words are sung at every Evensong service, in the same order, they gain a particular resonance and become familiar to people, even if they have only attended a few times, or many years ago. Many people referred to internalising the text as children, and still knowing it ‘by heart’ often decades later. One SR said that after five decades of Evensong attendance, its ‘prose, music and theology [have] lead to something that runs very deep within me’. Another, a former chorister, recalled how as a child in the 1950s ‘the familiar words of the Prayer Book slowly but surely implanted themselves in my head’.

Research has shown that words set to music are more easily recalled, due to the ‘chunking effect’ of musical structure, its stress patterns, and the attention it draws to the surface characteristics (Wallace 1994). This in turn, can lead to the powerful experience of the words originating from an internal, not an external source, as one Anglican SR in his twenties explained:

The choir sings and you inwardly read and recite the words of God, to God...so it’s an immersive experience of the spiritual and because of the plethora of voices... The emotional states that accompany this underlying reality of the event...follow a vague and blurred sequence that mirrors the phases of the liturgy.

Perception and action

One obvious consequence of listeners’ attentiveness to the text of Evensong, their familiarity with it, and frequently their internalisation of it, is their receptiveness to its meaning. But while many Evensong participants spend at least some of the service consciously focusing on its text, words can also be powerful subconscious primes. Even when they are not the subject of the listeners’ attention, words can influence the perceptual, evaluative and motivational psychological systems, and so alter perception, thoughts, judgments, emotions and behavioural responses without conscious awareness (Doyen et al. 2012; Kahneman et al.

1982; Tversky and Kahneman 1974; Loersch and Payne 2011; Zajonc 1968). Research has found, for example, that immediately after being exposed to ‘rudeness’-related words, people behave more rudely (Bargh, Chen, and Burrows 1996); people exposed to words associated with ageing walk more slowly (Bargh, Chen, and Burrows 1996); and people played songs with aggressive and hateful lyrics display increased aggressive behaviour, and have more thoughts about vengeance (Fischer and Greitemeyer 2006). Similarly, exposure to background music with romantic lyrics is associated with greater romantic feelings, as evidenced by men visiting a florist where this music was played spending more money on flowers (Jacob et al. 2009), and women being more likely to accede to a request for their telephone number (Guéguen, Jacob, and Lamy 2010).

Perception and behaviour are closely linked to affect, but words can also prime affect directly. Religious priming studies have shown that exposure to words associated with religion and that are prevalent in church services – ‘God’, ‘prophet’ and ‘sacred’, for example – can reduce anxiety and distress (Inzlicht, Tullett, and Good 2011). Likewise, reflecting on the love of a benevolent God can diminish people’s negative affective responses to their own mistakes, resulting in lower stress levels (Good, Inzlicht, and Larson 2015). In religious psychology it is thought that this priming works by evoking in religious people a sense of order and control that is palliative, and that relieves the distress caused by perceptions of disorder, uncertainty and a lack of meaning in life and the world (Inzlicht, Tullett, and Good 2011; Diener, Tay, and Myers 2011). Findings from music psychology further suggest that such priming may, additionally or alternatively, cue affective responses through cultural socialization, ritual participation, evaluative conditioning and the triggering of episodic and semantic memories associated with those textual primes (Juslin 2013; M. Lang et al. 2016).

The songs of Evensong, as well as being likely to prime ‘religion’ generally, through long cultural association, are filled with words more directly, semantically, related to calm,

harmony, rest, and quietness, to dependability and continuity, and to being safe and protected. The word peace, for example, recurs in the main text of the Evening Prayer liturgy three times, and each time in an entreaty: ‘Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace’ in the *Nunc dimittis*, ‘Give peace in our time, O Lord’ in the prayers, and ‘Give unto thy servants that peace which the world cannot give’ in the Second Collect; ‘quiet’ and ‘quietness’ recur twice, and ‘forgive’ at least four times, depending on which optional elements are included. The doxology which includes the phrase ‘As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen’ is sung five times. The recurrence of words from Evensong in participants’ descriptions of how they experience it suggests their influence: SRs, for example, used peace/peaceful and their derivatives 416 times; quiet/quietness 272; glory and glorious (which appears eight times in the liturgy) 42 times; and heaven (with seven recurrences in the liturgy) 46 times.

Tranquillity and the music itself

Consistent with its purpose of enriching the text, the music to which the Evensong service is set generally conveys the peaceful and reassuring sentiments of its words through peaceful and reassuring sounds. Idiomatically, the harmonic palette tends to be predominantly consonant, and harmonic tension is resolved relatively quickly; melodies are memorable and lyrical; rhythms are regular and metrical; performance practice prioritises the reverent and stately; and drama, emotionalism and individual expression are absent: the musical mood is calm and serious, restrained and dignified (Fol 2017; Temperley 2013). There are of course exceptions to this norm, but that the peaceful idiom was both normative and considered necessary by participants is reflected in SRs’ frequent citing of musical styles which disrupt the service’s expected peaceful character as a detraction from, or a deterrent to attending, Evensong. One response encapsulated almost all of the objections:

[I] Don’t enjoy music which interferes with the service. Music [that] is too long, excessively dramatic, inappropriate modernism (for its own sake), can’t stand

settings of the responses which turn a simple response into a fugato (or similar), endless jolly japes on the organ in the Psalms (go to Westminster Abbey to hear them done prayerfully and with meaning), when the organ is in competition with the choir ... kaleidoscopic changes in organ registration in music which really doesn't require it ... Hymns, and anthem too fast, etc... There [can be] a genuine lack of sensitivity relating to the nature of day-by-day evensong. Big music is for big occasions - not for a dark Tuesday evening in November. This is because (for some) the music has become a thing in its own right and is no longer the handmaid of the liturgy.

The responses suggest, however, that these detractions occur only rarely, and that in their absence, the music is experienced as a significant contributor to Evensong's affordance of tranquillity, either by promoting it, or conversely, by doing nothing to disrupt it, as the IES participants' comments indicate. For Duncan, for example, the choral singing has a calming warmth:

[Choir singing Magnificat] There's a sort of warmth of the sound as it fills the chapel. That's quite a lovely sort of rounded warm sound. (Duncan, IES commentary)

...when they did the Psalm it- you know, it still really fills the atmosphere, but it was calming ... the way they were singing. (Duncan, post-IES interview)

For several other participants, the music sung in the IES was unstimulating to the point of being, as one put it, 'almost boring'. They wondered why the service chosen for the IES – which was selected to be reasonably representative of a typical weekday service, and included settings by Smith, Weelkes, and Purcell – did not have music that was 'more dramatic and uplifting', that 'would have generated a far more interesting set of sweaty palms and racing hearts', as one participant framed it, or one that would better 'showcase' the choir, rather than one with a repertoire that was 'not that inspiring', as another asked.

Among many regular participants, however, the lack of musical drama characteristic of weekday Evensongs was appreciated primarily because it did not inspire dramatic thought or action:

Evensong is restful time with God...[it] frames my worship as listening...and gives light footholds to maintain the intention, so one does not wander off internally and lose focus (SR)

A very beautiful very flamboyant piece of music doesn't [move me] in the same way that a very peaceful deep piece of music can do, because there's a difference in the way it's touching me as a human, and it does touch me. (Josh, post IES)

In apparent contrast to these comments, the heart rate monitoring data from the IES did suggest that the musical elements of the service led to a temporary increase in arousal, followed by a step down. Future research could usefully compare objective responses to music subjectively perceived as more arousing with this data.

Peace at the last: themes and ideas

In addition to conveying tranquillity through textual association and musical mood, Evensong's messages are perceived by many participants to be anxiolytic – they are soothing, calming, or anxiety reducing. The service's overarching theme is closure. On the one hand this is a marking of the end of the day, with tasks fulfilled and nothing more to do but 'hand things over to God', as one SR wrote, and a reminder, 'as we move from light into darkness', that 'every day the light will return', as another said. On the other, Evensong is about the end of life, and the two endings are associated both metaphorically and explicitly in the service. Several SRs quoted the 'peace at the last' appealed for in John Henry Newman's night prayer, included in the 1928 Prayer Book (Justus 1927) sometimes heard at Evensong. The prayer unites in the idea of evening the twin themes of the end of the day and the end of life, when 'the busy world is hushed, the fever of life is over, and our work is done'. Many others expressed similar sentiments. The comments of these three SRs are representative:

[I get] feelings of peace and closure - as the service is about facing the night & its dangers, and metaphorically, death.

[Evensong] is intensely human, covering birth (Magnificat) to death (Nunc dimittis), and the prayers of intercession covers what goes between, and in a context that is both intensely peaceful, and also extremely uplifting...

To me, there are two aspects that always stand out: the opportunity to contemplate the state of one's own soul objectively; and the way that the service is worded to help us to face the future and eventually even death - there are not many situations in which thinking towards death is easy in our society, but being enabled to face it steadily must be good for our mental health...

Death and dying, as the last respondent quoted above and many others observed, are not subjects often contemplated or discussed in contemporary British society, and are generally now hidden away from everyday life, ‘outsourced’ from the family to professional settings (E. Becker 1973; Routledge and Juhl 2010). Even subtle reminders of mortality have been shown to lead to anxiety about death (Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski 1991), and for many people, these subjects are a source of great concern (Miller-Lewis et al. 2021). A large number of empirical studies, however, have found that people who have a sense that their life has meaning are uniquely protected from this anxiety, and are also better at coping with the other stresses of life (Routledge and Juhl 2010).

There are many mortality cues in Evensong, and not only because ‘so many dead lie around’ the buildings in which it is sung, as Philip Larkin observes in his poem ‘Church going’ (N. Marsh 2007, 112) – although that clearly reinforced the theme for many participants – but also because its subject matter throughout concerns the nature of life and death. No participant, however, expressed anything akin to anxiety about this, and all those who commented on the theme did so positively, without fear or negativity, and often with acceptance. As Hilary, brought up in the Anglican tradition but no longer religious, commented during the Collects, or prayers, in the IES,

I do nearly always find those appeals ... actually quite moving, partly because of [a close relative’s] death quite recently ... it’s good- and yes, important, to be reminded of those things which it’s very easy to carry on not thinking about.

Also common was the perspective articulated by the SR who wrote that Evensong is ‘a reminder of the small space we fill in the timeline of Christendom. Reassuring that life’s beginning and ending are wrapped in faith’. For several interviewees and IES participants, Evensong prompted thoughts about the end of their own lives. One observed that the message of Evensong is ‘a very powerful’ one to keep in mind, ‘because then you have peace, you’re not fearful of dying’. Another participant, who had heard Jonathan Dove’s (1998) ‘Seek him

that maketh the seven stars' sung as an Evensong anthem, explained that he now has it 'down for my funeral, should I be lucky enough to have a funeral'. The piece sets lines from the biblical book of Amos (5:8) and Psalm 139:

Seek Him that maketh the seven stars and Orion and turneth the shadow of death into the morning.

Alleluia. Yea, the darkness shineth as the day, the night is light about me. Amen.

The importance of meaning

For many participants, it was the wider sense of meaning they took from the service that supported its peaceful affect. That Evensong was a 'meaningful' experience was a very prominent theme, raised by more than half of the interviewees, three IES participants, and more than 80 times in the survey responses. For some, of particular significance was the sense of unity and community that the service affords. Pam, for example, who emphasised the importance of the peace she experiences at Evensong, explained that this comes from the music, from her familiarity with the music and with the church where she regularly attends, and from her perception of the atmosphere there: 'there is no conflict, there is peace'. Frieda, who took part in an interview after we met at an Evensong service when she was visiting Britain as a tourist, had a similar perspective, but derived from her participation in the Evensong ritual. A Christian and regular church attender in her home country, the text of the Evensong service was not familiar to her, but while reading the Creed aloud with the rest of the congregation, she became conscious of the many different faiths and nationalities standing alongside her, and of Christians elsewhere in the world, saying the same words:

...it was almost like a pledge, to follow Christ, listen to God, live a Christ-like life... That was meaningful. You have that many people together, saying it at once, it had quite an emotional- I don't know what to call the feeling, it was like we're not so different, and we're all in this together.... you can feel the love of God.

For others, it was idea of being safe, protected, or cared for that was important. As one SR commented, Evensong 'induces a feeling of deep peace. I particularly like being protected

against the perils and dangers of this night'. They were not alone in this: it was common for participants to report that the prayer to which the SR referred – the third Collect at Evensong, 'for Aid against all Perils' – was an important or favourite part of the service:

Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord; and by thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night; for the love of thy only Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

In the Evensong service, participants hear of a God who exalts the humble and meek, keeps promises, hears prayers, grants salvation, and lightens darkness, and has the power to give us peace, save us, help us, hear us, protect us from perils and dangers, and be with us evermore. It was not unusual for participants to attribute the sense of calm they experienced in the service to the strength and comfort they found in this sense of support and protection. This sense of being protected at or through Evensong, of being freed from worry, and of having someone to 'take over' for a while, was pervasive. As one SR wrote:

I love how the structure takes us through the history of salvation ... before ending with the *Nunc dimittis* where we remember that "mine eyes have seen thy salvation" ... very prayerful - taking an hour or so at the end of the day to collect everything together and to give it back to God.

From the perspective of human psychology, what these participants report could be regarded as a form of 'security priming': they are reminded that they have the support of an 'attachment figure' through exposure to words or images related to secure attachment, which in turn creates a feeling of safety and security (Carnelley and Rowe 2010). This is consistent with research into the effects of faith on happiness, which has found that happiness is related to 'feeling close to God and to holding beliefs that all will be well (Kaldor, 1994 and Ellison, 1991, cited in Hills and Argyle 1998, 93). One interviewee, Simon, described this as 'the promise of consolation':

I think the word consolation is right ... I immediately thought, the consolation of philosophy by Boethius, I started immediately thinking yes, it is, it's consoling, it's the promise of consolation.

Finley, an atheist, argued that this function of Evensong, and its role in providing such comforting messaging – especially about ‘look[ing] after us, the fears and the perils of the night’, and in the Magnificat – is crucial, and too important to be available only to people with religious belief:

... there is such gloriously important and crucial messaging, such comforting messaging, if it could be scripted in such a way as to be humanist, as opposed to divine ...it would become something that would be accessible to all. This is about us as a species, about the way we can live together as global people, recognising the fact that we are so alike, without...creating these separations to allow powerful people to stay in power.

Adam, an atheist who is interested in what can be learned about life from all religions, does not find this messaging comforting, however, and argued that relying on a supernatural being who promises everlasting life for protection is misguided, and can lead people to stop taking responsibility for their own lives in the present. A keen singer since school, he nonetheless has a love for the sacred choral tradition, based on its musical beauty and the perfection of its performance, and hopes that a recording of a favourite setting of the Magnificat will accompany his dying moments.

The evidence therefore suggests that Evensong’s engagement and association with some of the most fundamental existential themes of life and death, and the perspectives or responses to them that it offers, are for many participants an important dimension of the sense of peace the service affords. Importantly, this appears to be true for both religious and non-religious participants who are able to separate semantic meaning and religious context from broader associations that can offer comfort, peace, and meaning.

The other, related, meaning many participants took from Evensong was the importance of forgiveness. Edith, who was brought up a Christian, stopped going to church in her twenties, but continued to pray at home. Recently, however, she felt drawn to return to church, and at Evensong felt ‘at ease...at home’, and found the forgiveness she has been ‘craving’. She now attends the service regularly:

Edith: We're sinners, we're all sinners. I'm a sinner, and I'm preparing myself for the Lord's house, forgiveness, repenting, and learning more about the Lord, through the songs... It feels great. I get a lovely feeling when I hear the choir singing. It goes right through my body...

Q: What sort of things are you thinking about when the choir is singing?

Edith: My mind's absolutely blank, just listening to every word.

It was apparent in other interviews that while (or perhaps because), like death, forgiveness is generally not a topic widely discussed (Brand 2016), many Evensong participants find comfort, solace and succour in the words of forgiveness in the service. Some cited 'forgiveness' as a motivation for attending Evensong: one SR, for example, referred to 'the sense of peace, forgiveness, beauty - just resting in God'. For others, forgiveness was central to what it *feels* like to be at Evensong: 'Feeling at home. Feeling moved. Feeling that Christ died for me. Feeling forgiven'.

There is growing evidence that both forgiveness and feeling forgiven have a beneficial effect on mental health, it is thought by reducing the stress, guilt, shame, rumination and fear often experienced as a result of feeling 'unforgiven' (Toussaint and Webb 2005). Not seeking forgiveness has been found to be a factor in depression (Sandage et al. 2000), but forgiveness of others and being forgiven oneself have also been connected to reduced depression, anxiety, and to general good mental health and well-being, as well as to reduced heart rate, blood pressure, medications taken, and overall physical stress symptoms (Bassett et al. 2016; Woodyatt et al. 2017). In summary, experiencing forgiveness is consistent with the feeling of increased tranquillity frequently experienced at Evensong, and for some participants, is an important factor in affording it.

5.3. 'An old and much-loved friend': stability, predictability, and familiarity

Stillness and stability

The third factor of significance in affording peace and tranquillity at Evensong is its constancy: its unchanging liturgy and structure; the stability of its rhythm and rituals; and its

repetition every day. For Nadine, who has a young family and a demanding job, these characteristics constitute Evensong as an oasis of certainty in the ‘chaos’ and disorder of human life:

...when we feel everything is falling apart, when everything feels chaotic, we need to make a little corner of it manageable and I guess that’s what a set order of things in a ritual partly does... you want some kind of timeless space. I won’t be the only one, I guess, who will quote Eliot’s ‘Still point in a turning world’ to you, but that’s pretty accurate.

The quote to which she referred is from TS Eliot’s *Four Quartets*:

...At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance...

One SR described the ‘still point’ offered by Evensong as a meditative ‘safe space’, a constant in a hectic life that is familiar and reliable – what Goffman (2017) and DeNora (2013) term an asylum: a place that provides a retreat from the world linked to a contemplative task (see also Chapters 8 and 9). This familiarity, and the predictability inherent in that, was identified by many other SRs a source of reassurance, like this SR, an Anglican and regular Evensong attender at numerous different Evensong churches:

...[Evensong] feels sort of normal, a regular bolt hole where you can recoup emotional energies. The very familiarity of it is vital. I keep a little office of one psalm, the hour’s canticle and the day’s collect on the bus, morning and evening. Choral Evensong is just a heightened experience of the same activity, so the regularity and familiarity are a key factor in my experience. It’s my way of expressing my gratitude for being alive and in the very process of it I experience something of the best of being alive.

The comforting nature of Evensong’s familiar format was also a frequent cause of comment in the IES. For many of the participants who attend Evensong regularly, being in a church building and hearing the familiar sounds immediately triggered a feeling of safety:

...going back to the same place and the same music gives you the opportunity to feel secure in the physical elements, time and space, which therefore helps you to

feel peace internally. And I think a lot of regular attendees... gain that internal peace...

(Chloe, IES commentary, opening organ voluntary)

It's interesting, after the sixth chime [which marks the beginning of the service] I felt this huge sense of anticipation, that something amazing is going to happen.

[sigh] It ... feels so amazingly comforting and familiar and safe.

(Mason, IES commentary, after Priest's welcome)

For many participants, so idiomatic is Evensong's music, and so familiar do its daily-repeated texts become, that even if a particular musical setting has never been heard before, it will still feel familiar and therefore 'comfortable':

The music feels very familiar and relaxing and serene... it feels very familiar, and very comfortable, but I know I haven't heard that before. And that's an interesting paradox.

(Ben, IES commentary, during the psalm)

At the same time as appreciating Evensong as a point of stability in the day or week, many people valued its reliable presence over the longer temporal course of their life – remaining there, unchanged, for them to return to, although they themselves were changed. For some, like Brian, a lifelong churchgoer and regular Evensong attender, the service provides a connection with his past self and a way of framing and interpreting his life. His immersion in a text that he has known since he was a child transforms the collective, public act of worship into a personally meaningful, private reflection and a place of reassuring familiarity in which his self-conception is anchored in the reliably unchanging words. While the priest and choir were singing the versicles towards the end of the service in the IES, he commented:

I went to evensong all those years when I was young, and then I didn't go again for years and years because the church that I was going to didn't have evening services. And then [I moved to a new area with a church where] they have evening prayer ... and I discovered that I still knew it off by heart. So, it's something that's utterly familiar somehow, and somehow, it's a very *completing* kind of feeling, as though I'm still the same person as I was then, and when I was a teenager, or when I was a child, because the words are the same and the service is the same. And I'm still here, and still listening to it.

This lifetime constancy was, in itself, a reassuring source of safety and belonging for many SRs, for whom, for example, ‘Life-time-established-familiarity brings joy and enhances a feeling of depth, security and connectedness’, as one wrote, while another noted ‘there is a sense of (semi-) permanence, of sinking into the familiar – little changes about the service whilst everything else in one’s life does’. As David Hamilton has noted, writing on the repetitious aspect of listening to recorded music, the unchanging aspect of recordings can be a comforting source of stability:

...[they] can be pleasing and reassuring; they can act as aural security blankets, particularly if they have extra-musical associations ... life may be getting worse, but the old records, at least, stay the same (Hamilton quoted in Chanan 1995, 119).

For others comfort came from the emotions induced by episodic memories associated with Evensong, that had accrued over their own lives. One SR, for example, said that he ‘draw[s] great comfort from the Nunc dimittis, which has a personal connection for me in that I read it to my father when he was dying’. Another wrote that he used to recite the Third (‘Perils and Dangers’) Collect as a bedtime prayer for his now-adult children:

...when we now attend Evensong together they still smile at me to acknowledge a shared and treasured memory. All of them tell me that these glorious words still come easily to their minds and seem so meaningful compared to modern forms of prayer.

David Hesmondhalgh (2013, 53) has observed that music can accentuate awareness of ‘continuity and development’ in a person’s life, and Evensong’s continual repetition, day after day, seems to make it particularly adept at connecting to different ways of remembering past experiences, and the different facets of those experiences: the emotional, cognitive, aesthetic, sensory and social. It seems from these accounts that equally powerful is the corollary: listening to Evensong across the course of a changing and developing life accentuates its stability and constancy – and hence the reassurance it affords and can represent, and the tranquillity it therefore engenders.

Familiarity and cognitive selectivity as resources for agency

While worship that is predictable, unarresting, and hence apparently ‘safe’ might be considered by some to be suboptimal (see, e.g., Stringer 2016), others take the opposite view: CS Lewis believed that a church service works best when, ‘through long familiarity, we don’t have to think about it’:

Every church service is a structure of acts and words through which we receive a sacrament, or repent, or supplicate, or adore. And it enables us to do these things best– if you like, it ‘works’ best– when, through long familiarity, we don’t have to think about it. As long as you notice, and have to count, the steps, you are not yet dancing but only learning to dance. A good shoe is a shoe you don’t notice. Good reading becomes possible when you need not consciously think about eyes, or light, or print, or spelling (C. S. Lewis 1964, 4–5).

Lewis’s point, in ecological terms, is that a church service is most able to afford the opportunities for action its participants seek if they can focus on those actions and their outcomes, rather than on what is affording them. Accordingly, Lewis says, ‘the perfect church service’, would be

one we were almost unaware of; our attention would have been on God. But every novelty prevents this. It fixes our attention on the service itself; and thinking about worship is a different thing from worshipping... (ibid).

Neither position, however, fully reflects the prevalent mode of this study’s participants. They do not behave like Adorno’s regressive listeners, uncritically immersing themselves in music in pursuit of the ‘possibility of individual shelter and of a security’ which ‘obstructs the view of a change in the situation in which one seeks shelter’ (Adorno and Bernstein 1991, 55).

And, while their attention may be on God – or an almost infinite range of other subjects (mainly of their own choosing) – the music does not go unnoticed, as Lewis’s narrative might suggest. Rather, instead of being ‘brainwashed’ or ‘seduced’ by the service, as some participants critical of organised religion in general or traditional choral services in particular suggested that they might be, believers and non-believers both described and exhibited engagement in an active practice, performed against the backdrop of an apparently passive listening experience, in which they dynamically and critically utilised their familiarity with

Evensong, and its predictability, in ways that enabled them to find peace – or avoid stress – within it, according to their individual characteristics. There were two main ways in which the properties of Evensong and the capacities and characteristics of the participants combined to afford this. First, Evensong’s predictable nature meant that after several services, participants knew when in the service they could ‘relax’, ‘let go’, and lose themselves in their own thoughts – as it was often put – in addition to losing themselves in problem-solving, reminiscence, imagination, meditation, visualisation, and prayer, as the IES revealed, without having to be vigilant for cues for action, and without the risk of ‘being caught out’. As one SR commented, reflecting the sentiments of many others,

...it guides you along - you don't suddenly need to be active and shake hands with everyone. It means you can really go into another world, and I find this helps me pray more deeply.

Others commented similarly that this familiarity with the service affords other modes of deep thinking, and a special opportunity for high-quality creative problem-solving, as this SR (among others) wrote:

It is refreshing by virtue of being a regular pattern of word and action, which requires a certain attention but does not make too many demands on the intellect, especially when tired, leaving the non-rational mind to do its thing.

Second, the predictable pattern of text and music affords participants the opportunity to switch the service in and out of primary focus, and thus to interact selectively with the different elements of the service in different ways, and in accordance with their goals and capabilities at any given time, as the comments of these three SRs suggest:

It is so familiar that it feels like coming back to a comforting pattern, the words and the actions feel comfortable. Sometimes Evensong is just a time to relax and let go, sometimes that familiarity allows me to engage with the readings from scripture, or the sermon if there is one, in a new and challenging way.

[It can be] emotional, depending on what I'm thinking about, what the readings prompt me to think about, or something new I've found in the Mag and Nunc settings.

In God's presence, spiritual refuelling, heart and soul lifted, soothed or calmed even challenged by the music, liturgy and prayer depending on my personal circumstances on each particular occasion.

One example of this switching of Evensong in and out of primary focus came from Steffi. Steffi goes to Evensong because she loves choral music, but is an atheist who strongly disagrees with much of what is taught in church, and is appalled by some of it. In the IES, at the beginning of the first reading, she commented: 'This is where I switch off really. I don't like Old Testament lessons... I completely switch off, and think about other things'. In order to avoid being drawn into a reading with which she knew she was likely to disagree, Steffi chose simply not to engage with it. Accordingly, she spoke throughout almost all of the said parts of the service, explaining eloquently her views on a range of debates associated with faith, the Church, and secularisation, but each time the choir rose to sing, she fell silent ('It's hard for me to talk, because I really want to listen, because it's so beautiful'). Several other non-religious participants acted similarly. Like Steffi, Stuart explained that while he can sometimes find interesting points to consider in the biblical teachings, because he often disagrees with them so strongly, he has developed what he called 'a sort of Pavlovian thing' where during elements like a sermon, he will focus his attention elsewhere. This was evident in the IES when during the psalm-singing, for example, he commented extensively on the timbral characteristics of the choir, the harmonic progressions, and the compositional texture, and intermittently hummed along with the lower parts, before observing, reflexively, that he has 'a sort of very skirting or superficial attention for the words. I seem to zone back in to key words or phrases, like covenant, days of heaven...'.

Finley described a similar, but more planned approach to selective listening and interpretation:

...this is the thing: you pick and choose the bits you want. And what it is about Evensong that keeps me coming back, apart from the music, is the fact that we have, in the Magnificat, an anti-capitalistic, pretty anarchic world view, being read out every single time...

Steffi's, Stuart's, and Finley's selective, pragmatic and active approach to listening at Evensong, in which they curated their attentional focus to minimise engagement with the elements they considered unlikely to be edifying or enjoyable, exemplify what emerged as a reasonably prevalent practice of many Evensong regulars, including those with a committed Christian faith. One such SR, an Anglican in her 50s, explained that she appreciates Evensong for 'the more meditative feeling of music and words that I can listen to or not depending on how I am'. Scott, also an Anglican, and a very frequent Evensong attendee, shared this view, on which he elaborated in interview. For him, he said, Evensong is

...a form of higher meditation. You can drift in and out of it. It's very difficult to concentrate on the whole thing every time. It doesn't matter. You may take different things from it - although the words are the same, the music's different and your reaction's different. ... [and] you want different things from it. If you've had a bad day, you want to be uplifted and comforted to some extent. If you've had a good day, you want to give thanks for it..

Kassabian (2013, xxi–xxii; 19) has described how, through exposure to the ubiquitous music that now fills our lives, listeners develop competence to control their modes of listening, shifting between different levels of consciousness and attention in response to different types of auditory event. While encountering background music in a coffee shop and deciding purposively to go to an Evensong service are evidently musical interactions of an entirely different order, the tuning in and out of the sounds of the service that Evensong participants frequently describe, and demonstrated in the IES, exhibit similar characteristics to the distributed listening Kassabian observed in everyday settings. This suggests that competence in controlling listening modes is applied reflexively and strategically during services to achieve affective goals, as well as spiritual, religious, and cognitive ones. This practice was assisted by the fixed structure of Evensong which means that, as dozens of respondents put it, 'you know what you're going to get', and attention modulation accordingly becomes very easy to manage. Graham, for example, a frequent Evensong participant, knows that he generally finds the psalm musically unsatisfying, but that it will always be followed by a

reading, and then a canticle, which he normally finds more moving and musically interesting. In the IES, he appeared to self-manage during the psalm by deliberately directing his attention towards an element of the performance he found visually interesting: the interaction within the ensemble, commenting ‘it’s always good to look at the stalls of the choir, at the singers ... when it passes between the stalls like that’. Then, during the singing of the canticles, knowing that he could expect to enjoy the rest of the service and that nothing would be required of him, he allowed himself to relax, as he does in real-world Evensong services – ‘I don’t shut my eyes, but I do attempt to get myself into a receptive state’ – before trying to clear his mind entirely during the prayers. Overall, Graham said that Evensong ‘has a cathartic and soothing effect in the same sense that, I always imagine, more attentive worship probably does’.

Graham’s preferences, responses, and cognitive and affective priorities are personal to him: other IES participants experienced the psalm as ‘a lovely opportunity to sit back and soak it in’ (Peter); ‘very moving’ (Gabe); and ‘basic but quite visceral’ (Amy). It was not found, therefore, that different elements of the Evensong service can generally be associated with particular responses. Rather, what the study showed was that Evensong’s predictability allows people to be present in the same service and attend to each element in a way that works for them, shifting between what Herbert (2011b, 2) has called ‘listening stances’ that lie in a range between directed and undirected listening, to achieve what they consider they need, each time that they attend. In the IES we can see listeners’ active management of these listening stances, as they shift purposively and easily from the most intent musicological focus to a state in which the auditory is experienced as a background wash of sound. We can also see the music being periodically foregrounded in a dialectic of listener-directed, strategic affect-focused prioritisation, prompted for example by the arrival of a familiar musical cue which calls attention to a keenly anticipated part of the service approaching, and

environmental calls on the attention, like the unexpected disruption of a siren. In this regard, Eric Clarke (2005, 235), has written that music can function as

the starting point for a “thought-ful” exploration of any one of a huge potential variety of connected domains (cultural connections, personal memories, other music, unresolved problems, fantasies, inventions...) [that] may also be highly integrated and highly concentrated – but not directed solely at musical structure.

The above examples show some of the ways in which the sounds of Evensong, whether musical components of the service itself, or sounds that are environmental and extrinsic to it, provide such a starting point. They also show how listeners maintain a distributed awareness that enables them to listen with selectivity, and to explore thoughtfully the domains they connect to what they hear in a way that is consistent with their cognitive and affective intentions.

5.4. Embodied experience and feeling the sounds of tranquility

At Evensong, the attainment of tranquil affective states seems to be particularly associated with the musical episodes perceived as rhythmic, and especially its psalm chants and sung prayers. The comments made by Ben during the choral prayers in the IES are representative:

[Priest and choir singing prayers]

It’s kind of, very ancient, and feels very mystical. It feels like the rhythm of the music sort of connects with you physically.

[Pause]

It feels almost hypnotic... It’s kind of got a rhythm to it that’s [pause] hypnotic.

[Pause] It feels like everything’s slowed down.

Elaborating in the post-IES interview, Ben commented that at that point in the service, he felt that the music:

...had a physical human rhythm to it, almost like hypnosis or certain forms of exercise – yoga, that kind of thing – where the kind of rhythm, in this case not of movement but of the sound, your body almost became attuned to it, and I felt conscious that my body was tuning into the pace and tone of the music and almost becoming- mirroring that in terms of feeling. And obviously a lot of the time that was very serene, and there were moments of quiet in between which were not the same. It felt physical, it felt like a physical connection with it.

Other IES participants and interviewees described the musical rhythms similarly, as ‘mesmerising’; ‘like meditation’; ‘hypnotic’; and ‘calming...it almost feels like a sort of body rhythm’. One SR who described herself as spiritual and religious, said similarly that she attends Evensong regularly because of the ‘rhythm and familiarity of the words and music’. For her, the psalms, ‘when well-sung...can be like a meditation in their rhythm and repetition’. Several others made similar observations, including another religious SR who emphasised that the ‘pattern, rhythm and harmony’ of the psalms were more important than their words and meaning, and that she is frustrated if she cannot sit in the choir stalls to experience not only the sound, but also the feeling of this rhythm. Other SRs placed similar emphasis on the pulse and the pattern provided by the psalm-singing:

[I go to Evensong to] Join the church’s worship in the heartbeat of the psalmody.

I love the almost out of body experience of superb music in a quiet place. The measured cadences of the psalms are like nothing else, and build the sense of worship, and a tension out of quietness.

I am surprised how much I, as a non-musical kind of person, miss the measured, familiar rhythms and cadences which I hadn’t realised were an essential part of this ancient worship. I particularly miss the psalms - big surprise!

The embodied nature of musical response, and its connection to emotion – what Georgina Born calls ‘the affective entailments’ of sound perception – are widely documented:

[S]ound, hearing and voice mark a special bodily nexus for sensation and emotion ... an alignment suffuses the entire fixed or moving body. This is why hearing and voicing link the felt sensations of sound and balance to those of physical and emotional presence (Born 2013, 8).

Research proposes several related mechanisms by which exposure to rhythmic music might afford peacefulness. Dynamic attending theory suggests that focusing on temporally predictable events can induce entrainment and a sense of self-motion (Riess Jones and Boltz 1989; London 2012), and experimental studies have found that where that motion involves rhythmic rocking, relaxation ensues to the extent that sleep is promoted (Bayer et al. 2011). Even the entrainment of brain oscillations during so-called passive listening to repetitive,

pulsed or cyclic sounds has been shown to be capable of inducing sleep (Öztürk-Çolak et al. 2020). It was clear through the IES commentaries that this simple, antiphonal alternation was experienced by participants both bodily and cerebrally, and often in a way that led to a rapid and significant transformation of state:

[Choir singing psalm] Then you get into the psalm, which has the sort of “to and fro” between the two sides which is quite basic, but quite visceral. A steady, rhythmic kind of sound, which isn’t really that conducive to listening – it’s more a rhythm that plays out in quite a visceral way, which is quite relaxing, and possibly even sleep inducing. I definitely close my eyes and sort of *feel* it rather than listen in much detail. I need to follow in the book to really pay attention. Generally, like now, I’d rather just sort of experience it.

(Amy, IES commentary)

The steady rhythm of the psalm chant, in which the two facing sides of the choir alternately sing a verse of the psalm to the same music, provides an unusual and powerful auditory experience. This is intensified by the layout of the two choirs in relation to the congregation – it is common for the congregation to sit adjacent to or behind one half of the choir, and opposite the other – which creates the sense of listening with stereo effects, and in a way that can be deeply embodied. At times in some of the observed services, for example, congregation members were observed following the singing visually, with their gaze, as it passed from one side of the choir, in a manner similar to a spectator at a tennis match. This attentional pattern is indicated at times in the gaze tracking data recorded at the beginning of the psalm (see Figure 23 and Figure 24) in the IES, when the singing switches from the whole choir, to just the choir on the right-hand side.

Figure 23. Gaze fixations of IES participants at 11m 50s, both sides of the choir singing.

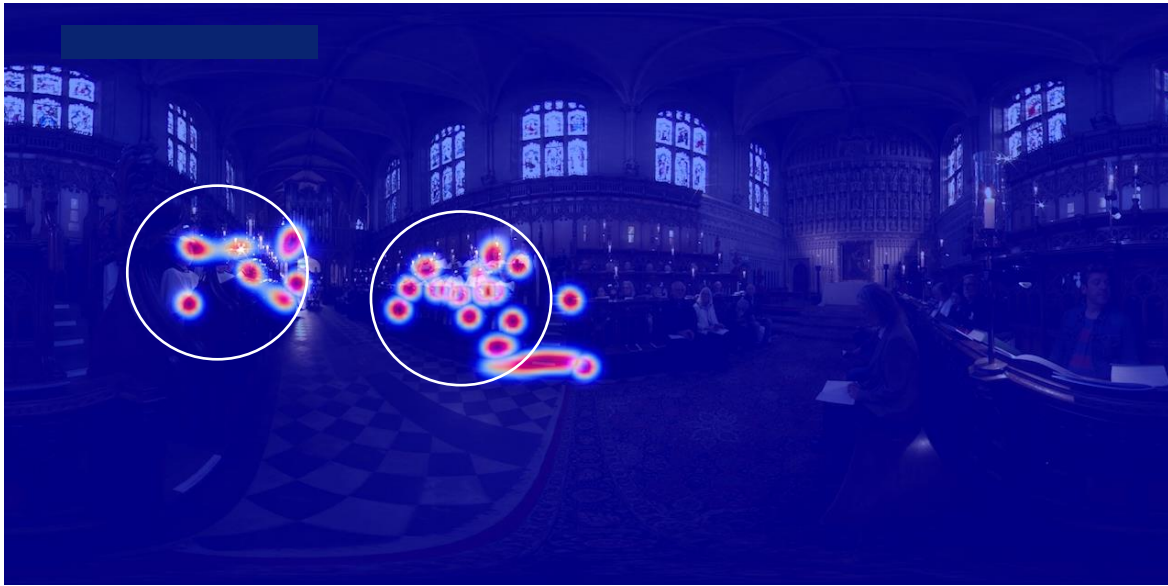


Figure 24. Gaze fixations of IES participants at 12m 23s: choir on the right-hand side of the image only singing



There are several other ways in which the rhythm of Evensong affords calm. Giles Fraser (2009), describing how he has observed his restless young son become gradually calmer during an Evensong service, commented that it was ‘as if the magnificent rhythm of evensong had overwhelmed him, forcing him to submit to its calm and gentle pace’. He also

identifies the rhythm of Evensong as the catalyst for the prayerful state he experiences at the service himself:

the repetition of the psalms sends my mind off into spirals of prayerful streams of consciousness ... liturgical subjection is just the way in which my own clock is forced to tick in time with a very different beat, a beat that is not all about me and my next skittish must-have desire (Fraser 2009).

Others had a more externally discernible response to Evensong's musical rhythm. During the IES, Harry, for example, commented that the organ voluntary 'didn't have any striking emotional pitch', and that he would have preferred to hear some 'more full whack organ-ing to really bowl me over', before noticing that he was, nonetheless, tapping his foot in time. Head-nodding with the organ music, before and after the service, was very common in the IES and also in the observed Evensongs, and is also evident among participants in the IES recording.

For some, however, their musical bodily entrainment was more subtle. In the IES, Maurice noticed, for example, that at the end of the *Nunc dimittis*, he 'instinctively' takes a breath with the choir, in preparation for saying together the Creed, which follows. The deep, controlled breathing used in professional singing is known to have stress reducing effects, through its modulation of the autonomic nervous system (Jerath et al. 2015). By tuning into the choir's breathing and become entrained with it, Maurice – who is not a singer – illustrates a further way in which the congregation members' entrainment affords real and perceived bodily calm. He was not alone: fourteen SRs described Evensong as 'an opportunity to breathe', or 'a chance to take a deep breath', not only metaphorically, it appeared, but also quite literally. One SR, a woman who was spiritual but not religious, and who attends 'for the music, the space it offers my mind and spirit', explained:

One of the factors that attracts me is the proximity to the choir and the clerics. You feel part of the choirs' breathing, and very included in a way that you don't in a full cathedral.

The evidence suggests, therefore, that Evensong participants consciously and unconsciously synchronise their internal and outward bodily movements with the music, with the singers, and with their co-congregants, feeling and replicating the musical sounds in and with their bodies, from involuntary brain wave and body-matter oscillations, foot-tapping and head-nodding gestures and intersubjective synchronised actions. In doing so, they enter into what Reason and Reynolds (2010) call ‘kinaesthetic empathy’ with the music itself, and, when the character of the music is peaceful, Evensong participants can thus come to embody that peace.

5.5. Summary

The music of Evensong has tranquillity-affording, anxiolytic properties, but it is not *a* tranquiliser or *an* anxiolytic. It does not calm, quieten, or relax people. Rather, people can potentially become calmer, quieter, and more relaxed with it, on the conditional basis of that being their intention, and of their being in possession of the skills, practice, and opportunity to engage with it effectively and appropriately in pursuit of that intention. There is, however, much in the music of Evensong that specifies tranquillity, and that affords listeners the opportunity for increased inner peace of a variety and intensity not readily available elsewhere. This affect can be anywhere on the continuum from ‘incredibly gentle’ to the ‘powerfully strong’, depending on the music, the interplay between its sounds, significations, and the somatic sensations it induces, and the listeners objectives, practices, and abilities in deploying it. Some dimensions of this interplay rely on cultural knowledge or conditioning, like the organ’s cuing of reverent conduct, and its evocation of sacred mental images and ideas. Some are universally accessible, arising on sub- or pre-conscious physiological responses, like the gently rocking entrainment with the singing of the psalms. Others rely on individual memory-based or associative apparatus, like autobiographical recollections.

While the full range of mechanisms identified in the experience of emotional responses to music is potentially in play, crucially, the recurring theme in the evidence of regular Evensong participants who seek and achieve calmed cognitive, emotional, and physical affective states is that they engage with these mechanisms actively, and in a range of knowing and sophisticated ways. With varying degrees of conscious awareness, they use their familiarity with the service to tune in to the elements that will support their goal, tune out of those that might hinder it, and through the paradoxical and highly personalised passive-active practice of their participation, to variously lose themselves in the recognizable rhythm of the service, and find within it the resources their affective ambitions require.

Section Two. A ‘mystic state of mind’: Evensong as transcendence

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind...

Romans 12:2

Our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness, as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different.

William James (2013, 438)

‘Everything disappears and all I can see is music.’

Dominic, interviewee.

The connection between music, religious ritual, and transcendent experience has a long and culturally diverse history. Ritual dancing is celebrated in early rock paintings found in Africa, Asia and Australia; ecstatic worship is recorded in texts from Ancient Greece and from medieval Christian England; and ‘electrifying rites’ of drumming, dancing, and trancing are a recurring theme in the accounts of nineteenth-century Europeans as they encountered for the first time what they thought of as ‘new’ worlds (Ehrenreich 2007, 1, 21–35). Today, intense and transcendent musical experiences remain central to many Western Christian practices, including Pentecostalism, the most rapidly growing religious movement in the UK and the world (D. E. Miller, Sargeant, and Flory 2013, 6; Brierley 2017; Burgess 2017).

Music is not only central to these experiences, but instrumental. From Hildegard of Bingen’s medieval visions to many of the thousands of personal accounts received at the Religious Experience Research Centre since 1969, when its founder Alister Hardy asked the British public the question ‘Have you ever experienced a presence or power, whether you call it God or not, which is different from your everyday self?’, music is a common component in transcendent experience (Schmidt 2016, 1; See also Boyce-Tillman 2006).

Emotional and intellectual abandon – what Max Weber (1993, 161) called ‘hysterical’ forms of worship, or ‘religious emotionalism’ – is not, however, part of the Anglican tradition’s history, and is somewhat at odds with its Reformation founders’ liturgical

principles of rationalism and restraint (Temperley 2013 §6). Elizabeth I, well-known as a lover of music, permitted only that a ‘modest distinct song’ could be used in the new Anglican services, although ‘for the comforting of such that delight in music’, songs of the highest musical quality were also allowed before or after it (Dyer 2018). Today, the Anglican Church encourages silent as well as vocal participation, urges that silence be given a greater role in services, and challenges the idea that it is necessary to participate vocally in worship to participate fully (Church of England General Synod 1992, 176–77). Cathedral-style Choral Evensong epitomises this approach. It is performed by the clergy and choir on behalf of the congregation and wider community, and its liturgy excludes the possibility of spontaneous or individualised congregational engagement, expression, or participation. As a result, attendees’ opportunities for expressing their thoughts or feelings in the ritual itself are limited largely to discreet facial expressions.

This study found, however, that while Choral Evensong is a routine, everyday occurrence in the literal and temporal sense, qualitatively it is far from quotidian. Rather, its participants commonly regard it as an encounter with the extraordinary, an experience of the superlatives of the world, of the unworldly, or the other-worldly, and an event that affords a wide range of altered states from emotional elevation, to encounters of the most profound religious and spiritual transcendence with remarkable reliability. The next two chapters discuss the types of transcendence evidenced, and their underlying musical mechanisms.

Chapter 6. Defining transcendence at Evensong

The idea of transcendence occurred in abundance in this study. Almost one hundred of its participants specifically used the term ‘transcendent’ in relation to Evensong; many more who did not use this word nonetheless described experiences there that were both profound and profoundly different to the everyday.

The idea of transcendence is also a prevalent feature in discussions of strong or deep experiences of music. Alf Gabrielsson (2011) devoted a chapter to it, and Gilbert Rouget (1985), Judith Becker (2004), and Ruth Herbert (2011b) have books exploring variations of it. Yet as Herbert (2011a) observes, labelling a phenomenological experience as ‘transcendent’ can be problematic, reifying artificial constructs and applying misleading boundaries around overlapping variables. There are further complexities. Transcendent experiences do not crystallise: they are by definition transient, fluid, and dynamic (James 2013, 430–32). Like religious and mystical experiences, they are inexactly defined and rarely delineated in the literature (Sharf 1998, 95). And like the trancing with which transcendence intersects, it is an internal state, so cannot be wholly available to objective, external empirical analysis (Schmidt 2016, 3). The accounts of this study’s participants further demonstrate that different people understand and use terms like ‘transcendent’ to represent materially different ideas and experiences. Even using the strictest definitions, the term transcendence alone can function as a superlative signifying excellence, the extraordinary or superior, and something ‘beyond the ordinary limits’; it refers to the Kantian ideas of matters outside or unrealizable in human experience, and of things beyond human cognition and thought; and, of particular relevance here, it denotes God’s exaltation above the universe (OED 2016).

Despite the difficulties in articulating transcendent experiences, those set out by the participants here shared two common factors. The first was the strong sense that the experience was of a markedly different quality and character to other, every day, experiences

of being in the world, and operated on a different plane to those experiences. They were, as Williams James identified a century ago, experiences that are not only ‘entirely different’ to ‘normal waking consciousness’ but also ‘so discontinuous’ with it, that it can be difficult to know how to regard them (James 2013, 438). The second was that within this plane, what distinguished the experiences from one another was less their content, and more their degree of separation from ‘normal’ spheres of thought or action and the form of consciousness with which they were associated – or in other words, their unusualness and intensity.

Attempting to organise these highly individualised and nebulous encounters into discrete categories would be misleadingly reductive. Instead, they can be more usefully understood as unique instantiations existing on a continuum of intensity and distance from the everyday, ranging from a moderate departure into dissociation, to deeply intense emotional absorption, visions, and trance. This approach reflects the similarities between transcendence at Evensong and Becker’s conceptualisation of trance states, which she considers a Wittgensteinian category, in that they have some shared, some overlapping, and some non-overlapping indicators, and as such are ‘a set of similar events that bear “family” resemblances to one another’ (J. Becker 2004, 43–44). It also replicates Antoine Hennion’s approach to exploring musical taste, in that the idea, as he puts it, is ‘less to fill a catalogue than to describe variations’ (Hennion 2001, 6).

Accordingly, this chapter suggests, based on participant accounts, that there are seven sorts of transcendent transformation of particular prevalence at Evensong – defined here as elevation, enlightenment, encountering God, being transported, flow, losing and finding the self, and dissociation – and two characteristics that they commonly share: ineffability, and transience. It does not suggest that these are codified categories, and acknowledges their overlapping and often simultaneous occurrence. The chapter discusses in turn each of the

seven types of Evensong transcendence, before assessing the two overarching shared characteristics.

6.1. Seven varieties of Evensong transcendence

(i) Elevation and being ‘uplifted’

The ubiquity of ‘uplifting’ experiences at Evensong was one of the strongest themes of this project. Consistent with Hay’s 1982 (revised 1987) study, which found that feeling ‘uplifted/awe-struck’ was regularly reported in accounts of spontaneous religious experiences, 410 SRs (one in five) used the word in describing the experience of being at Evensong. One SR wrote that going to Evensong was ‘one of the most uplifting experiences of my life’; another described the service as ‘a feeling of being on a higher than usual plane of spirituality’. Similar perceptions, including that the music ‘lifts me to a higher place’, and ‘elevates me’, also featured heavily. The only adjectives used more frequently than ‘uplifting’ were ‘beautiful’ and ‘peaceful’, but these words, and the concepts they reflect, were also routinely associated with notions of elevation:

Beautiful. Peaceful. Uplifting.

Relaxing, uplifting and contemplative. A period of being on another plane.

Uplifting, with tremendous sense of peace and calm.

Transcendent, uplifting, nourishing.

A significant minority of respondents specified the nature of the elevation they felt, which was almost always ‘spiritual’, and, where this was the case, was often preceded by intensifiers like ‘incredibly’, ‘greatly’, or ‘profoundly’. Notably, and apparently paradoxically, experiences of being uplifted also often contained references to being ‘grounded’, such as ‘It’s a really uplifting service but grounding at the same time’, as one respondent wrote, or in a listed juxtaposition, such as ‘uplifting, calming, grounding, spiritual’, as it was also frequently put.

One way of understanding this choice of language is that it reflects the embodied reality of Evensong participation. In many other religious traditions, when people feel or want to become uplifted, they physically elevate themselves – getting to their feet, or raising their arms or voices in expression of their transcendence, for example, as described in Hinson’s (2000) ethnography of musical experience in African American Gospel churches (e.g., Hinson 2000, 84–88). At Evensong, in contrast, participants must generally remain physically grounded, seated silently in their stalls. That is not to say that what they experience is any less intense, however; this is not a slight uplift in mood – a ‘cheering up’ – but an experience of an elevated state firmly on the continuum of transcendence, as Ernest, who attends Evensong regularly and in a variety of locations, explained in describing his uplifting experiences at Evensong:

You feel it. ... all is right with the world, even if it’s fleeting, there’s something very serene and reassuring and timeless ... it’s sensory bombardment, and through the ear, through the eye and through the heart, it’s like all of that combined.

(ii) Noetics and an enlightened state of being

Very common, and essential to many of the transcendent experiences described at Evensong, was the sense of inhabiting a different state in which feeling, thinking and being are entirely different to the feeling, thinking, and being of normal consciousness. One SR in his sixties, who has a committed Anglican faith, for example, said he often experiences at Evensong ‘another way of being and seeing,’ which he described as ‘magical’. Intrinsic to this way of being was its noetic quality– that is, the ability to gain new insights – and often in depths undiscovered by the everyday conscious mind. For William James (2013, 537–39; 548), this noetic enlightenment is one of the four defining characteristics of transcendence – in his terms, the ‘mystic state of mind’ – along with ineffability, transiency, and passivity – and it was also reported with frequency and consistency by participants in all elements of this study.

Ben, for example, described how, without effort or conscious action on his part, he attains a different form of consciousness at Evensong, in which he can see the world in a different way. His new perspective goes beyond thinking of novel ideas and creatively solving problems, although these are part of it, extending to a diminished sense of his own significance and a wider feeling of being part of something ‘bigger, more important’, which he finds liberating:

You go in, and you could be super-stressed and your mind’s on other things, and I often think it’s not really going to work this time, because my mind’s elsewhere... But almost always, at some point in the service, often without you knowing it, it’s weaved its spell and it *has* worked...

It’s a disconnection from the day-to-day cares of the world and a sense of the other, I suppose; of calm, tranquillity, but also a sense of a better perspective – a bigger perspective on the world, rather than the narrow, mundane focus on the day-to-day chatter in your mind... It’s not just that you’ve forgotten about the day-to-day cares, it’s that you see them in a very, very different way... your own significance is diminished, and there’s a sense that there’s something bigger, more important in the world and that you’re a very small part of it. That’s how you feel.

The attainment of existential enlightenment through engagement in musical-religious ceremonies is more often associated with denominations or groups that practise expressive, ecstatic, or trance rituals, than with the restraint of Evensong. The transformation Ben recounts, however, is considered by some to be the essence of all Christian spirituality, representing the transformation from a self-centred to a theocentric state of mind, and to rely on spiritual practices including in ‘intentional disciplines’ like Evensong, to become part of everyday being. As Spohn (2005, 275) has written, from a theological standpoint,

Practices are the means through which beliefs take root in us by becoming affectively charged dispositions that lead to faithful action. Under the grace of God’s Spirit, these embodied convictions of faith become virtues; that is, dynamic habits of the heart to do the right thing with ease and delight.

Spohn describes a process of affective conditioning, where through spiritual practices, ways of thinking and of feeling become trained, or educated, so that the emotions that are aroused by interactions in the world increasingly emulate those of Christ, and reciprocally, perception and action are shaped such that instinctive behaviours will embody Christian virtue (ibid,

278). Spohn writes from the perspective of theoretical theology, but strong evidence of the powerful influence of conditioning on perception and action exists across disciplines, as discussed in Chapter 2, and from the participants in this study. Jennifer reflected in discussion on her experiences of a deep sense of personal transformation at Evensong that is also about an other-directed, wider perspective on life and herself. For her, this altered state has both a cognitive element, that she expressed as an awareness that ‘I need to be exposed to this, I need to be lifted out of my own, rather petty, concerns’, and an embodied one:

...you really feel still, you really feel, wow, I’m just here physically and my essence is here, and I can’t claim to know more than that.

Jennifer is a regular Evensong attendee. In an interview, she explained that for her, being at Evensong is like being ‘touched by the numinous’. She went on to elaborate on how, after the sensory affective qualities of the service fade, the insights of the altered state endure and influence her behaviour in the days that follow. By way of illustration, she recounted a recent event:

So yesterday evening a friend came round... and she’s a bit of gossip...and I sort of noticed that I was being invited to join in gossip, which is so often rather negative; and I’m not claiming any virtue there ...but I noticed... that I made a choice: I found ways of responding that didn’t pull me down that road, because ... I think going to Evensong, it contributes to this developing a taste for what is helpful and a taste for what is unhelpful ...I suppose it’s the stepping back and watching yourself that’s the critical thing...I feel more compassionate, you know?

Kim, who is often involved in organising events at the church where she goes to Evensong, had observed a similar phenomenon. She said she found others to be much more willing to help with the events if she approached them after Evensong rather than before it, because after Evensong,

...people [are] prepared to negotiate on very co-operative terms because they are all much more relaxed, and happier, ... so often people accept things that you ask them...

Many survey respondents commented similarly, including one who personally found the service ‘very soothing’, and had also observed that the choir at the church where they attended ‘was never quarrelsome after Evensong.’

This kind of state alteration is therefore suggested to be characterised by two components: (a) during Evensong, an altered intellectual perspective on life, the world, and the self, accompanied by an embodied feeling of being in an altered state of receptivity; and (b) an enduring cognitive or emotional transformation that continues to shape thoughts, feelings and conduct into life beyond it.

(iii) Boundary-blurring and encountering God and/or the Other

Numerous SRs referred to Evensong as a ‘thin place’:

I go [to Evensong] to be close to God. It is a time when the Cathedral truly becomes a “thin” place.

It is like being in heaven - the combination of music, words, beauty, architecture, and silence helps me to relax, switch off from daily worries and feel peaceful and calm, safe in the Love of God. Such experiences feel like you are in a “thin place” where earth touches heaven and you become part of a much wider picture of the cosmos, raising your sights from self, up to the wider whole.

My college years ...were in Lincoln with choral evensong every night - it was a thin place, transporting me to God.

Celtic in origin, the term refers to a sacred space, usually a geographical location, where the dividing line between the human and spirit worlds is especially ‘thin’, and connection to the divine can be felt as profoundly close (Balzer 2013). The term has been adopted by Christians to describe moments, experiences and settings that Turner might call ‘liminal’, in which the boundary between heaven and earth, and worshipper and God, is blurred or breached (Grieve 2019; Francis 2019). For agnostic or non-religious participants in this study, these encounters were often articulated as ‘mystic’, ‘magical’, or involving a ‘spell’, or some other supernatural force; for the devout the encounter was with God, as these SRs’ comments illustrate:

[Evensong is] peaceful, calming, re-centring, emotional, a chance to connect with the Creator in a manner that helps me understand my place and purpose in this human life. [It] can reset my perspective by preparing my heart for the battle of ego and self, through the portal of music and prayer... it might be more about my own experience in renewal that keeps me coming back.

There is ... a slightly mystical aspect to the service, because it has been said and sung so many times over the years that the stones of our church buildings are steeped in it.

It is probably my deepest religious experience, I feel very close to what really matters.

The most beautiful and sublime connection to Almighty God, Jesus Christ. Almost an out of body experience.

...the service feels more spiritual than other services, almost mystical.

This sharing of an elevated, 'spiritual' experience by people of different beliefs who are not trancing, but are in an altered state, has also been observed in other musical religious settings. In a study of consciousness among listeners at a live performance of Hindustani tabla music, Vivek Virani (2019) describes how people of diverse religious backgrounds participate in the performances together, as they regard the music as a product of ancient spiritual knowledge, and become united through the attainment of a higher or deeper consciousness. Participants are able to interpret their shared altered-state experience through what Becker (2004, 24) refers to in other contexts as an individualised and 'particular understanding of the holy', located within a framework of their own beliefs or world view, which may or may not be the same one that those performing the service have in mind. An important difference between Virani's tabla performance and Evensong is that Evensong is explicitly conducted as an act of worship directed towards a specified deity, the Christian God, extensively named and described in the text. Participants' accounts make clear, however, that it is nonetheless capable of affording profound experiences of an other-worldly character to people of various beliefs and none, all of whom frequently utilised eschatological language, particularly the terms 'heavenly', 'divine', and 'numinous', to describe their Evensong experiences, and

whom, as Becker theorised, have developed their own individualised understanding – with which they are entirely comfortable – of what is sacred, holy, or Other. This was evident across the study:

[Evensong is...]

A heavenly divine experience of love and God's light.

(SR who identifies as belonging to the Church of England, and as religious and spiritual)

Transcendence with the Divine...The voices of the choir bring me closer to God.

(SR who identifies as a Roman Catholic and as religious)

It's not so much about religious faith for me although there is a sense of transcendence and beauty that make it a spiritual experience.

(SR who is spiritual and not religious)

Beautiful, connected, calm, divine.

(SR who does not believe in some sort of spirit or in God).

Frequently transcendent - occasionally tedious - sometimes funny...

(SR who does not believe in some sort of spirit or in God)

It's just, it's just, magical, it's a magical oeuvre.

(Interviewee, not religious)

One in six SRs ($n = 349$), spanning the full spectrum of belief, described the experience of Evensong as spiritual. While in many cases this was in an abstract sense rather than as an encounter with some sort of spirit – for example as spiritual nourishment, sustenance, refreshment, or re-charge –for some with a religious belief, the transcendent experiences they described were perceived as a holy, and often profound, encounter with the reality of a living God. 44 SRs volunteered in their free text answers that they felt God's presence at Evensong (there was no survey question specifically about this), one described this presence as 'palpable'; another, responding to the Absence of Evensong survey, explained further how the 'real sense of divine presence and calm' in the service counteracts feelings of anxiety, powerlessness, and isolation; and many others said that it was the sung texts of the service that afforded these experiences. As two of the SRs put it:

During the service, especially when sung, one can encounter God, be refreshed and renewed, steadied for the world. It is a time to be in the presence of God through the blessings of beautiful music reminding one of basic beliefs.

In other types of service, I feel as if I am coming to God. In the Evensong service I feel that God is coming to me and meeting me.

Frieda, a Christian who attends Evensong primarily for religious reasons when visiting Britain as a tourist, expressed this in discussion in a similar way to many SRs. She explained that in whichever cathedral she finds it, Anglican Evensong is a place where she ‘feels God’s spirit a lot’: ‘I think you can definitely feel heaven ...you can feel the love of God’. The emotionally moving nature of these encounters was an important characteristic of them, as many SRs emphasised, including one, who, in a detailed account of his life as what he termed a ‘man of faith’, wrote:

Evensong is, for me, my personal moment of peace and coming close to God and on occasions there are tears in my quietness.

Such affective experiences of what in theological terms might be considered a revelation of the presence of God were not unusual, and were also associated with a range of somatic responses. As one Anglican SR who believes in God, but who identifies as neither religious nor spiritual, put it:

I find [Evensong] a wonderful time to be closer to something quite special ...something that’s centuries old but feels so connected, it does give you goose bumps...

Several other atheist, agnostic, or non-religious people characterised this feeling of abstract connection as feeling that they were ‘not alone’, not because they were in a congregation among other people, but because of the sense of being with an ‘Other’. One SR wrote that at Evensong, he feels that ‘I am but a small part of something infinitely greater than myself, and that there, I am not alone.’

(iv) Being transported

Distinct from experiences of Evensong as a thin place where God or the spiritual were close, were the similarly prevalent experiences of Evensong ‘transporting’ its participants to a

different place. According to transportation theory, transportation happens when someone – ‘the traveller’ – is conveyed ‘some distance from his or her world of origin’ as a result of performing certain actions (Gerrig 1993, 10–11). The transportation makes some aspects of the world of origin inaccessible, and when the traveller returns to the world of origin, they are ‘somewhat changed by the journey’. Green and Brock (2000) further conceptualise transportation as an immersive and convergent process, in which attention, imagery and feelings are subject to an ‘integrative melding’, and where the person transported is so drawn into the events in a narrative (read, heard, seen or imagined) that they fail to attend to real-world events. They might, for example, fail to notice someone entering the room. Other characteristics of transportation include becoming psychologically distanced from reality, and privileging beliefs from the narrative in which they are immersed over real-world facts. The traveller is likely to experience heightened emotions and motivations, and ultimately will find themselves transformed in their beliefs or feelings, to varying degrees, by the transportation.

One SR recounted a powerful example of such a transformational event:

I emerged from Evensong with a sense of peace that I did not have when I went in. At first I was not sure what this might mean, but eventually realised that it might be a religious experience (and I had not previously considered myself religious, having renounced Roman Catholicism as a teenager). This led to a series of discussions with Chaplains at the end of which I joined the Church of England and have been attending services regularly for the last ten years or so.

The types of transportation reported at Evensong were mostly not so fundamentally life changing, but were universally powerfully moving, and often involved a sense of being conveyed to heaven. Recounting his first experiences at Evensong on arriving at college as an undergraduate, Grant, who was not then religious and had little experience of churchgoing, recalled how he thought

...that was the best music I’d ever, ever heard, and I was very much in amongst it, and it wasn’t on the radio – I was next to the choir, and wow, transported up to Heaven, kind of situation.

Maria, a Christian, similarly described how, on a trip to explore the churches of London, she found herself for the first time in a Choral Evensong service:

I thought I was in Heaven, because it's so lovely. ... you can feel the power of prayer there... I think with the music and everything, I'm wafted up to Heaven.

For others the destination of the transportation was of less importance than its character, experienced as deeply different from the everyday but not necessarily as any identified or identifiable alternative place. For Rhiannon, this was 'a happy place', and although she is spiritual and not religious, also a 'reverential' one. In an interview, she described her first experience of Evensong:

Rhiannon: ...the singing was out of this world. It was absolutely- it transported me. My husband's a musician, so even though he is vehemently against religion in organised form, even he was transported by it.

Q: Can you say to where it transports you?

Rhiannon: To a happy place, a reverential place... It's a holiday from reality.

Other participants also described being transported at Evensong to a special place that was identifiable only as 'somewhere', or 'another realm':

[the choir were singing] the Howells Coll Reg³⁴...I was absolutely transported by it... this stuff reaches in through my ears, grabs my tear ducts and squeezes and makes me cry and utterly transports me. (Jonty)

You become part of a different reality. You are not here and now. You are in your mind, in a different space, as I mentioned. It does sound a bit strange – I don't mean like Dr Who or anything... You are transported, with the music, somewhere... (Millie)

[Evensong is] A spiritual experience that lifts the soul... one can be transported to another realm. One is left feeling light and entranced as though suspended several inches above one's seat; all is right with the world. (SR)

The strand of altered consciousness described by these participants accords closely with the state that Herbert (2011a, 85–86) and others identify as 'absorption'. Like transportation, absorption is contingent upon multisensory perception and imagination, which, through non-

³⁴ Herbert Howells's *Collegium Regale*, a setting of the Evensong canticles.

volitional reception – the state William James called ‘passivity’ – leads to a deep involvement with the focus of consciousness. Laski described two varieties of absorption-type experience: intensity experiences related to art including music, which are strongly emotional and highly arousing, and withdrawal experiences, of which contemplative prayer is an example, characterised by low arousal and gradual rather than sudden attainment (Herbert 2011b, 86–87). Participants’ descriptions indicate that Evensong, perhaps unsurprisingly since it is contemplative prayer in a musical context, affords both varieties: intensity – ‘it grabs my tear ducts’; and withdrawal – ‘I’m wafted up to heaven’.

(v) Flow states, and peaks and plateau experiences

Closely related to, and overlapping with the idea of absorption, is ‘flow’. So called by Csikszentmihalyi (1978, cited in Csikszentmihalyi 2014), who identified the concept, flow is the state of optimal experience that occurs when the demands of environmental information are in optimum balance with an individual’s attentional capacities – a kind of optimal perception-action integration, where, in this case, ‘action’ is understood very broadly, incorporating internalised responses. In the flow state, the conscious mind is neither overwhelmed nor underoccupied, only totally absorbed; and the perceiver’s skills and abilities, are being used up to, but not beyond, their maximum potential. Csikszentmihalyi (2014) characterises the flow state as having four key features: (i) it temporarily excludes from consciousness any thoughts and feelings not salient to the task at hand, to the extent that ‘past and future cease to exist subjectively’ and ‘clock time is replaced by experiential sequences structured according to the demands of the activity; (ii) the goals of the activity are clear, and so is the means to reach them; (iii) there is a loss of self-consciousness; and (iv) the experience itself is autotelic, or intrinsically rewarding.

One of the most vivid – almost textbook – accounts of flow at Evensong was given by Ernest. He chose the words ‘peak experience’ to describe what Evensong affords him. This, he said, is so rewarding, it has become ‘a need’:

Ernest: I enter into a space during Evensong where it’s *Kairos*, a different type of time, God’s time I suppose, where three years is nothing, but I’m reconnecting; it’s almost like time moving, or moving in time, backwards and forwards, in the present, very extraordinary experience, or at least I’m probably over rationalising it, but that’s the feeling I have.

Q: What does that feeling actually *feel* like? Can you say more about it?

Ernest: ...I come back to the word uplifting, so there’s a respite in a busy day that’s brief, where I can just completely relax, and focus on the present, not think about anything about later, or when the day passes, I can maybe-get into that- and then, it just, happens. ...there’s a very distinct energy that comes from that...

Q: Does that always happen?

Ernest: ...it’s like a scale, sometimes it’s a two. It partly depends on the music, partly depends on which choir, but ... usually we’re eight and above, from memory, yes, I’d say. That keeps me coming back, it’s like a peak experience...It’s a need.

For Ernest, ‘clock time’ is replaced by *Kairos*, the Greek term for ‘the propitious moment for the coming into being of a new state’(OED 2021a); he has a clear goal (to learn the psalms, and to pray) and the means to reach it (‘pay attention to the psalms’, ‘focus on the present’); there is a lack of self-consciousness (‘it just happens’) and the experience is intrinsically rewarding (‘the music...the choir...that keeps me coming back’); and thus, flow is attained.

Luca also cited Evensong’s ability to afford a flow-like, altered, state as central to its purpose for him, and his primary goal in attending. He described this state as ‘slightly timeless, strange, slightly unreal’ (the suspension of clock time), and one in which the familiarity, predictability, and unchanged nature of the service he has known all his life enable him to ‘switch off’, while the music becomes ‘background noise’. This in turn affords him a duality of consciousness, in which he can feel completely immersed in his thoughts (excluding non-salient thoughts and feelings), while at the same time monitoring the

ritualised arc of experience through which the service progresses, in order to be open to arresting musical settings and interesting theological ideas, moving ‘very quickly between the sensing to feeling to thought...the synchronic and diachronic’. To illustrate this, he read out a quote he had brought from Iris Murdoch’s novel *The Bell*, saying that for him, Murdoch’s ideas of the congregation member as ‘spectator’, and her description of ‘the separateness, the factualness’ of the service all resonated with his own experience of Evensong:

“The Mass remained, not consoling, not uplifting but in some way factual... It simply existed as a kind of pure reality separate from the weaving of his own thoughts. He attended it almost as a spectator...”(Murdoch 1958, 313)

Despite Luca’s sense of separation from the ritual, he is, however, not self-conscious. On the contrary, he is, in his words, ‘immersed’ in a holistic experience that is visual, aural, aesthetic, intellectual, emotional, and embodied. At Evensong, he said, his ambivalence towards the Church, and its practises, teachings, and morality, feels unproblematic – ‘no-one cares and no-one knows’; and he feels able to allow his thoughts to range from the theological to the ‘heretical’, and ultimately to come out ‘with something decided, or a new thought’, or ‘feeling mindful or consoled’ (the intrinsic reward). Luca clarified that this state does not always occur, and that he sometimes leaves Evensong feeling low or despondent when he has not felt consoled or uplifted. He said that he achieves the cognitive and affective objectives that are his motivation for attending through the altered state that participation affords him ‘pretty regularly.’ If he did not, he reflected, ‘I probably wouldn’t keep going.’

The IES and follow-up interviews facilitated observation of the flow state as it happened. Within the experiment, Amy, who attends Evensong regularly at the cathedral where her chorister son sings, made comments that suggest she was experiencing the four defining features of flow, and exemplified them in her embodied responses:

[27m53s: Choir singing Lord’s Prayer in plainchant]

Amy: ...the choir are currently chanting the Lord’s prayer and again it feels like that just holds your attention. Not so much that you’re hugely focused on the

words, but it stops you thinking about anything else. It makes it quite meditative as an experience... [silence]

[One minute later, from 29m04s, priest and choir singing prayers and responses]

Amy: ...There we go, at this point I've got my eyes closed ... I really feel like I'm just letting it wash over me.

Referring to her sense of immersion in the sound, she noted several times that the music 'stops you thinking about anything else' and that she had a strong urge to close her eyes in order to 'just sort of absorb the music, rather than the visual' (in Csikszentmihalyi's terms, excluding irrelevant information). Several times, she did so: 'I find myself closing my eyes...just [pause] relaxing' (suggesting a loss of self-consciousness). She further remarked on the difficulties in providing a commentary during the choral singing because 'it's so overwhelming really... an incredible kind of sound', and after around two minutes of listening to the psalm singing, she commented that she was: 'fairly empty in terms of thought and mind. I'm just experiencing this but not thinking about it too much' (further confirming the exclusion of irrelevant thoughts and feelings from her consciousness). Then, in an illustration of the consciousness-duality described by Luca, she observed that she had, metaphorically, 'just been awakened by everyone getting to their feet for the Gloria'. Displaying the degree to which she had become immersed in the service (and her loss of self-consciousness), she joined in with the spoken congregational responses, speaking in a low voice. This unselfconscious behaviour was not unusual in the study, and several participants went further, saying private prayers, quietly but aloud, during the intercessions. One used the time to speak to God about a quite personal matter, leading me to note in my observations: 'Now whispering. Very quiet. Words not all clear. Does she remember I'm here? Praying?'

Amy's intrinsic reward when attending Evensong in the real world – in contrast to the IES – has two elements: first, the satisfaction of supporting her son by watching him sing in the choir, which she says is 'magical'; and second, the 'ephemeral' altered state that

Evensong affords when, in her words, and those of many others, ‘it works’. In essence, for Amy, flow is not only a state and a process, but also in Csikszentmihalyi’s conception, a goal (one of her two goals), the means to achieve it, and its own intrinsic reward.

Csikszentmihalyi expected that once a person had experienced flow, they would find it to be so enjoyable that they would seek to experience it again, ‘even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it’ (Csikszentmihalyi 2002, 4). Accordingly, it was not unusual for the achievement of flow, or a similar state with many of the elements of flow, to be one of attendees’ main purposes in attending. One of the most direct declarations of this came from an SR, a religious man in his sixties, who wrote that he goes to Evensong nowadays ‘for a transcendent experience’. Moreover, he said, he often achieved it, experiencing the service as ‘spiritual, transcendent [and a] vision of something greater’. For others, like Ben, Evensong has only ‘worked’ when he has attained the flow state. Geoffrey, a former Anglican who is now a member of another Christian denomination, framed a similar state-transformation objective in religious terms. He said that when he was an Anglican, Evensong was the place he would go ‘to try to have a religious experience’, because meaningful religious encounters felt possible there.

While these accounts are consistent with Csikszentmihalyi’s four criteria, they appear at odds with his theory that flow does not happen at ‘passive, receptive, relaxing times’, and only by engaging actively in an effortful, challenging, and outwardly performative task in which the ‘body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile’ (Csikszentmihalyi 2002, 3). His leading examples – such as achieving a personal best at swimming, sailing a tight course in a storm, or mastering a challenging musical passage on the violin – appear to have little in common with being in the congregation at Choral Evensong. While Csikszentmihalyi has explicitly stated that flow can occur through the act of music listening, he also suggests that this will happen only when the

goal – and the process in which the listener is engaged – is active, analytical, and musically-skilled listening. By this he means listening attentively to the structural elements of the music, such as the harmonic progressions and the thematic organisation of the work, with the objective of understanding its hierarchical organisation, or evaluating the acoustics, performance, or interpretation of the performance, rather than attending to what he calls its sensory or narrative elements (ibid, 109-111). This type of listening, akin to the technical, analytical, ‘structural hearing’ of Adorno’s (1976, 2) idealised ‘expert’ listener, is not the kind of listening most participants in this study described or evidenced as being involved in their transcendent experiences at Evensong. At the same time, however, participants’ modes of listening also seem to contradict William James’s position that transcendent experiences are inherently passive and unwilled, because here they are self-evidently consciously pursued.

Like tranquillity (as described in Chapters 4 and 5), the evidence from this study is that attaining flow experiences at Evensong requires both activity, to create the conditions that afford them; and passivity, to enable the relinquishment of control necessary to fully experience them, as proposed by Hennion (2001) in respect of musical satisfaction; Gomart and Hennion (1999) in drug use and in the love of music; and DeNora (1997; 2021) with regard to erotic intimacy. A useful additional way of understanding these active-passive flow-type experiences is offered by Abraham Maslow’s (1964; 1971) concept of the plateau experience, the counterpart to his better-known conception of the peak experience of self-actualisation. In Maslow’s conception plateau states are characterised by their calmness and serenity, and have the qualities of ‘casualness and lounging’ (Heitzman 2003, 34). They therefore lack the drama and explosive climax of the peak experience, and instead are enduring transcendent experiences of “‘awakened” cognition’, which, like Laski’s withdrawal experiences (Herbert 2011b, 86–87), are more likely to elicit extended effects,

including ‘mild and constant’ happiness. Maslow’s intention in theorising plateau states was, he wrote, to

correct the tendency of some to identify experiences of transcendence as only dramatic, orgasmic, transient, “peaky”, like a moment on the top of Mount Everest. There is also the high plateau, where one can stay “turned on.” (Maslow 1964, Introduction)

Crucially, unlike flow and peak experiences, which may happen to anyone, Maslow says that achieving transcendent plateau experiences needs to be learned, practised, and cultivated, with time, work, and commitment. Like the spiritual disciplines, he proposes, this is a lifelong effort; it is also, he holds, a way of explaining religious experience, and a way of experiencing the otherworldly encounters often described in religious terms.

(vi) Losing the self, finding the self

Losing the self

Distinct from the loss of self-consciousness associated with the flow state, also observed and reported among Evensong participants was the loss of the *sense* of self, and/or a perception that the self has been subsumed into something greater. For Winkelman (2016, 47), losing the self is one of the defining features of mystical consciousness, which he conceptualises as:

[The r]ealisation of the false nature of one’s sense of self and ecstatic emotional experiences resulting from suspension of the participating self as the point of reference, and the emergence of identification with the “observing self” and its liberation from attachments.

A transformed sense of self is also characteristic of strong experiences with music. As Eric Clarke (2014, 356) has highlighted, accounts of the ‘loss of self’ and its counterpart ‘the discovery of self’ have been documented in writings about musical experience since antiquity, and it has since become an important concern of European aesthetics to explain how and why music has this capacity ‘to take hold of the human subject, and dissolve, transform or reorganize the sense of self’. Taking an empirical approach, Gabrielsson’s (2011) research into strong experiences with music illustrates the variety of ways in which

the self is experienced as lost and found in music listening. He identifies this as happening in multiple contexts and as experienced in multiple ways, including under his themes of ‘Music and religious experiences’; ‘When music takes over’; ‘Merging with the music’; ‘Feeling light, floating, leaving one’s body’; and ‘Music and transcendence’. The last of these has a sub-category called ‘Cosmic experiences, merging into something greater, dissolution of one’s ego’, that encompasses experiences in which the listener feels that they have been ‘put in a trance or ecstasy’, and in which ‘there may be a feeling of totally merging with something bigger and of glimpsing other worlds or existences’ (ibid, 159), or what Winkelman refers to as ‘suspensions from the participating self’, afforded by music.

Gabrielsson also noted the parallels between deep musical experiences and spiritual ones, including the use of supernatural or eschatological language in secular contexts (ibid, 159-60) as did Hills and Argyle (1998), who – taking as a point of departure Andrew Greeley’s (1975) finding that music listening is the most common context for religious experience – conducted a survey of religious and musical experiences and found that religious experiences and deep musical experiences are ‘basically similar’. Among their shared features, they found that ‘glimpsing another world’ and ‘loss of sense of self’ appear prominently.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, the sense of reconfigured subjectivity, and in particular the loss of self, was frequently raised by SRs as an important part of their Evensong experience:

[Evensong is] Transcendental. Combination of ritual and music and familiar words. We lose ourselves in something that’s bigger than us.

...a spiritual experience... I become lost in the transcendence of the music and in so doing become lost in prayer.

While none of the IES participants experienced a total loss of self in the trancing sense, perhaps unsurprisingly given the technology they were wearing and the study’s requirement for them to narrate their experience, they did allude to it. Marcus’s reports of it were

retrospective, recalling his almost overwhelming experiences of choral worship when he was first becoming a Christian, that were instrumental in advancing his developing faith:

I love choral music *so* much. So, *so* much. And have lost myself in it. Especially when I was first becoming Christian really, it was a huge part of the way that I was able to come to believe in things like transcendence you know, experiences of God, the tearing of the veil.

For Marcus, a trained musician, the musical and religious transcendence were intertwined in the way Hills and Argyle predicted: it was losing himself in the choral music that enabled him to believe in transcendence and the direct experience of God, to which he alludes in citing ‘the tearing of the veil’. The reference is to the gospel of Matthew, which recounts that at the moment of the death of Jesus, the veil which hung in the temple between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place tore from top to bottom, symbolising the end of the separation between God and man, and the direct access that believers would now have to God.³⁵

Marcus’s use of this imagery in his description also indicates how the different ‘varieties’ of transcendence are conceptual ideas rather than bounded categories, and that they are not mutually exclusive: multiple varieties can occur at once, overlap, and converge, and one might catalyse another, as here, where ‘losing the self’ led to the blurring of the boundary with the sacred.

Others drew attention to the Evensong service’s focus on God as an important contributor to their loss of self through other-directed focus, for example identifying the fact that Evensong is ‘not about me, and that’s a relief, often’, as one SR wrote. Another elaborated ‘You soak in God’s word, enriched by lovely music. You can lose yourself in worship. You feel part of the timeless community of saints’.

³⁵ Matthew 27: 45-54.

Finding the self

Clarke (2014, 364) defines finding the self in music as ‘the sense of recognizing ourselves – or something like ourselves, perhaps a distortion, idealization or some other transformation of ourselves’ in the music. Of these, the idealised, transformed self was most common in the accounts gathered here. One SR, an Anglican, put it like this:

The service is an act of ceremonial magic - the choral aspects create an aural space that enlarges and intensifies the visible, tangible space. The mind is allowed and encouraged to open itself up to God. For a moment, in the majesty of their actions, in the soaring beauty of the music and the space, humans show that tiny fraction of the angel that they carry inside themselves - and even an ape like me can believe.

Another SR, explaining why he – like many others – found the experience of Evensong to be, in his word, ‘numinous’, wrote:

[I am] lifted by the words (which I have known since childhood), by the music, to a place where I am put back in touch with that part of me that aspires towards the good and the true, and to feel that I am but a small part of something infinitely greater than myself, and that there, I am not alone.

Both accounts share the sense that in the music of Evensong, the best aspects of human nature are revealed and recognised – ‘the angel that [humans] carry inside themselves’, and ‘that part of me that aspires towards the good and the true’ – and that through the music, these participants’ connections to them are renewed (‘For a moment...even an ape like me can believe’; ‘I am put back in touch with that part of me’).

The accounts also have in common the idea that what is found in the music is not something entirely new, but something about the self that was previously lost, or forgotten. For Emily, who was brought up in an evangelical household with a well-defined belief system, what she had lost were her ‘inherited, childhood beliefs’ when, at adolescence, her faith ‘fell apart’. Uncertain about who she had become, so central had her faith been to her identity, she felt a need to locate herself within what she described as ‘a palpable sense of the past’. She explained that Choral Evensong makes her feel the way she once did visiting an old village church filled with kneelers commemorating people lost in the First World War:

that she – quoting from TS Eliot’s (1943) poem ‘Little Gidding’ – is in a place ‘where prayer had been valid’. Cathedral music, she said, and specifically Evensong, gave her not only this sense of history, but also ‘a place in history’, as a type of worship that had taken place before her, and would continue after her:

...if you lose something that was core to your identity as a child, whatever you lose, you lose faith in a person or faith in God, there’s perhaps always a bit- you’re always aware of something missing...and so I think what pours into that gap is that choral evensong exists. ... I know that the service will speak to me, the structure will hold me... I don’t know where I would be without it.

(vii) Dissociation

Partially overlapping with transportation, flow states, and the loss of self, are the experiences of dissociation seen at Evensong. Normative dissociation is acknowledged to be an integral part of everyday psychological functioning, and is a broad category encompassing changes in conscious awareness of real-world surroundings, which span the continuum from daydreaming through flow-type absorption to complete detachment from the self and surroundings (Herbert 2013). Herbert has found a range of dissociative experiences to be commonplace in everyday music listening, including listeners’ strategic employment of music as a diversion from negative states or situations, for general escape, and to create an auditory ‘bubble’ separate from the world:

...references concerning the use of music to cut off, block out, escape from or facilitate distantiation from aspects of self or environment ... suggest that dissociation is a pervasive phenomenon in everyday life interactions with music. (Herbert 2013, 374–75)

How Evensong functions as escape, sanctuary and asylum is the subject of Section 3 of this thesis, but as participants’ cognitive disconnection from the ‘real world’ is also evidence of their altered state of mind, it is also relevant here. A common instantiation of this sense of separation was in participants’ unawareness of their co-congregants once the service had begun. When I asked Luca, who described his immersion in Evensong as a holistic experience, to what extent he noticed other people at Evensong, he replied that he simply

does not, and that even if someone does something that attracts his attention, then ‘they tend to fade out pretty quickly’. Similarly, Maurice, a frequent Evensong participant, said that he ‘never ever thinks about the other people’ listening; and Greg, uncertain about belief, but a music lover and occasional Evensong attender, said he noticed other people during a service for the first time only when he was taking part in the IES, and he saw them in the film. He was very surprised by their reactions, or more precisely, the absence of them, because, he said ‘inside I feel like I’m really engaging with it, but I guess it’s for *me*, rather than trying to feed off other people’, whereas everyone he could see in the recording, was, it appeared to him, ‘just sitting there’.

In common with Herbert’s findings in her study of dissociation, Evensong participants also portrayed their dissociation as strategic and purposive. Evelyn, for example, who is spiritual and religious but not a Christian, described how Evensong offers a variety of experiential options:

...you don’t have to listen to anything anyone is saying, but just sort of be an artefact unto yourself. You can ignore everything that’s being said and just be within yourself, or you can have the music, the choral music, and you just go and listen to that ... it gives you a variety of options, and also I think these options are dependent on your feelings that day as well, and you don’t have to prove anything to anyone in the cathedral setting...

Comments like Evelyn’s, especially when made by non-Christians, can be seen by some as indicative of a participant on the boundaries of the Church not yet comfortable to be open to its teachings, and/or a desire for anonymity and the avoidance of responsibilities while they explore – perhaps subconsciously – whether the service, the Church, or faith is ‘for them’ (Holmes and Kautzer 2013, 42–45). In some cases, this is certainly true; many participants made the point that Evensong had seemed to them an approachable service when they were unfamiliar with the Church: ‘an accessible window to God on my faith journey’, as one SR put it. Evelyn, however, made clear that none of these apply to her: she is committed to and contented in her own religious beliefs, but regards Evensong as ‘...just another way to

expend your spiritual energies... another place that offers you the opportunity to meditate or to pray'. It is also, moreover, one which affords her a beneficial experience of dissociation which blocks out the outside world, and sometimes even the words of the service, and supports her intention to pray and feel calm, and as a positively-valenced end in itself. As she explained:

outside there may be pandemonium, something else going on, but somehow being here and with the music completely enveloping around you or enclosing you almost...I feel security, I feel safety and I feel peace.

For others, by contrast, the disconnection is spontaneous and involuntary, and sometimes unexpected. This manifested in the IES for Megan, who describes herself as an Anglican, through her immersion in the music. Around 20 minutes into the service, during the choral anthem, she commented:

I think it is by now that the service has created its own kind of world. You've been here long enough, you've been through cycles of song and music and cycles of reading, and it's got a life of its own now. Not thinking about other things. You're not thinking about what you were doing before you came in – whether you left the oven on or something...

Completely immersed. Mm. [sigh].

And I think it's the music that does it. It's the music that builds the overall structure that disconnects you from the outside world because you're listening, because you're wrapped up in it, it's not somebody just talking at you. It's creating an alternative, parallel, numinous reality. That's the thing, isn't it? It's the otherness. Again, its otherness and the music's essential. The difference of the space is very, very important, but the music is what makes it ...

(Megan, IES commentary, from 31m36s)

The evidence of this study therefore suggests that Evensong affords positively-valenced experiences of dissociation of both the spontaneous and volitional varieties, that music is instrumental in this process, and that as Herbert (2013) found, the detachment does not rely on a lack of attentional focus by participants, but rather is characterised by a changed relationship with the self or the environment. Herbert, however, makes a distinction between absorbing and dissociative experiences, but Evensong participants like Megan, and others,

experience the two interconnectedly. The absorption in the music facilitates dissociation from both the participant's internal thoughts ('not thinking about other things') and their external environment ('[it] disconnects you from the outside world'), while simultaneously creating a perception of a different experiential sphere ('an alternative, parallel, numinous reality'), in which the participant becomes immersed, and in doing so, transformed.

6.2. Common characteristics of transcendence at Evensong

While not contributors to transcendence, the transcendent experiences evidenced at Evensong had two common characteristics which both marked them out from the everyday, and contributed to participants' characterisation of them as transcendent. They are ineffability, and transience.

Ineffability

For William James, ineffability is 'the handiest of marks' by which a state of consciousness can be classified as transcendent, or in his terms, mystical:

The subject of it immediately says that it defies expression, that no adequate report of its contents can be given in words. ... its quality must be directly experienced; it cannot be imparted or transferred to others. In this peculiarity mystical states are more like states of feeling than like states of intellect.

McCutcheon (2014, 8) argues that the ability to report a transcendent experience relies on a social learning of the relevant rules, such that what may be presented as immediate experience is actually a representation invented by others. In Christianity specifically, as Begbie has written, transcendent experiences are considered to be inherently ineffable, since God is ineffable, unknowable, and inexpressible (Begbie 2018; see also Arnold 2019, 14–15; 22–23).

A striking feature of the descriptions of experiences at Evensong gathered in this study was their ineffability, and this was manifest in three ways. The first was in the palpable difficulties otherwise fluent interviewees, like Ram, encountered in finding suitable words to describe them:

Ram: ...you think: “Wow, that’s amazing.” It feels like it connects both with you and with time and space.

Q: And what does that feel like? What *did* that feel like? What were your emotions?

Ram: I think of uplifting, that’s the thing. I don’t know what the word for it is, but it’s like this transcendental sense of being taken out of yourself. It’s an uplifting thing from the music. It’s kind of awe-inspiring, in a way. I don’t know if there’s a particular word for it. [Pause]. I suppose “transcendent” is the word, isn’t it? But that’s overused, so, I suppose, hotly disputed what that means, but I guess that would be the word I would use...

The second was the tendency to label the experience as ineffable. Alan, an eloquent interviewee whose responses were precisely expressed, and often illustrated with literary quotations and extracts of poetry, tried a range of approaches over several minutes to express his most profound experiences at Evensong, before conceding ‘...I suppose it’s the feeling that something is happening in the world which is incommunicable except in its own terms...’. Another articulate interviewee did the same, giving an uncharacteristically disordered five-hundred-word account from a variety of perspectives, before reflexively observing ‘So it seems, it’s very hard to describe what you’re really doing but you feel like you are there, and you are doing something...’. Jasmin, who has been a frequent Evensong attender since discovering the service on arriving in the UK several years ago, and is sometimes moved to tears during services, said simply ‘...it’s beautiful, you can’t describe it, it’s just beautiful’. A respondent to the second survey, conducted during the 2020 national lockdown, poignantly agreed: ‘The joy [of being at Evensong] is impossible to explain, but I miss it terribly’.

The third way in which transcendent experiences were presented as ineffable was in the extensive use of metaphor. In addition to the many water and immersion analogies applied to Evensong, as described in Chapter 4 (‘It’s like slipping into a warm bubble bath ...’, and so on), many SRs used other metaphors to answer the question ‘How would you

describe the experience of being at a Choral Evensong service?', often in the absence of any context, clarification, or further explanation. Evensong, they wrote, is

Rich, like a creamy sherry

...like an ambient jacuzzi of sound.

...like being in heaven.

...like that scene in the Wizard of Oz when the film moved from black and white to colour. Suddenly a technicolour vibrancy appeared.

Take a well-planned religious service and blend it with a quickly paced classical music concert. Give it the creamy texture of a chocolate thick shake and the "kick" of a strong gin-and-tonic. That's Choral Evensong.

Metaphor was also a feature of descriptions of Evensong in the interviews and IES. For both Dominic, who is spiritual but not religious and has only recently begun attending Evensong, and Billie, a Christian who has been a regular participant in Evensong for many years, the service is 'like meditation'. Others proceeded by more abstract analogy:

It's like the reading speaks to your mind, and the choir speak to your heart. (IES participant)

It's like a space that is created - beauty and groundedness, where I can just be in a contemplative way. I feel centuries of history that have room for me. (SR)

As Georgina Born (2011, 377) and Timothy Rice (2017, 117–18; 122) have identified, the way that metaphors for music are used in wider discourse can reveal something of ontological and epistemological importance about the nature of the music described, and indicate where the power to define the meaning of that music resides. Here, the spontaneous use of metaphors for Evensong is of itself significant, in that it seems to suggest a widespread view among participants that ordinary, non-metaphorical language is an inadequate tool with which to represent their Evensong experience. This could be interpreted as evidence that they have internalised the ideology that profound musical, religious, and spiritual experiences are by definition ineffable, or as an indication that they personally found such experiences irreducible to plain words. Both are possible and given the interdependence of the two, a

combination of both elements seems likely. Significantly, both explanations also point to participants' location of the experiences outside of the everyday.

Also significant is the nature of the metaphors. While conventional, eschatological-type imagery of the type Rijken (2020) found in her study of Dutch Evensongs abounds, here so too do unique, highly specific, and self-conceived metaphors like those quoted which associate Evensong with the qualities of a jacuzzi, gin and tonic, and the Wizard of Oz. The creative, and sometimes slightly irreverent character of the metaphors suggest participants' sense of power to claim their Evensong experiences and to define them on their own terms, and their refusal to submit to conventional, expected, or hegemonic narratives of that experience. They also indicate what became apparent in further explorations, for example in the interviews: that many participants suspected that their experience, their way of engaging with Evensong, was unconventional and unusual – either because a friend or member of their family was in the choir, or they were a minister or choir member with a church elsewhere, a former chorister, a non-religious person, a trained musician, and so on, or because their primary motivation was not worship – and that they were confident to portray it this way. In their elaborateness, they reflect participants' desire to represent their experiences adequately, fully and in all their multi-valent richness, and in the nature of what they elaborate, point to Evensong being primarily a felt experience for many, an embodied experience, and an emotional one, as much as an audio-visual one. And in their diversity, the metaphors emphasise the uniqueness of each individual's way of understanding their own experience, and their ability to shape their narrative of it in a way that is consistent with their wider – and notably diverse – values and life experiences, while at the same time, underscoring the commonality of affect that Evensong affords. While a jacuzzi, a bubble bath, and a gin and tonic clearly have quite different cultural associations, it is not difficult to see the similarities in the sensations to which they allude.

Despite the difficulties in conveying interior experiences, this response, an extract from a longer account given by an SR, illustrates one account of a profound experience of Evensong presented as ineffable:

... it can elevate you to heaven, with profound inward experiences of love and adoration of God ...It's like homing in for 45 mins on eternity, in union with those in eternity and in so doing, if you're lucky, you can actually experience Him as an intimate immediate reality in time. That experience is of course ineffable but... it becomes semi-tangible... you stand in God and with Him and before Him, so it's an immersive experience of the spiritual...

The emotional states that accompany this ... follow a vague and blurred sequence that mirrors the phases of the liturgy. ... [there is] a clear distinction between the objective experience of the divine and the emotional states that result from a cerebral recollection of it. I'm describing here the latter but recognize that the former does sometimes result from it... in the very process of it I experience something of the best of being alive.

The potency of the experience is perhaps best illustrated by occasions when I come either bored and unreceptive or stressed and self-centred. It dissolves these conditions, renews peace and security in myself and with God and almost always excites some devotion if I'm unreceptive.

Transience

As Arnold writes, the ephemerality of any mystical experience is obvious: 'no one lives in a constant state of heightened experience' (Arnold 2014, 105). This is true as much of the trance-type encounters documented by Rouget, Becker, and Herbert, as the altered states described by William James (2013, 431), for whom a state is transient if it lasts no longer than half an hour, 'or at most an hour or two'. Unlike many of the contexts for transcendence documented elsewhere, Evensong itself, however, has a relatively short duration and its completion is likely to bring any transcendent experience to an abrupt end, either with music, the other occupants of the pew wishing to leave, or the individual listener being ushered out by church officials, in some cathedrals as soon as the organ begins playing. Participants rarely described their experiences of Evensong transcendence ending in this way, however. Much more common was the idea that the service took participants on a 'profound spiritual journey', in the words of one SR, with its own experiential arc, during which their

experiences became increasingly heightened, before they were gradually brought back ‘down to Earth’. This is suggestive more of an externally guided, fixed-duration experience than the encounters with trancing and dissociation described elsewhere, as Elsa explained in our discussion:

To me, it’s almost like there’s a narrative arc to the whole thing, created by the music, the movements, the words, the structure ... it takes you from one place, takes you through this transcendent experience and lands you in a different space.

...the music’s really fundamental to it... It starts with the organ and finishes with the organ... a series of things happen and are repeated. But they take you through a familiar process. Yet often the way it makes you feel isn’t necessarily familiar or the same every time. It’s often very different.

Rohan also used the analogy of an arc of experience extending across the service. He described intensity building from what he thinks about ‘in terms of almost coldness and hotness’, to a climax in intensity and the capturing of his attention with the anthem, which might be ‘arresting’, ‘shake him up’ or ‘bowl him over’ and to which ‘everything [else] is just a prelude’.

The music’s role in configuring time, and scaffolding different types of experience which transport participants to a peak of altered experience and back again, was highlighted by several participants. Julia, quoted in Chapter 4, experienced the opening organ voluntary as a cue and a technology to get into ‘church mode’. She similarly commented when the closing voluntary began that ‘At this point, if there’s someone with me, I reassure them that we don’t have to be in church mode anymore’: the process is complete. Charlie, another IES participant, noticed after around a minute of the closing organ voluntary that it seemed to be ‘an opportunity for everyone to come out of their reverie. Everyone’s looking around...It’s like people are waking up.’ This awakening – the shift was from one way of thinking and of being to another – was also reflected in IES participants’ comments turning from the service, on which they had often been intently focused, to more quotidian concerns during the organ voluntary: one participant, a member of a college where Evensong is sung regularly, shifted

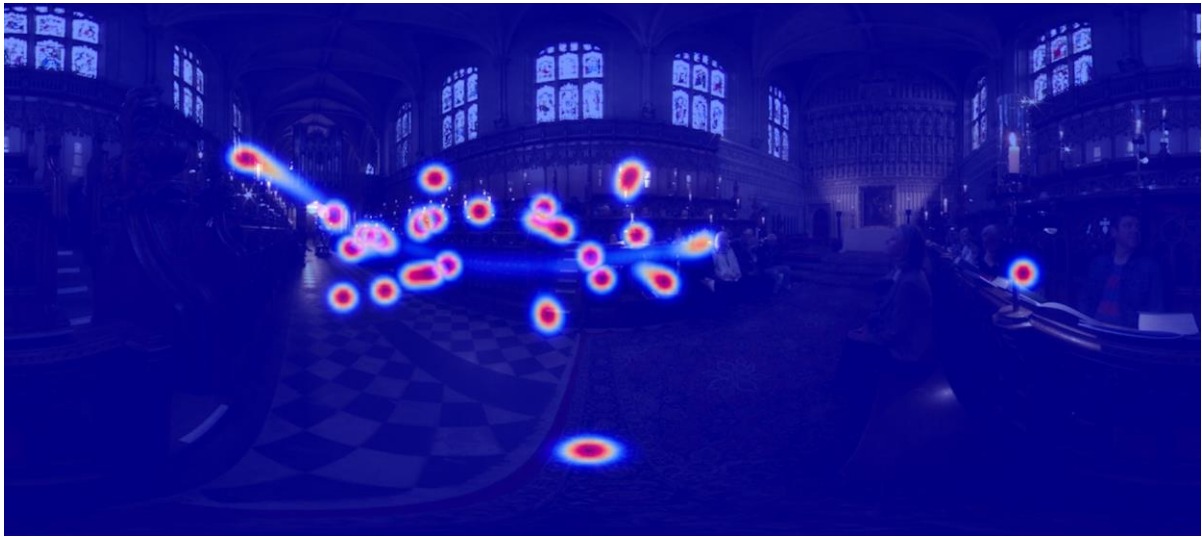
his focus from the religious content of this service, on which he had been reflecting, to wondering ‘what’s for dinner in college tonight? Should I have a glass of sherry, or a glass of wine?’. Another began to be distracted from the music and ritual, noticing instead, and for the first time, ‘how uncomfortable this bench is’; and several observed that they had started to think about all the things they had to do for the rest of the day.

The association between the closing organ music and participants’ emergence from the altered state of being they had occupied during the service, is also indicated by the gaze tracking data. Figure 25 shows the gaze fixations during the choir’s singing of the final responses, sung from the antechapel seen through the doorway in the left-hand third of the image. Figure 26 shows how these gazes disperse again once the choir has left, reflecting the pattern evidenced in the data before the service began (see e.g., Figure 19 on page 133). This evidence therefore suggests that it is commonplace for altered experiences at Evensong to be time-limited, but that this is not a spontaneous tendency; rather, they progress through a series of musically and liturgically configured temporal phases, which at the largest scale are marked by the transition in and out of church mode, or otherwise altered ways of being, in parallel with organ voluntaries at the beginning and end of the service.

Figure 25. Gaze fixations of IES participants at 41m 02s: choir singing from antechapel.



Figure 26. Gaze fixations of IES participants at 44m 46s: closing organ voluntary playing.

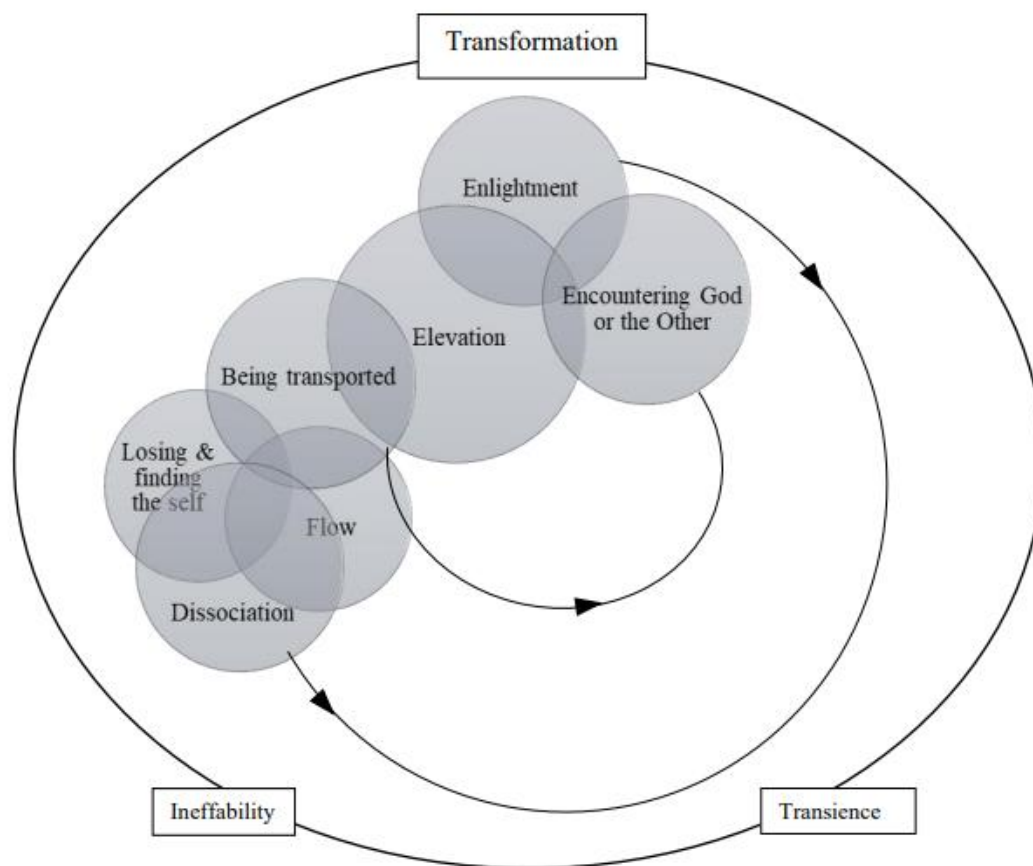


6.3. Summary

Experiences of transcendence at Evensong are not only surprisingly common, but for a very significant proportion of participants, they are intrinsic to their participation in the service. These experiences are not unique to people professing a religious belief: they are reported widely, and by people across the spectrum of religiosity and of faith, doubt, and certainty about the existence or absence of any sort of spirit or God. The possibility of such experiences motivates repeated attendance, encourages particular modes of engagement with the service, and are the ultimate measure by which the success of the experience is judged: Evensong has ‘worked’ if transcendence has been achieved. These experiences vary enormously, from service to service, person to person, and moment to moment. They differ in duration, intensity, character, and the degree to which they can be described in language. Some are manifest as fleeting flashes of insight; others are prolonged plateaus of divine encounter with life-changing consequence. In all, however, the world or the self are experienced quite differently, and this study has identified seven varieties of transcendence at Evensong to conceptualise the nature of these sorts of experience (Figure 27). The varieties are not intended to be fixed, non-porous, rigidly defined categories, but rather are identified as themes around which the innumerable individual experiences reported coalesce.

Accordingly, the varieties can occur alone, or in combination, simultaneously or successively, and might catalyse, overlap with, or transform into one another. Each variety of transcendent experience at Evensong, however, is almost always associated with the musical soundscape of the service, regardless of the musical background or training of the individual involved. The next chapter examines how and why.

Figure 27. A diagrammatic representation of the seven varieties of Evensong transcendence and their suggested relationship, as identified and conceived by the author in this study



Chapter 7. An Evensong state of mind: how the sounds and music of Evensong afford transcendence

In 1975, Andrew Greeley's questionnaire study of 1,467 people in the US found that 49% of people who reported having a religious experience said that they had done so in the context of music listening. This was more than in any other situation, including during prayer (48%), quiet reflection (42%), a church service (41%), sex (18%), or while taking drugs (0%) (Greeley 1975). In the decades since, frequent quotation of this study's headline finding as 'music is the most common "trigger" of religious experiences', as well as additional studies replicating or building on this findings, have embedded the idea that music activates altered states and religious transcendence (e.g., Argyle 2000; Beit-Hallahmi and Argyle 1997, 81; Hills and Argyle 1998; Wald-Fuhrmann et al. 2020). This position is, however, contrary to current musicological thinking, which holds that music is not a stimulus that simply acts upon individuals, but an object of perception and cognition and that musical experience is the result of complex networks of factors; it is also at odds with the views of the participants in this study already cited for whom the music *is* the worship. It also does not answer the obvious questions that it raises: which 'music', and how? The 1975 study did not purport to explore causality in depth, to identify a mechanism, a source, or a process for the induction of religious experience, and few, if any, empirical studies have subsequently attended to the vital question of *how*, through listening, music 'gets into the action', to adopt DeNora's (2000; 2003) useful phrase, of religious experience (Sloboda 2000; Belzen 2013).

The evidence from this study, however, is clear: the sounds of Evensong are perceived as inherently extraordinary – they are 'magical', 'mystical', and 'unlike any other', as participants put it – and this extraordinary quality is central to experiences of transcendence in a variety of ways. This chapter illustrates how music is mobilised and otherwise implicated in transcendent experiences at Evensong. It sets out the study's findings

about how listening to the music of Evensong afford transcendence; demonstrates the role of culture and performance practices in perceptions of the sounds of Evensong; and shows the significance of the sonic qualities of the Evensong spaces in transcendent experience. It begins with an examination of how the repertoire sung in the service is involved in transcendent experience, before turning to consider listeners' personal strategies for potentializing their experiences of that repertoire to achieve individual affective objectives. It then discusses how performance practices have become associated with, and can be used to achieve particular kinds of affect, before setting out the vital role of space in mediating sound to transcendent effect.

7.1. The repertoire of sung texts

'That wretched little tune': the psalms and transcendence

According to the results of this study, psalm chanting is one of the elements of Evensong most cherished by many participants. It had not been included in the survey's multiple-choice options as one of the factors of importance in motivating Evensong attendance, as the pre-existing evidence reviewed did not suggest its prioritisation. More than 200 SRs, however, took the time to explain in their written comments that psalm chanting was one of the main attractions of Evensong for them. Many wrote of their 'love' for it; and some spoke of its transformational power, including one who said that hearing the singing and content of the psalms as an undergraduate at Magdalen College Oxford 'made me be an Anglican'. Others commented that depending on the setting, it can elicit 'either stillness or thankful joy', and unite the listener with God; as one put it, it 'connects with the source of my being, taking me to a realm of awe and wonder'.

Anglican psalm chanting does not, however, have a reputation for transcendence. An anecdote recounted in choral circles claims that when the nineteenth-century composer Antonin Dvořák heard the choir of St Paul's Cathedral in London singing the psalms at

Evensong, he asked ‘why do they keep singing that wretched little tune over and over again?’ (e.g., BBC Radio 1993; Gant 2015, 285). The story may be fictitious, but the fact of the practice’s peculiarity remains a live concern: one current worship guide counsels music directors who might be considering introducing psalm singing to their congregations that the arcane language and repetitious music mean that ‘until you get into it, it can seem turgid...’ (Harper 2000, 47).

Anglican psalm chanting is normally performed antiphonally by two full choirs, *Decani* and *Cantoris* (abbreviated to Dec and Can), facing one another across a central aisle, to simple, generally homophonic, four-part musical settings with their origins and character set by plainchant, their monastic predecessor. The psalms themselves are the 150 sacred songs of King David contained in the Hebrew scriptures, and at Evensong they are usually sung as translated in the sixteenth century by Miles Coverdale, and included in the 1662 Prayer Book. As every verse of text, regardless of its length, spoken rhythm or meaning, is sung to the same line of music as the one before it, the choir often sings multiple words to each psalm tone before moving on to the next. When to move to the next note is indicated by the psalm pointing, a series of symbols indicating how each line of text should be fitted to the music, which is repeated – over and over again – until the psalm is complete, or in longer psalms, until it is replaced by another, similarly simplistic psalm tune (Ellingwood and Glover 2004; Huray and Harper 2001; Long 1972, 235; Temperley 2013).

The psalms were originally sung in this way to ensure that the words would be clearly discernible by the listening congregation. This was especially important given the sixteenth-century reformers’ aspiration that through the newly vernacular translations, ‘a boye that dryveth the plough’ could know more of the Bible’s teachings than an educated priest, and the ‘plowman wold singe a texte of the scripture at his plowbeme’ – the essential point being

that congregations should understand and be edified by the sung biblical texts without the requirement for clergy to interpret their meaning (Tyndale, quoted in Martin 2017, 87).

As the reasonably typical text of the first four verses of the psalm sung in the IES service suggests, however, the passage of 500 years has done much to temper the immediacy of the psalms' message:

v20. Thou spakest sometime in visions unto thy saints and saidst: I have laid help upon one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people.

v21. I have found David my servant: with my holy oil have I anointed him.

v22. My hand shall hold him fast: and my arm shall strengthen him.

v23. The enemy shall not be able to do him violence: the son of wicked-ness shall not hurt him.

Psalm 89, verses 20-24 (*The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments* 1662, 462)

Paradoxically, it is the now non-everyday nature of the experience of listening to these texts that this study found to be most instrumental in the psalms' capacity to afford of transcendence. The data suggest several mechanisms that commonly support this. The first is through the intensely focused listening disposition many congregation members adopt in respect of the psalm singing, in order to attend closely to the text. For these people, a cohort in which the most regular attenders and the more religious and theologically inclined participants are proportionally over-represented, listening to the choral psalms, canticles, and prayers at Evensong involves an in-depth intellectual engagement with the sung text, through well-honed practices of concentration, interpretation, reflection, and meditation. The involving nature of these processes was frequently associated with transcendent experiences related to being transported, the loss of self, enlightenment, and encountering God. A representative example of how this might operate in practice was given in the detailed response of one religious and spiritual Anglican SR, who regularly joins a cathedral congregation for Evensong in addition to attending parish church services, and for whom –

like many others – allowing the choir to sing allows him to engage ‘more deeply’ with the text, and in a way that he could not if he were reading or singing it himself:

Allowing the choir to sing enables one to reflect more deeply on the words of the psalms and canticles. It’s like floating in the sea and allowing the singing to carry you along, surrounded and held by it, communicating a sense of one’s own smallness and God’s infinite goodness.

It is this SR’s deep, textual reflection that affords him the enlightened state of being (‘a sense of one’s own smallness and God’s infinite goodness’), the phenomenological experiences of being transported and of an altered state (‘carry you along’; ‘like floating in the sea’), of losing the self, and of the reassurance and joyfulness arising from the safety of being ‘surrounded and held’ and the certainty of God’s love.

The SR’s account of this experience also resonates closely with Gomart and Hennion’s (1999) sociology of attachment (see §1 of this thesis), in its reference to a passing between the active state (reflecting more deeply on the words) and the relinquishment of agency and resulting passivity (floating in the sea, being carried along) that they and others argue is a prerequisite for the attainment of altered states through the potentialization of a resource – here the choral singing. As they put it, ‘the user strives tentatively to fulfil those conditions which will let him be seized and taken over by a potentialized exogenous force’ (ibid, 243). Here those forces are music, and ultimately, for many, God, the spiritual, or the Other. Listeners’ intent concentration on the meanings, connotations, and evocations of the text can lead to a ‘losing of the self’ in it, a transporting to the places it evokes, enlightenment on understanding its message, and for those who consider the Psalms to be the word of God, an encounter with the divine. This is illustrated in the account of another religious SR, who describes himself as Anglican in the Anglo-Catholic tradition:

[I go to Evensong] to be in a state of stillness and quiet reflection and contemplation as the Psalms are sung... The feeling of God’s presence with me when listening to the words of the Psalms sung by the choir...

The vital role of the music in conveying meaning and the emotional content of the texts, in creating the sense of immersion within them, and its associated role, therefore, in affording transcendence was a very common theme, regardless of belief, as the comments of other SRs who are not religious, demonstrate:

Though I have no sense that God exists in the world, I believe the possibility resides in artistic expression. The music created to express the language of the Bible is often powerfully beautiful. When sung and played well, the music of Evensong gives time to reflect and focus on how best to live my life. Our service starts with an introit from a small side chapel. When that sound opens up into the cathedral, my mood changes and the distractions of the world disappear. If Evensong was offered daily, I would make every effort to attend seven services a week.

This response, from a man who described himself as neither spiritual nor religious, but who attends Evensong at least weekly, went on to elaborate on how his engagement with the spoken and sung texts and their music is transformative, especially for him, through the enlightenment that intense focus on them can catalyse:

I find that the language of the Magnificat and Nunc dimittis provide a constant reminder of two of the most important qualities to have in life: gratitude and humility... I find that the order of service allows me to focus on my behaviour towards others throughout the week. It just makes sense to me.

The tradition of all of the music, from Byrd, Tallis, and Palestrina to Howells, Noble, and Parry... connects centuries and reminds me of the apostolic line...I love the language of the Apostles' Creed and the General Thanksgiving, especially the words, "inestimable love" and "unfeignedly thankful."

Absorption in the sung texts was also widely associated with transcendence through the empathic experience of the emotions they are perceived to express, which can be transporting and enlightening – recall, for example, Tess's reaction in the IES to the setting of the Magnificat, a text that she knew well, discussed in §4.5: 'Ohhhh. Gosh, it's quite sad. Poor Mary'.

For some people, the esotericism of the sung texts promoted this intense focus, because their sixteenth-century language and poetic structure require some effort to deconstruct. Thus, while several participants speculated that it was probable that others did

not listen to the words, ‘it’s much easier just to listen to the glorious music and not think about the words...which is I’m sure what most people do’, as one of the atheist participants commented, in general this was not borne out by the evidence. On the contrary, the IES commentaries, interviews and SR comments suggest that many are engaged in a concentrated focus or reflection on the sung words:

I feel caught up in the service. The music is very special and enables focussing on the words and becoming lost in worship. Sometimes I feel an ecstasy and closeness to God. (SR)

The choir sings and you inwardly read and recite the words of God to God. (SR)

It allows sustained attention to the words of scripture, nurtures meaningful prayer and allows us to experience the beauty of God. (SR)

The many variations of the music make me reflect on the words of Evensong. (SR)

While not everyone is engaged in listening to the texts for their meaning, especially for those for whom that meaning is not immediately accessible or of interest, simply hearing their sounds offered a second, and similarly effective, means to affording transcendent experience. For Joel, a student attracted to the so-called High Church, Anglo-Catholic practices of music, incense, and ritual, hearing services sung in a form of English that is unfamiliar conveys a sense of otherworldliness and mysticism that is conducive to the alteration of state, which he compared to hearing services sung in Latin, a language with which he is unfamiliar. Both, he said, are ‘always a treat to hear’, because they are ‘the language of religion, not often heard, and surprisingly musical’. Thea, who attends several churches, said that she loves the ‘old language’ of the psalms, and simply would not go to a service that did not use it, because for her, the poetic English of the 1662 Prayer Book is not only what she called ‘the church language’, but for her it is also ‘the language of heaven...I think about God and Jesus, and it’s their language’. Similarly for Jennifer, the uncommon-ness of the language of the psalms supports her experience of elevation from the everyday, because it is ‘not prosaic, it’s not everyday, it’s not normal prose, it’s not the language of newspapers. It’s heightened

language, it's poetry, it calls forth a different response...' Many other participants reported that hearing the ancient language of the service, whether in Latin or sixteenth-century English, 'feels', like being in a non-everyday, special, sacred space. In a similar way that Rijken found that Dutch congregations experienced the English language in which Evensong is conducted there as musical and transcendent as a result of its 'otherness', so many in English congregations in Britain hear the Prayer Book language as specifying the transcendent, apparently for the same reason (Rijken 2020, 81–83).

The sung texts also assist in creating the conditions for transcendence in other ways. For Ram, hearing the choir sing biblical texts without instrumental accompaniment, as the psalms are often performed at Evensong, is transporting because it feels 'ancient' and mystical, almost like listening to 'the Eastern Orthodox Church'. For several participants in the IES, this same sound also evoked exotic associations and images of other times and places, including in several cases, of medieval Roman Catholic monasteries. This points to the individualised nature of sacred associations, and the ability of the music of Evensong to suggest different kinds of sacred environment to people with different cultural experience. Chloe, for example, a regular Evensong attendee, was brought up going to a Roman Catholic church:

(Choir singing Nunc dimittis)

I can just imagine the music that the medieval monks in the Vatican used to sing, their chanting.

No light, no electricity but this wonderful sound coming from different places around the Vatican.

Medieval chanting, medieval chants.

(Chloe, IES commentary)

Another very commonly reported perception on hearing the sung texts was that their unchanged language created a sense of being transported in time, and to feeling a connection with times and people past. For Ram, this was heavily implicated in his sense of enlightenment, completeness, and transcendent perspective:

I think the fact that it's using language that has been spoken for hundreds and hundreds of years and it's part of the tradition that's passed down, I think that's really important.... that sense of connectivity in time and space...

For Maisie, and many others, the sung idiom afforded a more personal connection to the past, through 'the feeling of people who have worshipped there before, the story, the continuity...'. It was notably common for participants to mention the feeling of connection this gave them across the centuries in which Evensong has been sung to the rituals that took place before it, going back to the days of Christ, and thus to the encounter with God. One SR said that 'There is also a slightly mystical aspect to the service, because it has been said and sung so many times over the years that the stones of our church buildings are steeped in it.' Another, a frequent Evensong attender and a Christian, wrote:

I adore the liturgy and the quality of the music, and have a real sense of God's numinosity during the service which is ancient and unchanging. It is the one service which makes me feel as though I am part of an historical as well as a global tradition which goes back centuries to earlier monastic forms of worship, and for a few minutes at least, feel part of the full 'communion of Saints'... Evensong is about me and God...

For Carla, a student who took part in the IES, the sense of time and history created by the traditional language was intensified by the great age of the church she normally attends and the artworks within it, which together afforded her a form of noetic transcendence, and a better perspective on her life:

I think a lot [there] about the communion of saints ... art really does a good job of capturing the diversity of Christians throughout history. And so, I feel a lot of companionship. I usually have whatever's going on to reflect on. The fact that it's not that original, and that other people have probably been in love before and had exam stress before and maybe also, if it's possible to imagine, probably had even worse problems than me. Which is very encouraging.

For these participants, along with the many others who emphasised the symbolic significance of the sounds of the sung texts more than the semantic meaning of the words, it was their powerful cultural associations that afforded the transcendent experiences of enlightenment, losing the self, and a sense of being transported to worlds, times, locations and presences

related to, but different from, the real-world Evensong context: other holy places and times, heavenly or divine realms, and the domains and presence of Evensong participants past.

From an ecological perspective, these profound, and very different, other-world specifications can be theorised as resulting from the mutual interaction of the sounds and individual listeners, and also, according to Windsor (2000, 21), to information about the sounds in question gathered by those listeners from the socio-cultural environment, including, for example, through learning from other people. Thus, as Clarke (2005) illustrates, meaning is not immutably inscribed in music, and while interpretations cannot ‘just spread unchecked in every possible direction’, even simple sounds afford multiple interpretations, as the above accounts illustrate. Clarke also argues that aesthetic objects are deliberately structured as to exploit this polyvalence (ibid, 203; 52). While it might be posited that the choral elements of Evensong are an exception to this, because their words and music are intended to communicate with clarity a biblical teaching, it is abundantly clear that regardless of what was intended, polyvalence is an undeniable characteristic of participants’ perceptions. These reflect the contemporary socio-cultural environment, and contemporary listeners’ very different life experiences both from one another, and from the audience for whom the texts were composed. The meaning of this music to today’s listeners can therefore be seen to result from a combination of factors, including their accrual of five centuries of additional and alternative socio-cultural significance, each individual’s suite of personalised associations and interpretations, and the obscuring and complication of their original intended message by time, changed cultural reference points, and listeners’ different education.

It is additionally evident from the way in which a considerable proportion of participants reported their transcendent experiences that there was a substantial element of intention involved in the prioritisation of meaning, with participants activating or mobilizing selected features of what they perceived in order to produce meanings and interpretations in

accordance with what they felt they needed at particular moments (cf. DeNora 2000, 38). Accordingly, people seeking to become closer to God often talked about tuning into the canticles or the psalm texts as the words of God; when people want to feel connected to history, or part of the community of Evensong-goers across the centuries (a not uncommon desire among SRs, and what, in Born's (2005, 29) terminology, is a 'musically imagined community') they might focus on the heritage or socialities encoded in the chant. The data show that for many participants, this can feel like a very personalised, and quite malleable, encounter. It was common for people to refer, as several SRs did, to Evensong being an opportunity to get what they needed, whatever that was at the time:

I feel I get exactly what I need at that moment from Evensong. If I'm anxious, it calms me. If I'm sad, it comforts me. (SR)

Immersed in the word of God [I] find space to hear and feel what he has to say to me. It is an environment where you can experience transcendence more than any other service... (SR)

Carla called her experience of this 'bibliographical providence':

I believe really strongly in something that has been called bibliographical providence: the fact that God basically chooses your reading lists. And so often ... I walk in, and I've been having a thought and basically the text of the psalm or the sermon complete the thought or answer the thought.

One musicological way to understand these accounts is therefore as an illustration of participants using their skills in engaging with – or as Josh put it, being 'more open to ... even more vulnerable' to – the multiplicity of meanings and conditions that Evensong can afford so as to mobilize those most conducive to the attainment of what they need. This may be an intellectual, cognitive outcome, or it may be to entering the conditions for transcendence – for which the ground can, and for its attainment must, be carefully laid.

'Feeling the vibrations': visceral voices and transcendence

A further recurring theme in participants' discussions of transcendent experiences was their association with physically moving, embodied musical experiences. Graham felt this regularly when listening to the psalms, which he described as musically 'the most dull and

repetitive moment of the entire service’, but, due to the antiphonal exchanges of the closely proximate choir, as also ‘visceral’, ‘impressive’, ‘affective’ and ‘the most moving thing... you get a sense of awe out of it’. The shared desire of many congregants to sit as close as possible to the choir is evident at some of the larger cathedrals, in the competition for a seat in the choir or quire area, next to the choir stalls. At Westminster Abbey and other popular Evensong settings, queues start to form an hour or more before services begin, the first to be admitted being allocated seats adjacent to the singers. For many, this preference is not only, and often not at all, driven by wanting to feel part of the community, avoiding being isolated in a large cathedral, being able to see the clergy, or having a better view: it was motivated by the experience of sitting near to the singers that are the source of the sound. ‘There is a very real “presence”, especially sitting in the choir, where the sound is immediate’, as one representative SR wrote. For Aiden, who is uncertain about faith and religion, and has recently begun attending cathedral Evensong services while remaining ‘right on the edge of the Church’, his decision about where to sit is specifically about the somatic sensations, the whole-body sense of sound, that can be experienced in particular locations:

... this is an important detail, I always sit right behind the choir because I like feeling the vibrations, I like being immersed in the sound ... [At first, I thought] I’ll just sit in the main nave, and then, I’ll just listen to it outside the choir stalls and then I was like, this is too removed, I want to hear the choir. So, then I jumped to the other extreme of getting right behind the choir, which is now where I sit habitually. Just being around that sound is uplifting, it’s purely embodied, purely emotional...I might be aware of the words, and they might matter, but it might be in Latin and I’ve no idea what it is, that doesn’t really matter. It’s just the sheer vibrations and the waves in my ear, it’s as simple as that, and the consoling feeling is there again, and I’m thinking, yes, I’m growing old like Simeon, the shadows are coming through the window, it all comes together in a melancholic tableau.

Aiden said his motivations for going to Evensong lie in the service’s text, its physical sacred setting, and its music. His account illustrates not only the instinctive, almost primal appeal of experiencing music as a felt force, but the ways in which this is possible even with unamplified voices in a large cathedral – if you know where to sit and take the necessary

actions to get there – and the potential of such an experience to create the conditions for transcendence. It also demonstrates several of the important themes that emerged in other participants’ accounts. First, that transcendence involves state transformation, and that this is a practice, as indicated by Aiden’s experimentation with three different locations before finding the optimum place to sit at Evensong, and in which he now ‘habitually’ locates himself. Second, that the sung words are experienced in different ways by different people, his account adding another ‘felt’ variation to the approaches of listening for meaning, and listening to the words as sounds already discussed. And third, that different varieties of transcendence can coexist in one musical experience. Aiden referred to being uplifted by being in the presence of the musical sound; to attaining a different, enlightened, perspective through the combination of the sounds and the sung text (‘yes, I’m growing old like Simeon’ – the Nunc dimittis is the Song of Simeon); and to losing himself through the immersion in sound. His account also raises a new dimension of the transcendent experience, in terms of its connection with emotion. Aiden uses the terms embodied and emotional almost interchangeably (‘that sound is uplifting, it’s purely embodied, purely emotional’), suggesting he feels the two types of experience are connected, as well as both being fundamental to his experience of transcendence.

Emily talked in similar terms about how she experiences the music at Evensong, suggesting the interwoven nature of her visceral and her emotional responses to the music:

... [the cathedral] organ is just a magician... It just feels like your chest in engaged, so very visceral ... and to be surprised by it, because of the clever ways that your brain processes it – you don’t know what’s happening at first, it just feels like it’s this emotional- [gesturing overwhelming emotion], and then you realise, “oh that’s because of the organ” ... and if it’s plainsong that also can be so powerful ... transformative really.

Emily’s comments highlight the degree to which emotion is essentially a sensory experience, and sensory experiences can be perceived in very similar ways to emotions. The distinction that is usually applied conceives of emotions as resulting from ‘things in the world’ outside

the body, and bodily sensations as directed inwards (Tye 2008). The visceral experience of the vibrations of musical waves in the body, which are simultaneously heard as sounds, while the listener is engaged in a multi-modal experience of the event from which they emanate, is likely to have both a sensory and an affective dimension. Emily consequently experienced the physical feeling of the organ's vibrations as a feeling of being overwhelmed by emotion, until she processed its origin, but still felt the power of it as 'transformative' – transcendent.

Rhiannon, another interviewee, described a strikingly similar response: 'I can feel the resonance in the chest, I can find a tear in my eye... Wherever I go I seek an Evensong'. The almost primaeval attraction of these sensations was highlighted by several SRs who recalled their earliest, childhood experiences of Evensong as primarily physical ones, and attribute their attachment to the service now to these early encounters:

When I was six and a half, my brother was a chorister, and ... we [went] every weekend to hear him sing. While I enjoyed morning mass even at that young age, I have always had a particular fondness for Choral Evensong ... The church was dark and cool. I could lie on the pew while the boys rehearsed and absorb their music into the depths of my being.

Similar accounts of Evensong being felt as a deeply, and even primarily, bodily experience were surprisingly common, as were reports of these embodied events being associated with transcendent-type altered states, and of participants deliberately configuring themselves or their environments to maximise the somatic effects of the music.³⁶ Maurice, an interviewee who regularly attends Evensong, described how Evensong 'feels' from his preferred seat next to the choir:

Maurice: ...you can feel the reverberation from their voices, and you can actually feel, if you touch the right part of the stall, the vibrations from the different [voice] parts ...

Q: And does that change your experience of the service?

³⁶ C.f. the Lie Down, Look Up project at and work by the British Pilgrimage Trust (Norwich Cathedral 2018; Wilkinson 2018).

Maurice: I think it does. The visceral dimension adds to the experience because you get every aspect of the sound that they're producing, you feel almost as connected as you can be to the singers, without being the singer yourself.

For the majority of people in Britain, being sufficiently proximate to live musicians to feel the vibrations of the sound they are creating is an inherently out-of-the-ordinary experience, for two reasons. First, concert-going of any kind is a rare occurrence. In an average pre-pandemic year, only slightly more than half of the population attended a live music event of any sort even once, and fewer than one in twelve saw a performance of live 'classical music' (Christophersen and Arts Council England 2018; Arts Council England 2016, 15, 17). And second, even in the context of co-present live musicians, the opportunities to experience vibrations of humanly created sound directly in the somatosensory system, without technological mediation, are rare. With art music, typically performed without amplification, the audience is generally seated further from the performers and it is through the auditory modality, rather than the vibrotactile, that the music is usually experienced (Merchel, and Altinsoy 2014; Tranchant et al. 2017). The visceral, corporeal stimulation described by the Evensong participants, in which the unamplified voices of others can be literally felt as vibrations in the cells, tissue, and organs of the bodies of members of the Evensong congregation, is therefore in itself a comparatively rare form of a spontaneously encountered, musically altered bodily state. As one SR commented, 'there is no substitute for the live experience, to feel the music resonate, to swell one's chest, a balm to soothe one's mind'; another wrote simply 'it's exhilarating'.

Punkanen and Ala-Ruona (2012, 6–7) suggest that the holistic act of listening to music, sensing its vibrations, while at the same time, reflecting, enables the listener to become aware of 'body-mind connection' and to study their own experiences at sensorimotor, emotional, and cognitive levels. This, they argue, can lead to an altered, deeply meditative state. This theory is supported by the accounts of study participants like Gareth,

one of the participants who tries to ensure he arrives at Evensong early enough to secure a seat close to the choir, since his first experience of sitting in cathedral choir stalls left him, in his words, ‘just overwhelmed sensually’:

I thought, this is lifting me to somewhere else, and I like it... really at the heart of it, physically involved’.

He explained that now, when the choir is singing, he consciously engages his mind and body, in a manner similar to that theorised by Punkanen and Ala-Ruona. As he puts it, ‘I sort of do a funny thing where I like to sit there very quietly and sense myself as a physical organism...’. In doing so, he achieves what might be called a mystical, ineffable and enlightened state of elevation, completeness, and connection to what he calls ‘a huge scheme, the whole universe’. For Gareth, like many participants, Evensong’s reliable capacity to afford transcendent experiences are therefore central to its appeal. Gareth says he is spiritual, and an aspiring Christian with a respect for the Christian religious tradition. In our discussion, he reflected on the nature of God and of existence, and frequently contextualised his thoughts in the ideas of a range of religious and spiritual philosophies, but observed that an important part of what draws him to Evensong is deeply physical: it is, he said ‘a sort of gut thing... the service just ... draws one in, and touches one’s heart’. His substitute for going to Evensong when he cannot make it to a service suggests the importance of the sensory in creating the experience that he, like many others (including 14 SRs), called ‘numinous’: he will, he explained, ‘get some incense going’, lie down, and ‘listen to Evensong on the big speakers.’

In addition to the abstract effect of sound on the body, the experience of the Evensong choir’s voices can also create a perception of intersubjectivity that goes beyond the social bonding associated with participatory music making to a sense of becoming unified with the creators of the sound, the world and with God in way that is preternatural or supernatural. One SR, an Anglican in his thirties and frequent Evensong attender, finds the experience ‘the most intimate available in a church’:

I feel at one with the world, a kind of inner peace. I am not over-religious but have a very stressful job and see a lot of heart ache in my work life. I find this a wonderful time to be closer to something quite special that's centuries old...

An SR in her fifties who is an occasional attender of Evensong said that 'being close to the choir' gave her a feeling of 'calm communality'; another referred to experiencing an 'ethereal co-presence'. Rohan, another interviewee who likes to arrive early to Evensong to secure his place in the choir stalls, said that sitting with the choir was about not about 'feeling part of it', but 'being part of it':

'It's being in the presence of the musicians themselves that is an important part to me... when you're in the choir stalls, then you *are* part of it, and you just feel you belong to what's going on... you are with them, you are belonging to them, they are close to you, and you feel a certain bond...

One theory suggests that as listeners' bodily matter resonates sympathetically with the soundwaves of the music as it physically interacts with them, the sense of being literally 'on the same wavelength' is experienced as unity, harmony, or intersubjective intimacy (Jaastad 2016, 261). Another proposes a concept of 'merged subjectivity', a phenomena most typically associated with active, collaborative music making when the sense of a boundary between the self and one's co-performers is lost (for a discussion see E. Clarke, DeNora, and Vuoskoski 2015). Studies such as Gabrielsson's (2011), however, have found this also to be prevalent among listeners, where it can extend beyond everyday empathy to a loss of the sense of self, and a perception of being at one with the music. Others, including Bronwyn Tarr and colleagues (2014), consider that involuntary sympathetic activation of the motor areas of the brain during listening may be sufficient to stimulate the neurohormones involved in social bonding. Although this is not dependent on close proximity to live co-performers, musically-afforded empathic engagement is understood to be 'an environment-complementary action tendency rather than a fixed trait' (E. Clarke, DeNora, and Vuoskoski 2015, 78), which can lead to the perceptuo-motor resonance described above, and specifically to synchronization or entrainment with other listeners, perceptual-cognitive resonance,

mimetic resonance, and affective resonance. All of these can support an extraordinary sense of connection with co-present others, musicians, and even the music itself; dissociation and a loss of the sense of self, and an experience of merged subjectivity, that can also characterise, or catalyse, transcendent experience (Rabinowitch, Cross, and Burnard 2012). While the mechanisms underlying this effect remain uncertain, this study emphasises its importance, and its capacity to afford transcendence, for a significant number of Evensong attendees.

7.2. Performance style and practice

Music for the pair of Evensong choral canticles, the *Magnificat* and *Nunc dimittis*, has been written by successive generations of composers from the sixteenth century onwards. The repertoire therefore includes works from each of the last five centuries, and also spans genres from plainchant to elaborate polyphony to contemporary commissions. Choral anthems are drawn from a wider range of works, and includes, for example, anonymous pieces from the fourteenth-century or earlier, and compositions from other Christian traditions, especially Roman Catholicism and Lutheranism. Despite this apparent diversity, and the occasional performance of less conventional pieces like Harrison Birtwistle's 2003 'The Gleam', which includes chorister foot-stamping and shouting,³⁷ the core regular repertoire performed at Evensong tends, however, to reflect a traditional ethos, with a recognisable sound and performance practice, and a style widely characterised as 'beautiful' by contributors to this study. The evidence from this study suggests that some of the musical characteristics intrinsic to this sound can be instrumental in affording altered states, through cognitive, perceptual, and social processes operating on multiple levels.

³⁷ For details of the divided public responses to this work's first broadcast, see Jeffries (2012).

‘Like joining the angels’: awe, transcendence, and extraordinary musical quality

In this study’s Experiences of Evensong survey, the most commonly selected factor of importance in participants’ decision to go to Evensong was ‘The quality of the musical performance’. 1,824 people said this was important to them, 90% of all those who took part. Their supplementary narrative accounts indicate that one of the main reasons why this was of importance was that to attain the variety of transcendent states that ‘keep them coming back’ to Evensong, as some phrased it, it is essential that (a) very high standards of musical performance are delivered, and (b) that the participant can feel confident that they will be delivered for the duration of the service. In interview, Ryan contrasted this with services with a greater degree of congregational participation:

...choral evensong just has an integrity, a polish, a steady flow to it that is lovely. Because everybody has to come in, sit down, be quiet. Then the professionals, the choir, glide in, magical, you know, auditory experience and then they glide out and mark the end, so it is that. So, it’s not a motley crew of mixed commoners mucking it up... It’s got a pristine aspect that I *love*.

SRs made hundreds of comments about the necessity for musical excellence in the service, and many made very clear that this was not (or not only) an aesthetic preference, nor primarily a matter of respect for the holiness of the service – as Long (1972, 35–36) writes, while ‘God is not a music critic’, there is a theological imperative for church music, as an offering to God, to be of the highest standard possible. These were significant considerations, but excellence, and ideally perfection – ‘the pristine aspect’ – were particularly valued for their ability to afford transcendent experience. Moreover, the absence of such excellence precluded transcendent experience and marred the event profoundly. This weighs against interpretations of Evensong-goers’ emphasis on musical standards as indicative of their only or mainly attending Evensong for an aesthetic appreciation of its music (Shephard 1998, 88) – what Mountford (2011, 16), in his study of churchgoers who consider they belong to the church but are not Christian believers, calls ‘sacred music atheists’. Rather, in this study, it

reflects a desire to encounter the numinous and to achieve transcendence, typically as part of a religious or spiritual way of being; an understanding that music can afford this; and the insight that it is most likely to do so when the musical standard is high.

Two types of transcendence were particularly associated with high musical standards: losing the self, and being close to God or another similarly powerful supernatural force, either through boundary blurring, or being transported. For many participants, the outstanding musical performances characteristic of Evensong create a sense of awe that is itself transformational and/or transporting. One SR reported that ‘The perfection of worship at Westminster Abbey leaves me in awe, every single day’. Another explained that at Evensong, they ‘always find the music uplifting’, but there are times ‘when the choir sings something really awesome (in a very literal sense)’, and when this has happened, they have gone home ‘...reflecting that God had blessed me greatly’. Others talked of the music and the skill with which it is performed transporting them ‘to a realm of awe and wonder’, or to a place that is ‘awe-filled and magical’. One SR, explaining in response to the Absence of Evensong survey how being unable to attend the service had affected their emotions and sense of wellbeing, commented:

... to attend Evensong is one of the most inspiring experiences; one is elevated through the beauty of both the music and the incomparable language of the [Prayer Book]. ... [it] does put the problems of the moment into perspective and the resumption of Choral Services here has been transformational - the problems of Covid are put in their context.

Awe is an experience that is central to both religion and art, and is characterised by feelings of wonder, amazement, admiration, enlightenment, and appreciation (N. Krause and Hayward 2015; R.-M. Lin et al. 2020; Shiota et al. 2014). It is considered a moral, spiritual, and aesthetic emotion (Keltner and Haidt 2003), and a ‘self-transcendent’ experience, because it decreases self-salience, increases feelings of connectedness to others, and helps people see their lives in new ways (R.-M. Lin et al. 2020). One of the primary objectives of religious art

is to stimulate awe as a means of promoting transformational experiences, by helping people to perceive ‘the reality and mystical truth of something greater beyond ourselves... on the deepest level of our human experience, often beyond cerebral knowledge’ (Arnold 2019, 4).³⁸

Keltner and Haidt (2003) theorise that there are two prerequisites for the experience of awe: first, a perception ‘that the stimulus is vast’, and second, an inability to assimilate the experience of that stimulus using pre-existing mental structures. The combined effect, they suggest, is that the perceiver is ‘re-programmed’ with new values, enlightenment, or understanding that can accommodate the awe-inspiring stimulus. Their term ‘vastness’ encompasses not only physical size, but also what they term ‘social size’: power, authority, or prestige, which in aesthetic cases of awe can be symbolic and suggested by anything that evokes ideas of ‘magnificence, succession, infinity, and certain properties of light, colour, and sound’ (ibid, 301). They further propose that the feeling of awe is intensified when it is experienced collectively, as in a religious ceremony, because of participants’ shift of focus from the self to the wider world. As Émile Durkheim (1972, 228), who argued that an important function of organised religion is to create a feeling of community and communality, wrote, ‘Following the collectivity, the individual forgets himself for the common end and his conduct is directed by reference to a standard outside himself’.

One explanation for the transcendence experienced in response to the ‘extraordinary’ standard of the choirs and music (a term frequently used in the survey responses), is therefore that it is perceived as existing outside of what is known about ordinary human capabilities, and especially what can be expected musically of children:

I find the whole kind of choir thing – because I don’t sing, I don’t do any of that sort of thing – I find it quite weird and mystical. They have this synergy that they’re able to achieve... (Graham)

³⁸ For an alternative perspective that arrives at similar conclusions, see De Botton (2013).

Cathedral Music and the singing choir enthrals me and lifts me up out of this world. The beautiful clear singing ... and the amazing ability of young boys and girls seemingly taking the most difficult of music in their stride. (SR)

As such, it inspires an awe which prompts a reconfiguring of the framework for understanding what is being heard and designates Evensong as ‘magical’, God-given, otherworldly, and, for more than 70 SRs ‘sublime’. One SR emphasised they meant this ‘in the Burkean sense’, referring to Edmund Burke’s eighteenth-century treatise on aesthetics, in which Burke conceived of the sublime as an intense feeling that extends beyond aesthetic appreciation to a state of physical fear, excitement, and awe. They were not alone in making a connection between this perception of the sublime and a sensory, emotional, and transcendent response:

... [Evensong is] an experience of excellence... So unlike the “everyday” that it lifts me emotionally and spiritually to “another place.” (SR)

It is performed at a very high standard the constant commitment is in itself inspiring. (SR)

It’s sublime. The musical elements are invariably superb, the spiritual factor is very high. (SR)

It is important to state that these experiences of musically inspired awe were not contingent on religious belief, and were common among participants without any faith or religious affiliation as well as those who heard God in action in the musical excellence. It is also important to be clear, however, that while from an atheist perspective, works of art ‘are sublime if God is there and they are sublime if he isn’t’, as Richard Dawkins (2008, 66–67) has argued, and the presence of things perceived as sublime is not evidence in either direction, that did not preclude non-believers from experiencing Evensong as spiritual. Of the almost 700 SRs who said that they were not religious, more than half attended Evensong to ‘connect with a spiritual part of myself’, and one in five went for ‘the religious meaning’. Furthermore, almost one in five of those who did not believe in God (18%) said that Evensong enabled them to access the ‘spiritual’, ‘magical’ and the ‘transcendent’.

Acknowledging the apparent paradox, one SR, who described herself as not religious but spiritual, and said she did not know whether she believed in God, commented that ‘It’s not so much about religious faith for me, although there is a sense of transcendence and beauty that make it a spiritual experience’.

Jonathan Arnold has theorised that one outcome of societal secularization is a renewed appreciation of the spiritual, ‘the subjective and experiential over the rational’, and an appreciation of the sacred and of ‘the enchantment of life’ (Arnold 2019, 5). That Evensong participants across the faith spectrum share this spiritual appreciation is underscored in the data from all of the methodologies used here, and is consistent with findings from studies of cathedral visitors, one of which recently found that three quarters of those who self-identify as ‘non-believers’, had found the cathedral ‘successful in helping me meet with God or given me a sense of the spiritual’ (The Grubb Institute and Theos 2012, 24–31). Thus, while the transcendent and sublime may be attributed to different ultimate origins depending on the experiencer’s beliefs (God, the spiritual or something else), the experiences themselves are profoundly similar in their transcendent effect, and appear to be available to all who seek them, as Arnold (2014, 147) suggests. For Millie, for example, who is not religious, it is witnessing the extraordinary capacity of humans in action that affords transcendent experience:

There’s this feeling of - I’m not very religious like that, but when they talk about “creating heaven on earth”, the human voice, it’s the best of humanity that we have got... It’s beauty. It’s just beauty. So, that moves me, yes. Humans at their best.

For some participants with a religious faith, however, the cognitive response to musical excellence was directly associated with God. One SR wrote, for example, that ‘the competence of the choir leads one “into” God’; another said ‘I like the spiritual dimension of choral evensong services sung to a high standard, and with a great sense of commitment’; six quoted a line from Psalm 96: ‘worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness’. For some

believers, one way of making sense of the exceptional expertise of the choir – what in Keltner and Haidt’s terms is an excellence so extraordinary as to be beyond everyday explanation – is to interpret it as their being what Gerard Manley Hopkins (1976, 56) called ‘charged with the grandeur of God’. This interpretation also led some participants deeper into their faith, affording new layers of enlightenment and revelation. Elliot, for example, commented in the IES when the choir sang the opening responses, that they were like ‘the echo of God’:

‘I spend a lot of time wondering what it’s like to make such transcendent music, to be like the echo of God for so many people...I wonder what their relationship is to God... You know, God clothes you in majesty whether you’re on board with that, on that same page, or not. You see the gifts that he’s lavished on his people, these men and boys. It’s a nice picture actually, regardless of what that experience is like from the inside, from the outside it’s a nice picture. It’s what’s going on with all of us in some way in some capacity: we’re constantly being showered in grace in ways that we don’t recognise or acknowledge.

Elliot’s narrative illustrates how awe affords a conceptualisation of an aesthetic encounter that accommodates the extraordinary (the ‘transcendent’ music, the choir’s musical ‘gifts’) through a framework that incorporates the supernatural or divine (the gifts are lavished by God), and how that understanding in turn affords a new perspective on the world and life (we are all ‘constantly being showered in grace’).

‘I know that nothing is going to go wrong’

For those whose transcendence primarily takes the form of ‘losing themselves’ in the music, the certainty of high-quality music and performance appears to play a role which is less about affording that experience, and more about ensuring it is not interrupted, compromised or curtailed once it has been catalysed in some other way. The distinction here can be explained with reference to Herzberg’s two-factor theory of motivators and hygiene factors. Attempting in the 1950s to understand how workers achieved job satisfaction, Herzberg devised a model in which the elements of a job are divided into those that actively lead to satisfaction, which he called motivators, and those that prevented dissatisfaction: the hygiene factors. The

absence of motivators does not cause dissatisfaction, he hypothesised, only a neutral position in which active satisfaction will not normally occur; and the presence of hygiene factors does not cause satisfaction, only a neutral position in which negativity is absent. Accordingly, the absence of dangerous working conditions is said to be a hygiene factor, and attaining recognition for work well done a motivator. Applying this model to Evensong offers one way to understand the two different types of transcendent experience associated with musical excellence. For those who experience an awe-inspired response, as described above, the high performance standard is a Herzbergian motivator: it has an active role in affording awe, and thus in affording transcendence, and through that, satisfaction: as one SR wrote, 'It is a wonderful spiritual experience ...you feel uplifted by the excellence'. For these people, when excellence is not quite achieved, the experience is not necessarily unpleasant, it is just not transcendent. As one SR summarised:

As long as what is offered is the best that can be offered, and that is only comparative with the abilities and circumstances of the choir and clergy on that day, in that place and with that music, then it is an act of true worship.

For some of those who described encountering transcendence at Evensong through the loss of the self, however, and particularly through meditative-type practices, musical performance of less than the highest quality was a critical threat to the achievement of the altered state, and so functioned more as a hygiene factor in two key ways. The most common was its propensity to be 'a distraction':

Good quality choral singing helps. ...poor quality singing would be a distraction!

Choirs that are under-rehearsed are distracting. Best to sing something you know and do it well rather than get too ambitious.

If the music was not well done - which is almost never the case in Hereford - that would be a terrible distraction and undermine the value of the experience.

Interviewees who expressed similar sentiments explained further that they found music that is 'not well done' or similar to be distracting on the one hand because it catches the attention and so interrupts reflection, meditation, or transcendent experience; and on the other because

its flaws and imperfections compromise the illusion of being in another, transcendent, place or time:

I suppose there's this sense of disconnect...it's a distraction. Because, I suppose, one of the things about Evensong, for me, is it works because I stop being consciously present. ...I think if you have got someone singing out of tune all the time, they drag you back into your conscious mind, rather than allowing your subconscious, or the spiritual side of you, to wander free. ...it's the jarring, the bringing you back into the mundane, day to day, I suppose that's the thing that doesn't work. (Ram, interview)

The other way in which a sub-optimal musical performance militated against transcendent experience was, for some respondents, the anxiety they felt in response to it, either for the performers, or for the people they have invited to join them at Evensong, which impeded their ability to 'let go' of the real world or the present moment, and enter into an altered state. Expressing the sentiments described by several others, one SR wrote, '...sometimes I worry for the person singing it that ... they might go out of tune or collapse under the strain, which is very distracting!'

These feelings can be seen to be linked to both empathy and a sense of being invested in the service, which together resulted in a strong desire, frequently articulated, for the musical elements of the service to go well both for the choir and for the other participants. Peter, who describes himself as a religious and spiritual person, commented during the anthem in the IES:

I'm more aware now of the complexity of the music and the dexterity of the singers. There's an element of danger to it, there's a sort of complexity that might go wrong, a precariousness...

In the interview that followed, he explained:

It's not like the Mag and Nunc where it's safe, it's in safe hands, it's really not going to go wrong. The Purcell could go wrong and in fact it did get a bit wonky at one point and [the conductor] had to start beating like this [gesturing accentuated conducting] to get it back on track ... there was a sense of concentration in that music and that we as the listeners, the congregation were kind of drawn into...

I think as members of the congregation we are drawn into the dynamic that's going on in the choir, if you see something going wrong you feel, oh, no, no, no, don't, don't break down, you know? But if it's going well, you just think, oh, this is fantastic, and you just relax.

Many participants described experiencing apprehension before the choir sing – ‘you want the choir to do well’ as Gabe explained – either because their friends or family were choir members; because they wanted to support the choral tradition and to know it is being valued, nurtured and protected for the future; because they consider their own positive affective outcomes or the perceptions of those accompanying them depend on it; or because of the straightforward feelings of empathy that can arise when in close proximity to other people, particularly those communicating expressively through music (E. Clarke, DeNora, and Vuoskoski 2015; Small 1998, 134–36). In live music there is an inherent element of risk that can be thrilling, but ultimately participants want to be assured that, as Peter put it, the musical performance is ‘in safe hands’. Thus, the choir is trained to retain its poise and continue singing whatever happens musically. This involves similar emotional labour to that Hochschild (2012, 29, 136) identified as part of the work of airline cabin crew – the ‘management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display’ – which conceals from those not performing (the passengers, the congregations) any indication that things might be about to ‘go wrong’ (Hunter and Lambert 2016). One interviewee, Leah, said that when she sang Evensong as a student, her choir director used to say that singing in church should not sound rehearsed, prepared or like a performance, but instead it should seem confident, spontaneous and natural, ‘like you’re in a Broadway musical, walking down the street, and...suddenly then you burst into song. It should feel like that’. When it is perceived in this way by participants, it seems that they can relax and let go of the everyday much more readily; but when the music threatens to go ‘a bit wonky’, and especially if that is conveyed by the choir’s conduct, a common response was to observe the choir closely for signs of what was happening, much as a passenger might observe the cabin crew during turbulence,

anchoring them in the worldly present and precluding, for those participants and for that moment, the commencement of transcendence.

High notes and heightened emotions: ‘It lifts me to a higher plane’

The sense of transcendent elevation described by many Evensong participants was often associated with, or even attributed to, perceptions of the music as ‘soaring’. One SR’s complete description of the experience of being at Evensong reads ‘High-vault music, in that the singing lifts me to the very ceiling, and arguably higher.’ The ‘soaring’ sound of the boy trebles’ voices was a prominent feature in these descriptions, and the idea of being transported by or with their pitch was prevalent. This is illustrated at Figure 28, which shows an extract from the IES commentary of Pam, a regular Evensong attender. In the IES, she commented during a rising melodic pattern that she felt that she was being lifted with the choristers’ singing – F#5 is the highest note of the phrase and of the piece overall, and towards the top of the range of most trebles (Welch 1979; J. Williams, Welch, and Howard 2021):

Figure 28. Extract from Pam’s commentary during the IES

Choir singing Magnificat :

Thomas Weelkes’s Short Service (Weelkes, n.d.)

He hath shew - ed strenght with his arm: he hath scat - ter - ed the proud

[Treble line]

Pam: [after the choir sings ‘proud’] The boys seem to take you high!

Higher pitches are written vertically higher on the page in staff notation, and have higher frequencies, but some participants’ accounts transfer this spatialised model to the physical three dimensions of the church – as reflected in the common perception of the boys’ voices ‘soaring’ upwards to the roof vaults and ceiling; and to the visual and metaphorical

association of the voices with heaven, and heavenly bodies above the earth. SRs often conceptualised the choral singing as both ‘soaring’ of itself, and as affording through this musical elevation multiple varieties of transcendence: lifting them to a higher place (‘the worship simply soars when the choir sings’; ‘a feeling of being on a higher than usual plane of spirituality’); to states of enlightenment and divine encounter (‘the sung element sets one’s mind soaring into the ether ... to contemplate the divine’; ‘a reminder that there are higher things’); and transporting them to another place (‘I find myself soaring...into the heaven of the angels...’).

A further kind of elevation that the high-pitched singing affords is the heightened emotional experience and ‘heightened spiritual awareness’ identified by several SRs. This was exemplified by Aiden, for whom Evensong is most likely to be a ‘purely embodied, purely emotional’ heightened experience when he hears ‘a soaring anthem’. For, Ben too, ‘the best of [the Anglican choral tradition] is the soaring emotions. It’s transcendent, absolutely beautiful, and touches the divine.’

One way to account for this replicated sense of internal elevation in response to soaring music is through the concepts of mimesis and embodied cognition. Mimetic resonance arises from the tendency to hear music anthropomorphically (E. Clarke, DeNora, and Vuoskoski 2015), and thus, for example, to hear rising musical gestures as actual elevation in space. The related idea of mimetically embodied cognition refers to the way in which internally and externally, the body responds to perceived actions through voluntary and involuntary mimetic behaviour, the experience of which then contributes to the understanding of the sound (Cox 2016). Cox, who has written extensively about the power of the involuntary act of subvocalization and the role of pitch perception in sense-making during music listening, suggests that listeners always represent the sounds they hear mimetically, and that mimetic subvocalization, whereby listeners’ vocal chords are activated as if they

were singing the music they hear, can facilitate transcendent experience as the mimesis creates the impression that the listener is capable of surpassing their own physical limitations (ibid, 55, 108). Describing his own experience of a television commercial featuring a song by Kool & the Gang, he says:

As I listen and watch, I cannot help but mimetically subvocalize along with the synthesizer, including the highest note [F# 7], even though I have never sung above F 6. I find the last note thrilling (in the limited context of a television commercial), and I believe that this feeling comes in part from feeling something of what it would be like to transcend my usual limitations. The possibility of such transcendence, in many forms, is one of the implications of the hypothesis... (Cox 2016, 55).

Cox's hypothesis is of particular relevance to the voices of Anglican boy trebles, because with a normal range in the Anglican church tradition from A3 to G5, and sometimes up to A5 or Bb5, they fall outside the range of most adults. It is also supported by several accounts of listening offered by Evensong participants. Jocelyn, for example, asked if she had ever had a transcendent or transporting event at Evensong, recounted her experience of standing next to the soloist singing 'Miserere mei, Deus' by Gregorio Allegri, which ascends to C5, beyond the top of the range of many trebles and explained:

...that was just so overwhelming, I did want to cry, ...and I think that felt more special [because] we were doing it in worship, it did feel, like wow, we're creating magic here!

Whether through vocal mimesis or other mechanisms, perhaps including awe at the skill and the sound itself, Jocelyn's experience of the soaring voice was transcendent, transforming her emotions, affording a feeling that magic was being created.

Pure voices and 'the angel that they carry inside themselves'

At the level of musical sound, ideas of transcendence were also widely connoted by the singular tone and timbre of boy trebles' voices, a sound often described as 'unique' and 'magical' by participants in this study, and in the literature (Welch and Howard 2002, 103). English cathedrals historically employed only male singers, and although the first female 'top

line' was introduced into a cathedral choir to sing with the lower male voices in 1991 (at Salisbury Cathedral, see Salisbury Cathedral 2021) – a development widely, although not universally, supported among SRs – male-only choirs remain common. At the time, however, some opponents of this development took the view that the transcendent qualities of cathedral music relied upon boys' voices. Bernarr Rainbow, writing in 1997 for the campaign he founded for the preservation of male-only choirs, for example, argued that

Choirs of men and boys ... are one of the brightest jewels in the Church's crown – a stupendous inheritance. No other living tradition of such antiquity can match their enchantment and splendour, nor equal their power to enrich our spiritual lives. ...if the boys go...lost will be the magic, gone the glory (Campaign for the Defence of the Traditional Cathedral Choir 1997).

Today choirs of girls are common in cathedrals, but where girls do sing, they are often trained to replicate the sound that previously characterised boy choristers' voices (Welch and Howard 2002, 117). It is this sound to which many IESs, interviewees and campaigners attribute the choirs' particular power to uplift, transport, and, as several participants put it, enchant.

The study revealed two principal dimensions to this experience of enchantment. The first relates to the spectacle of boys, some as young as seven, dressed in robes and performing virtuosic repertoire and ancient ritual to the same standard as their professional, adult, counterparts. Several SRs and interviewees emphasised the contradiction between the disciplined boy choristers with the 'sweet' and controlled 'voices of angels', and the 'energetic', 'wild', and 'mischievous' boys they knew or suspected them to be, and expressed wonder at the choristers' apparent transformation from the boys of everyday life to the choral beings into which they are transformed at Evensong – 'that tiny fraction of the angel that they carry inside themselves', as one SR wrote. Two interviewees separately identified this transformation as almost supernatural:

...there is something about boys' voices which is special, and there is something about the discipline of caging the raging tigers of young boys to make them make this thing which is amazing... (Max)

I think there is something kind of a little bit magical about watching the boys sing. They make a sort of magical sound but they're also these young boys singing together, and I think it's quite a captivating and unusual spectacle. (Amy)

Kieran Flanagan (1988), who has written of Evensong as an act of sacred ritual-play that is 'proximate to the profane' due to the human, earthly nature of its actors, theorises the choir's enactment of these 'angelic parts' as a paradox, in that they are known to be performing a role, but that role is nonetheless a powerful conveyor of meaning:

Even the choirboys understand this. They enact angelic parts in song in the choirstalls, and in so playing, they manifest what they are clearly not. Despite this feigning, somehow, they manage to transmit poignant meanings out of a script that has unexpected powers to repeat its message in public in a way that also maximises private interpretations. All the time there is a tension operating between meanings intended, and those unintentionally given off ... (Flanagan 1988, 351).

Writing from a theological perspective, Flanagan's concern is with the transmission of the meanings intended by the liturgy, and congregants' attainment of a proper understanding of it. This study suggests, however, that it is the plurality of the 'private interpretations' that the service affords, including through the meanings unintentionally given off through the 'feigning' of the choristers, that facilitate many powerful experiences of transcendence. Max's sense that the raging tigers have become disciplined into 'something amazing', for example, and Amy's captivation by the 'magical spectacle' arise not in spite of the feigning, but rather because of it: they rely on their knowledge that the boys are manifesting 'what they clearly are not' – or not what they normally appear – and thus through their disciplined ritual-play and musical performance, reveal something about themselves and about humanity that is enlightening, moving, or inspiring, as participants commented.

There are other transcendent responses to the choirs also in evidence. Maya, for example, perceives 'something about' the boys voices that is moving and ineffable, and that in contrast to Max's perceptions, also relates to a sense that underneath the pure treble tones

is not a raging tiger but a basic raw unaffectedness: an authenticity that connects to the transcendent because it seems to emanate from it, wherein lies its power to move:

... there is something about those soaring voices- there is something about boys' voices. ... I think it's because when you have girls singing, they are more polished. They're a bit older, they're more mature, and they are just beginning to learn to have technique, and to sort of perform, and that's not to take anything away from them at all, but the boys are more raw. There's something unedited, they've been trained, but they haven't been polished, not performers. They just open their mouths and out comes magic, and there's something about that I find very touching.

For Maya, the ability of the boys' voices to transport her comes from the particular emotions and thoughts of innocence and authenticity they evoke.

Closely related to these perceptions is the even more widespread association of the choirs' voices with 'purity'. Musically, this depends on what Temperley describes as

the fluty, ethereal tone of boys' voices, the impersonal falsetto of countertenors...the general avoidance of vibrato...discipline, and the merging of the individual voice in a unified choral texture (Temperley 2013, §8. The Church of England after 1830).

Jasmin, who did not grow up in the UK and was unfamiliar with the Anglican choral tradition until she moved to England several years ago, explained that she finds this style of singing very moving:

I think they have a way to sing religious services... it's smooth, it's nice, it's white, the voice is like, "I know what I'm going to sing". That's the word, yes.

The style of singing that Jasmin described, and that SRs variously described as 'beautiful clear singing (no vibrato – thank heavens)', 'marked by limited vibrato', and 'voices so pure', is known musically as *voce bianca*, or 'white tone', and refers specifically to children's voices, but as Marshall (2015, 41) demonstrates, it is also expected of the adult women in professional ensembles who sing what would traditionally have been the boy choristers' vocal line in sacred choral music. She suggests that the reason for this is that women can only be accepted in the early sacred repertoire if they are understood as 'innocent and devoid of sin – angelic, pure'. Her argument demonstrates how the pure tone has acquired extra-

musical connotations, becoming a referent of a purity that extends beyond the voice, to the singer's disposition – a perception supported by the comments of Amy, Max, and Maya. For others, however, the characteristic chorister tone evokes not the sense of the idealised, 'pure' person, but of a more ethereal, non-worldly presence, reflected, as Timothy Day (2000, 123) observes, in the labels applied to the Anglican choral sound:

Again and again throughout the century the same epithets have been used to characterise the singing, 'pure', 'otherworldly', 'ethereal', 'impersonal'; writers who do not admire the style refer to its 'coldness', its lack of 'passion' or 'personality', to the cultivation of beauty of sound at the expense of any real expressiveness, to 'under-interpretation', to rather barren meticulousness...

The same epithets Day identified as being used by those who admire the style recurred across this study. In the IES, Ciara called the choral prayers 'austere and magnificent'; in an interview Pam emphasised the 'beautiful control' of the choir, and Ryan explained that his preference for plainsong services arose from their being 'even more ethereal' than other services; 17 SRs described the choral singing, or Evensong overall, as 'otherworldly' or 'out of this world'. Unaffecting as some of these descriptions may make the style sound, it is clear that the resulting musical effect affords listeners the perception that, as the epithets suggest, the music is coming to them from a non-worldly source.

A further dimension of the choral style that supports perceptions of unworldliness is its occlusion of the human, embodied origin of its sound. This occurs in three key ways. Perhaps the most obvious is the denial of sex and gender which occurs through the cultivation of what was in the past called the choirs' 'sexless' sound (e.g. Church 1957, 189), and which has been evidenced more recently in a substantial number of empirical studies. These, generally undertaken in response to the controversy around the admission of girls to cathedral choirs after many centuries of exclusively male singing, have found that in audio-only tests, even professional choral directors are generally unable to identify accurately whether choirs of cathedral choristers are comprised of boys or girls, whereas by contrast, the gender of

choirs not trained in the cathedral style is readily discernible, even by people without any musical training (Mould 2007, 269; Welch and Howard 2002). Second is the more general obscuring of the choristers' corporeality – 'the body in the voice as it sings', as Roland Barthes (1987, 189; 183) calls it: 'the tongue, the glottis, the teeth, the mucous membranes...'. These do not fit well with the 'disembodied' aesthetic (Church 1957) or the 'ethereal' tone and 'bell-like timbre' (Friar 1999, 26) that is the cathedral choir's cultural norm, and for the last century choirs have been trained to ensure breaths are not heard, 'those resonating-agents whose function it is to amplify the human voice' are underemployed, 'throatiness' is avoided, and that there is no indication of effort, forcedness – or 'grain' – perceptible in the voice (Day 2000, 131, 123–32; Moody 1923, 7–15; 27; 34). And third, and relatedly, is the subsuming of individual personalities and expression into one single, blended, balanced, homogenous voice, a core aspect of the choral tradition (Howard, Welch, and Himonides 2019; Terry, quoted in Day 2000, 125).

Barthes, during the not dissimilar experience of listening to a Russian church cantor, perceived a similar negation of the individual. His description is one of hearing a body that has 'no civil identity' and 'no "personality"', a voice that 'is not personal' and that 'expresses nothing of the cantor', and that 'bears along *directly* the symbolic, over the intelligible, the expressive: here, thrown in front of us like a packet, is the Father, his phallic stature' (Barthes 1987, 182). The negation of the individual is thus explained as a removal of the distracting, irrelevant, personal characteristics of the message-bearer – the noise that might obscure the message – to allow direct access to the signal, or what the message itself symbolically communicates: the presence of 'the Father'. While the Russian Orthodox tradition differs in many respects from the Anglican, the role of the cantor Barthes describes is similar to that of the cathedral choir: to convey the message and the word of God in a way that connects as directly as possible with those who hear them. It is reported that John Stainer, the nineteenth-

century choral director and composer, considered that in singing the services, the choir so entirely ‘subordinated their own wills to the general effect and beauty of the music’ that at the close of the anthem he more often ‘felt inclined to say “Thank God” than to say “Thank you, gentlemen of the choir”’, and he was sure that this was how it should be (Day 2000, 125).

For some participants who expressed discomfort about being involved in an institution that has taken positions that trouble them, the obscuring of the human at Evensong, and the sense of what one participant called its ‘objectivity’ was instrumental in their ability to attend, as these participants’ comments illustrate:

... I'm often deeply embarrassed and hurt by positions the CofE or Anglican communion take (especially on sexuality and marriage). But somehow in its formality and lack of too detailed examination of anything beyond the personal and God, I can bear evensong even when I feel I can't have much to do with the rest of the formal organisation.

I am attracted by what one of my fellow parishioners called "the objectivity" of the service - after the intensity and intimacy of the Eucharist, she said, she loved the objectivity and the strength of the Evensong...

A moment to experience your relationship with God

Accordingly, some participants described Evensong as ‘the portal’ that connects the everyday with ‘that which is beyond time and space’, ‘heaven and earth’ and ‘the Creator’, and listening to choral singing as an experience of personally and meaningfully engaging in an intersubjective relationship with something outside of everyday life:

Evensong [is] a sublime interface marrying the here-and-now with that which is beyond time and space, a cosmic portal for eavesdropping on and uniting with the eternally constant act of infinite and praise and worship by all who have ever lived and will ever live. (SR)

...a chance to connect with The Creator in a manner that helps me understand my place and purpose in this human life... through the portal of music and prayer. (SR)

With choral music I hear the richness of the harmonies and it transports me into far off places where I can commune with God. (SR)

There is great power in music. It gets into your soul and your spiritual being can connect with the emotion of a greater power. (SR)

The quotes of these SRs are representative of an important and prominent theme in accounts of transcendence: that the music of Evensong affords its participants an array of divine, spiritual, and imagined transcendent connections, and a diverse variety of ways of experiencing them. Encounters with God at Evensong were framed in terms of being with, being at one with, connecting with, communicating with, deepening their union with, engaging with, experiencing their relationship with, maintaining a relationship with, meeting with, resting with, sitting with, spending time with, uniting with, talking to, and listening to Him, for example. The same sense of encounter was mentioned in relation to the communion of saints, an abstract 'greater power', past generations of worshippers, and friends or relatives who have died.

Two complementary ideas are useful in understanding this: Small's (1998) theory that music can bring into existence what he calls 'ideal relationships' as the participants imagine them to be, and Born's account of musically imagined communities. Small's concern is predominantly with the relationships between people, and how, through musicking, they can explore and enact identities, and the ways that 'the relationships of the world' are and should be structured (Small 1998, 96). He argues that participants' emotional involvement in musical rituals can be so profound that they relinquish their everyday identities, and become in harmony with the new relationships created by the ritual (Small 1998, 96). Weight has been added to this theory by several more recent studies that suggest empathic responses to music may be responsible for the feeling of being 'at one with' both the music's performers (Scherer and Zentner 2008), and with the emotion and meaning of the music itself, encountered as a virtual person (Levinson 2006). Applying these theories to Evensong would suggest that participants' perceptions of the choir or the music as other-worldly, could, through empathic identification, play a part in listeners' own, internalised sense of

transformation or transportation, and of being ‘at one’ with the divine, the other-worldly, or the Other.

Born’s theory assists because the imagined communities she proposes as one of four planes of musical mediation extend beyond the co-present intersubjectivity Small describes, to encompass ‘virtual collectivities and publics’: communities which aggregate listeners based on musical and other identifications, pre-existing and newly co-produced, allowing for their heterogeneity to be elaborated and creatively expressed (Born 2011; 2005). While Born’s work, like Small’s, deals with secular contexts that do not include the supernatural or spiritual, it can nonetheless be seen how a listener’s perception of shared identifications with the imagined co-collaborators in a musical scene might also apply to shared identifications with choir members, with the imagined ideal or the ideas they represent or manifest, and with spirits and spirituality itself.

‘It is, quite simply, special’: the transcendent affordances of singularity

The final reason suggested by the data for Evensong’s sounds specifying something extraordinary, is that the practice of trained professional choirs performing Anglican sacred choral music in church services is a tradition virtually unique to the English church (Mould 2007, 272; Hansard, HL Deb 2012, Co.343; Shephard 2017, 112) and that as a consequence, much of the music performed, and particularly the canticles, is rarely heard outside of this context (Arnold 2014). This can immediately specify its sound as special, exotic, or other, simply because it is not a normal part of everyday life. For some of the SRs who described the sounds of Evensong in this way – almost one hundred SRs used the word ‘special’ in this context, for example – this specification seemed to be augmented by their associating the service with special times, because they attend choral church services only on ‘special’ festival, celebratory occasions – Christmas, Easter and Ash Wednesday were recurring themes – or to mark ‘special’ personal occasions. For some SRs it was this sort of occasion that prompted

their first Evensong attendance. Another repeated theme (and one mentioned by participants now aged from 20 to over 80) was that the service was first encountered during the first weeks as an undergraduate in a college at Oxford, Cambridge, Durham, or in other cathedral cities, and often on the first Sunday of the first term, a formative and special time:

My first encounter with Choral Evensong was as an undergraduate ... in 1958. I was instantly captivated and attended every evening (unless unavoidably prevented) during my four years ... It was one of the most memorable moments in my life. I had simply never heard anything so beautiful. It fed and nourished both my passion for classical music and my spiritual development. The regular daily chapel worship (not only choral) became a foundation for my life and has remained so ever since.

Many participants who were not or had not been regular Anglican church attenders in the past, including many of the interviewees who had grown up outside the UK, described discovering English cathedral music through radio or television broadcasts like the BBC's annual Nine Lessons and Carols service from King's College Cambridge, other festival services such as those shown on Easter Day, or televised state ceremonies like British royal weddings. Russ, for example, recounted how his grandmother would take him to hear visiting choirs when he was growing up, and play recordings of the Nine Lessons and Carols service at Christmas. He went to his first live Evensong service soon after arriving for a study year in the UK as an undergraduate, and, in his words, was 'so transported by those voices' that he spent the rest of the year going to Evensong wherever he could.

As previously discussed (in Chapter 5), the repeated pairing of sounds with a specific type of occasion can result in future encounters of those sounds arousing the emotions and associations of that occasion through evaluative conditioning, or, if a particular recollection is prompted, through episodic memory (Juslin 2013). Accordingly, it can be theorised that people whose first experience of Anglican choral music was in the context of an event that they found exciting, special, or out of the ordinary – or was highly memorable because it was deeply moving, or transporting – will later experience those same responses on hearing that

choral sound again, especially as it is also well-established in memory research that memories formed during adolescence and early adulthood, and of first-time experiences, are particularly salient and remain highly accessible in later life (Rathbone, Moulin, and Conway 2008).

7.3. 'Buildings that speak': sound, space, and specifying the conditions for transcendence

78% of SRs in this study cited 'the beauty of the building/the space/the physical surroundings' as an important factor in their decision to attend Evensong. Of itself this is not surprising: cathedrals were generally designed to be impressive, to inspire awe, and to house and be constructed of extraordinary artworks and artefacts that are usually ancient and often unique (Orme 2017, 1). Millions of people visit cathedrals every year as tourists simply to see them, even empty of choirs and clergy: St Paul's cathedral in London alone welcomes 1.7 million paying visitors annually, more than the free-to-enter National Portrait Gallery (Visit Britain 2020). It is also a finding consistent with earlier survey studies (Holmes and Kautzer 2013, 42), and the cathedral studies literature, which emphasises the materiality of cathedrals in their capacity to transfigure human life (Orme 2017, 263), to symbolise faith as 'flagships of the spirit' (Platten and Lewis 1998, xi-xvii), to allow spiritual exploration and experimentation as 'laboratories for the soul' (Fletcher 2006), and to function as sacred territory, 'transcendent ... holy ground' (Platten 2017, 3). The importance of the physical setting of Evensong is also supported by abundant narrative evidence from participants across all methodologies in this study, who highlighted the visual beauty of the stained glass, candlelight, wood carvings, sculpture, and so on, as appropriately inspiring for worship, as the subject of contemplation, and as a valuable and complementary contributor to their experiences of Evensong. What is significant for the purposes of this study, however, is that a principal reason why participants considered the buildings important was for their relationship with sound: as places not just seen but *heard*, as spaces in which sonic properties

are an inextricable part of musical experience, and through these properties, crucially, as key components in experiences of transcendence.

Since sound technologies began to emerge in the nineteenth century, the mutual relations between music, sound and space, and their employment to ‘create, mark, or transform the nature of public and private experience’ has been recognised (Born 2013, 2–3). Psycho-acoustic methods have been used to understand the sensations and perceptions of perceivers in the built environment since the 1860s (Guillebaud and Lavandier 2019, 1), and more recently, ecological approaches have argued for a holistic understanding of musical perception as a multi-sensory and subjective experience of embodied consciousness (e.g. E. F. Clarke 2005). At the same time, artistic projects and empirical studies undertaken at the intersection of music, art and architecture have explored, exposed, and crossed realms from the physical to the political, the social to the sensorial, and in fields from philosophy to physics (Ouzounian 2021, §1.1). Yet as Ouzounian (2021, §1.5) has recently shown, despite a profusion of artworks and what Born calls ‘a veritable avalanche of scholarship devoted to the interconnections between sound and space’, understandings of how sound came to be seen as spatial is often lacking, the dimension of space in analyses of sound and hearing is still considered to be neglected, and the social, cultural and political meanings of acoustic and auditory spaces – neither empty nor neutral – have not, in many settings, received attention.

Perhaps for these reasons, the ways in which the intersection of music, sound and architecture are implicated in the subjective emotional and cognitive experiences of contemporary Anglican churchgoers have historically not featured prominently in musicological literature, despite the flourishing fields of church acoustics (Girón, Álvarez-Morales, and Zamarreño 2017), religious built heritage (e.g. Whyte 2017; Yates 1993), and church music history, analysis, practice and performance (Temperley 2013; 1979). There is, however, some data available. In one recent survey of cathedral attendees conducted for the

Foundation for Church Leadership and the Association of English Cathedrals, 88% of cathedral visitors said they had ‘got a sense of the sacred from the cathedral building’, including well over half of those who were not churchgoers, and almost two thirds of those who saw cathedrals as having primarily historical importance (The Grubb Institute and Theos 2012, 29; 24–31). Alluding to the importance of the sonic properties of the building, the same survey found that more than three quarters of people in touch with their local cathedral reported ‘experiencing God’ through the calm and quiet of the cathedral space (The Grubb Institute and Theos 2012, 27).

This section builds on those earlier findings, its own results suggesting three main ways in which the music and setting of Evensong interact to support such transcendent experience: acoustic effect, experience intensification, and by affording different ways of listening.

In-Evensong acoustics and the church soundspace

Notably prevalent in accounts of transcendence at Evensong across all this study’s methodologies are references to the singular and central effect of the acoustics of the churches in which it is sung. Casey, for example, who took part in the IES, suggested that it is chiefly the acoustics that afford the ‘sense of awe’ and ‘profoundly affective’ experiences she has at Evensong:

I remember very vividly that when I first experienced choral singing, I was extremely impressed by the acoustic effect. It fills the space in a way that I have not heard anything do before. The quiet prayer is an opportunity to enjoy silence as well, which never sounds quite like it does in [church]... the thing that struck me most forcibly about it at the time was how very loud and present and impressive it all is, and how venerable and hallowed it all is as well.

Casey has no religious faith, and said in the post-IES interview that for her, Evensong is a ‘primarily acoustic and spatial experience’, but also a moving and emotional one, and that it was this latter aspect that was ‘very much the direct appeal of it’:

I just think it's very moving, and I have been moved by it before in a way that I haven't been by spoken services... it makes perfect sense that people would be drawn to this kind of thing because you do get a sense of awe out of it ... even [composers] who do very dull music... the affect, in this space ...it does have a kind of quite basic emotive effect.

The sense of the music 'filling the space' articulated by Casey, and the widespread nature of similar conceptions of being 'surrounded by', 'immersed in', or 'bathed in' sound and resonant 'silence' have already been discussed in the context of embodied experiences of calm, but they were also frequently associated with participants' reported strongest, transcendent experiences in the service:

You become a part of a larger mechanism that transcends time and space... The music, combined with this often-vast space, creates a fully immersive experience. This allows you to pause; to switch off from the outside world. (SR)

When I'm listening, it is like an immersion in beauty, love and fellowship. (SR)

Immersive, contemplative, prayerful, beautiful, uplifting, deepening the sense of union with God, a blessed hallowing of time and space. (SR)

From an acoustic perspective, the way that a sound is perceived is influenced by the quality of the sound created, and by the acoustics of the buildings in which it is produced (Boren 2021). The acoustics of a building are in turn determined by reverberation, intelligibility and clarity, and these are the result of the size, shape, dimensions and materials of the space (Guillebaud and Lavandier 2019, 5). Compared with most buildings in which people in the twenty-first century UK spend time, cathedral churches are vast. St Paul's in London, for example, has an interior volume of more than 152,000 cubic feet (Lewers and Anderson 1984). They are also unlike most other buildings in their internal construction, containing many thousands of sound-reflective, resonant planes of stone and wood, relatively few furnishings, and even during services, a relatively small number of people in proportion to their size (Suárez, Alonso, and Sendra 2015). The combination of these factors gives rise to extended reverberation times of more than 10 seconds (11 seconds at St Paul's when the cathedral is empty, and 7.8 seconds when it is full (Lewers and Anderson 1984)). By

comparison, a modern furnished apartment has a typical reverberation time of half a second, large auditoria designed for the spoken word, like theatres, have up to one second (Kleiner, Klepper, and Torres 2010, 230) and a classical concert hall around two seconds (Asselineau 2019, 17).

Cathedrals also give rise to other unusual acoustic effects: prominent reflections and echo are characteristic, both of which can make it difficult to perceive the location of the original source of the sound, create an impression that the sound originates from multiple locations; and suggest that singers have more power and are more proximate than they are in reality - 'how very loud and present and impressive it all is', as Casey noted. At the same time, thick stone walls insulate occupants from much of the environmental noise of the outside world, contributing to a quality of silence 'that never sounds quite like it does' in church, in Casey's perception.

This diffuse, reverberant acoustic, typical of traditional Anglican church buildings, is unsuited to conveying speech intelligibly, and an experimental study undertaken by Lewers and Anderson (1984) in one cathedral found that only 20-30% of words spoken in the middle of the nave could be understood. This sort of acoustic is, however, theorised in the acoustics literature to be highly effective in evoking a sense of immersion, mystery – what Arthur Bradley (2009, 45) calls 'an aura of eternity' and Braxton Boren (2021, 1) refers to as 'an embodied, otherworldly sense of the supernatural'. This theory was supported by the evidence from this study. One SR wrote that to be at Evensong, is 'to close my eyes, listen to the sounds and echoes, and once again be young, carefree, calm, and whole'. Another SR, who described the experience of being at Evensong as 'Peaceful, other-worldly', said they first went to Evensong 'to hear and experience the music echoing through the cathedral', and continue to attend for the same reason, although now they are motivated 'also to try to be part of the religious aspect of it'.

Steeped in the potentiality of such buildings, composers and music directors have long used churches as instruments, writing music that exploits the reverberant setting for immersive, otherworldly effect – for example through the skilful use of multiple choirs positioned in different locations, of polyphony and antiphony, by harmonising what is sung with the pitches that continue to ring around the building, and the use of choral blend to render multiple singers as one unified and powerful voice (Bagenal 1930; Schiltz 2003). The perceived result, as many SRs observed, is that ‘the music, combined with this often-vast space, creates a fully immersive experience’.

Boren (2021) has argued that because the acoustics designed into church buildings are ‘the final link in the chain of musical production’, they reflect the ideological preference of those who use them, whether for the spoken word or for a sense of mystery, which he presents as binary alternatives. Many of England’s cathedrals and college chapels were built before the Reformation, when words were more likely to be sung than said and mystery and music were paramount. The spoken word can therefore be difficult to discern, as was evident in the survey responses, interviews, and some of the IES commentaries:

In some cathedrals, the acoustics are terrible, and it is not possible to hear the readings clearly. This is a real drawback...(SR)

The reader sounds very distant, almost inaudible. Yet when I’m reading, I always feel like I have to temper my voice because if I project like I want to, it reverberates back at me (Claudia, IES)

While text that is sung is therefore generally more intelligible than words that are spoken, it is not only the words that participants hear when the choir sings: they also perceive ‘the music rising up and filling the chapel, echoing until everything rings’; ‘an ambience one soaks up, particularly if it is a large cathedral’, a sense of entering a different ‘state of mind [as the] building and singing surround you’, and a feeling of being ‘surrounded and held’ by the service – what Boren calls ‘mystery’. Another way to understand this experience is through Juslin’s (2013), conception of aesthetic emotional responses, an addition to his

BRECVEM(A) model of musical emotion. He suggests that a unique aspect of musical experience is that it resembles listening to a language where we can understand the syntax, but not the detail of what is being said. As a result, we sense something meaningful is being said – or sung – and we might respond to that emotionally, even without being able to translate that meaning into words, including because we feel awe at the musical beauty, skill, expression, conceptual representations, or its evocation of the sublime.

‘Total beauty of sights and sounds’: intensification and reinforcement

Just as church buildings provide an additional layer of transcendence-affording properties to Evensong’s musical sounds, the evidence from this study shows that the music of Evensong also has a significant role in creating the conditions for transcendence through its impact on perceptions of the building. Don Ihde (2007, 50) has proposed that when sound enters a building, with it, ‘a certain liveliness also makes its richer appearance’:

I walk into the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris... Its emptiness and high arching dark interior are awesome, but it bespeaks a certain monumentality. It is a ghostly reminder of a civilization long past, its muted walls echoing only the shuffle of countless tourist feet. Later I return, and a high mass is being sung: suddenly the mute walls echo and re-echo and the singing fills the cathedral. Its soul has momentarily returned, and the mute testimony of the past has once again returned to live in the moment of the ritual. Here the paired “regions” of sight and sound “synthesize” in dramatic richness (Ihde 2007, 50–51).

At Evensong, the musical accentuation, or even activation, of the transcendent properties of the service’s non-musical elements was identified by many participants as instrumental in their experiences of transcendence, with many stressing that the music, building, and the other constituents of the Evensong ecology – stained glass, fading daylight, candles, lingering incense – were irreducible in their effect to the sum of their individual parts:

For me it is a mix of atmosphere - grandeur, mystery, history of faith; magnificent architecture, beauty, flowers, embroidery. If I had to choose but one - music would come first but would be a much lesser experience without all of the above. (SR)

It’s an aesthetically pleasing experience involving the physical architecture of the building, a sense of historical continuity as you take part in an activity that has been carried out for hundreds of years, physical movement as the choir and clergy

move back and forth, beautiful music and solemn ritual... there is a sense of transcendence and beauty... (SR)

The singing, the words of scripture (in particular the Magnificat & Nunc dimittis) and the wonder of the building combine to make it a spiritual experience that lifts the soul. (SR)

Two apparently unconnected survey respondents conceptualised this as a '*Gesamtkunstwerk*' the term used by Wagner for the ideal of the complete artwork, and a '*Gesamtkunsterlebnis*', a complete artistic experience, that combines and unifies all artforms into one coherent whole, 'guided by the law of beauty and the dictates of intelligibility' (Millington 2002):

...above all [Evensong] is the combination of all relevant elements that is most impressive, just like Wagner's concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, although for me the core is still on the singing and music. (SR)

The calming of the ritual; the beauty of the "timeless" liturgy... when it can all really come together, the *Gesamtkunsterlebnis* of music sung with high quality, inspirational words, beautiful architecture, particularly when imbued with the centuries of previous worshippers, the mystery of eternity. (SR)

The data from this study's participants suggest that there are two main ways in which this sense of unification contributes to the possibility of transcendence. First, the character of the sounds, being perceived as complementary to the aesthetic resources of the building, affords the sense of a harmonious, complete, whole. This is illustrated by Peter's reflections on the Bach organ postlude in the IES:

The harmonies resonate with something which articulates why we're here and something about the physical nature of the intervals, the harmonies, the way that it's put together is a kind of physical manifestation of divine order, and the human condition within it ...they're all part of one theme that comes together ...which is saying something about the nature of God and about the human relationship to God that is not joyful, not solemn, even. Just profoundly true and meaningful but of course, you can't articulate why.

This sense of harmonisation can of itself feel transcendent: Peter's description suggests enlightenment (it 'articulates why we're here', and it 'is saying something about the nature of God'); and the ineffability of the experience ('you can't articulate why'); but each individual element also functions to intensify, clarify, or reveal something more about the other.

Another example of this from the IES came from Hayley, for whom the sense of harmony

was created by her perception of similarities between the texture of the music, the quality of light, and the carvings in the chapel:

[Organ playing opening voluntary]

It's beautiful. There's always a special quality of light in this chapel. It's like ivory. Carved ivory. I've seen reliquaries that are like the reredos... Hmm. [pause] Intricacy. Even the music is intricate.

The second common theme among participants who mentioned the physical surroundings of Evensong in their accounts of transcendent experience was the perception that those surroundings reinforce the ideas of timelessness and infinity created by the music and its text. William Whyte (2017, 83; 65–93) attributes this to what he terms 'an architecture of affect' – the multi-sensory stimuli of colour, scale, and ornamentation that compel encounters with the divine:

I find it actually sometimes incredibly emotional. I feel a combination of security, safety and warmth from being in a church or cathedral combined with the music, candles, prayers and knowing you're with other people experiencing different things in their lives but coming together. (SR)

I love the space, the architecture designed to make us think beyond human achievement and on the glory of God, and I love the time of day. Evensong in winter is particularly lovely, sitting in semi-darkness in those enormous buildings evokes such a sense of peace. (SR)

I find extraordinary and transcendent beauty in the experience of seeing the westering sun through a stained-glass west window in summer and the surrounding cold and dark outside and warmth inside in the winter months. These are the times when I feel closest to God in a Church where I would normally experience that feeling in places and events of natural beauty. (SR)

It is not only about the aesthetic impact of being in an historic building, but also the enlightened state that can arise from feeling part of something that operates outside the normal temporal or physical world. As another SR wrote:

[I] feel moved attending a service that is mostly unchanged over the years, and is mostly the same wherever you go, and to think of all those previous generations who have also sat through the same service and the same music, no matter what is happening in the world. In that way, I share the past. A mega church with Jumbotrons and soundtracks are no comparison.

One SR who had experience of Evening Prayer in a temporary structure in a military combat zone commented that the physical setting ‘isn’t the most important thing’. For some others for whom transcendence was a central objective, however, the aesthetics were significant. One SR wrote, for example, that ‘The immersion in music, ...and, likewise, the familiar words ...somehow need the stone walls, and dark corners to really fulfil me’ in the words of one SR. In this way, Evensong can be seen to function for these listeners as a form of ecosystem: a system of multiple physical parts – music, silence, light, dark, space, and structure – all of which can exist independently of one another, but which together in the ritual of Evensong are perceived to interact with one another, and the listener to create a richer, holistic experience.

These findings are important because while earlier studies have identified the historic and iconic nature of cathedral buildings as of great significance to visitors, and that a great majority get ‘a sense of the sacred’ from them (The Grubb Institute and Theos 2012, 29; 24–31), this study highlights the important role of the buildings’ sonic properties, their interaction with and activation by the music, and their relationship with other sensory modalities, in affording this sense.

2020, the absence of place, and ways of listening

The 2020 UK national Covid-19 lockdown, during which all congregational Anglican services were suspended, provided an unprecedented opportunity to research Evensong experiences, while controlling for the effects of being co-present in the church building, through the widespread online availability of live and recorded Evensong services.³⁹ Six months after the 2020 lockdown began, a second survey was therefore opened as part of this

³⁹ The last time church services were suspended in England before 2020 was in 1208, before the foundation of the Anglican Church, as the result of a dispute between King John and Pope Innocent.

study, to explore how Evensong participants were experiencing the absence of live, in-person Evensong. Whilst many of the 78 respondents valued the provision of virtual alternatives via online platforms – ranging from ‘an adequate substitute’, to ‘a Godsend’, ‘a lifeline’, or to something that has ‘literally kept me sane’ – for many of these, and many other respondents, the experience they described was also, or alternatively, of a loss and a lack:

...the best substitute, but nothing compared to being there.

...remote and pointless... There is no substitute for being at a live musical service.

...barren of spirit... Gazing into a screen does nothing for me.

... not the same as sitting in a space where millions before me have come and brought their troubles to God and survived!

Many referred to seeking in the broadcasts the transformational effects they normally attained at Evensong, but without success:

I tried but found them ridiculous. Almost like a sitcom. They offer me NOTHING. Better to play church music and meditate.

...I tried hard...but couldn't worship through them at all. I felt like a voyeur.

I tried a couple of times - but it lacked the sensory impact I crave. ...

A small number found the online services not just unfulfilling or inferior substitutes, but an actively negative experience. One respondent, who had previously regarded Evensong as ‘a means by which to reconnect with something greater than the trials and tribulations of everyday life, ...a cathartic outlet, a “reset button”, comfort like no other...’ said that even thinking about Evensong now had a detrimental impact upon them as it ‘only served to remind me of how good a thing had been lost’. They went on to say that when joining services online, they ‘experienced a strong sense of grief and loss’, because they were reminded of what had been taken away from them. Another SR, reflecting the views of a significant minority of respondents, said that Choral Evensong was ‘at the core of my being’ and that ‘being unable to either attend or perform the service has left me deeply depressed, gloomy and pessimistic’.

Among all respondents, expressions of missing the experience of going to services were common, which came as a surprise to some but was considered predictable by others:

I have been hugely surprised how much I have missed both the intimacy of the service and the grandeur of the setting and music.

I am not surprised that I miss attending Choral Evensong services and feel void.

Across all responses, however, including those from advocates of online and broadcast services, the allusions to transcendence, transformation, being transported, ineffability, spiritual encounter, flow, and closeness to God that pervaded the previous survey and pre-pandemic interviews were conspicuous by their absence; not one such experience was reported. This does not appear to be attributable to the technological mediation of the service, as some respondents reported being deeply moved listening to radio broadcasts and CDs of choral music during the lockdown period, and previous research has demonstrated the capability of recorded and broadcast music to afford altered states of consciousness, and transformational experiences (e.g., Gabrielsson 2011; Herbert 2011b). The evidence from this study, however, suggests that while many characteristics of in-person Evensong attendance were missed, some of the absences felt most acutely by respondents were those this study has identified as particularly influential in affording transcendence: the in-church acoustics, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* nature of the event, and the somatic encounter denied by the dislocation of the act of listening from the source of the sounds. One typical response read:

I have tried looking at a few services [online] ...The livestream by the Rudolphus Choir ...was particularly effective. But these are no substitute for personal attendance where the ambience of the building, art, architecture, and liturgical 'choreography' can combine to enhance the whole experience.

Another said that although they felt 'cheated' by the cancellation of Evensong, which for them is 'a magical interlude', they did not access any broadcast services because they knew that the building was as much a part of what they termed their 'Evensong experience' as the music.

The evidence from this study shows, therefore, that although, as the SR quoted above suggested, ‘the building isn’t everything’, the physical elements of Evensong can be so intrinsic to what many participants expect from the Evensong experience that without it, there can, for some, be a strong feeling that something is missing, ‘... a disconnect because being at a “real service” provides a participatory experience, combining what you hear with a spatial experience’, as one SR put it. As a result of this absence, the experience of the service becomes more effortful for participants seeking transformation or transcendence, as they cannot rely on the resources usually available. One SR described this as a sense of ‘sailing off keel’, ‘moving forward but the stance is awkward and difficult to sustain’. Consequently, Evensong becomes an experience of unremitting effort. This effort often resulted in some worthwhile outcome, as many SRs stressed – but in these circumstances the transcendent experiences that are the real prize for many, relying inherently on the relinquishment of control, become elusive, if not unreachable.

7.4. Summary

Music is central in the attainment of each of the seven varieties of transcendence identified at Evensong, and the service’s musical components - its musical texts, musical repertoire, performance practices and standards, and the interaction of its music with the setting – play different roles in affording different types of transcendence. Separately, together, and in various combinations, all of these specify concepts that are experienced by listeners as affording transcendence.

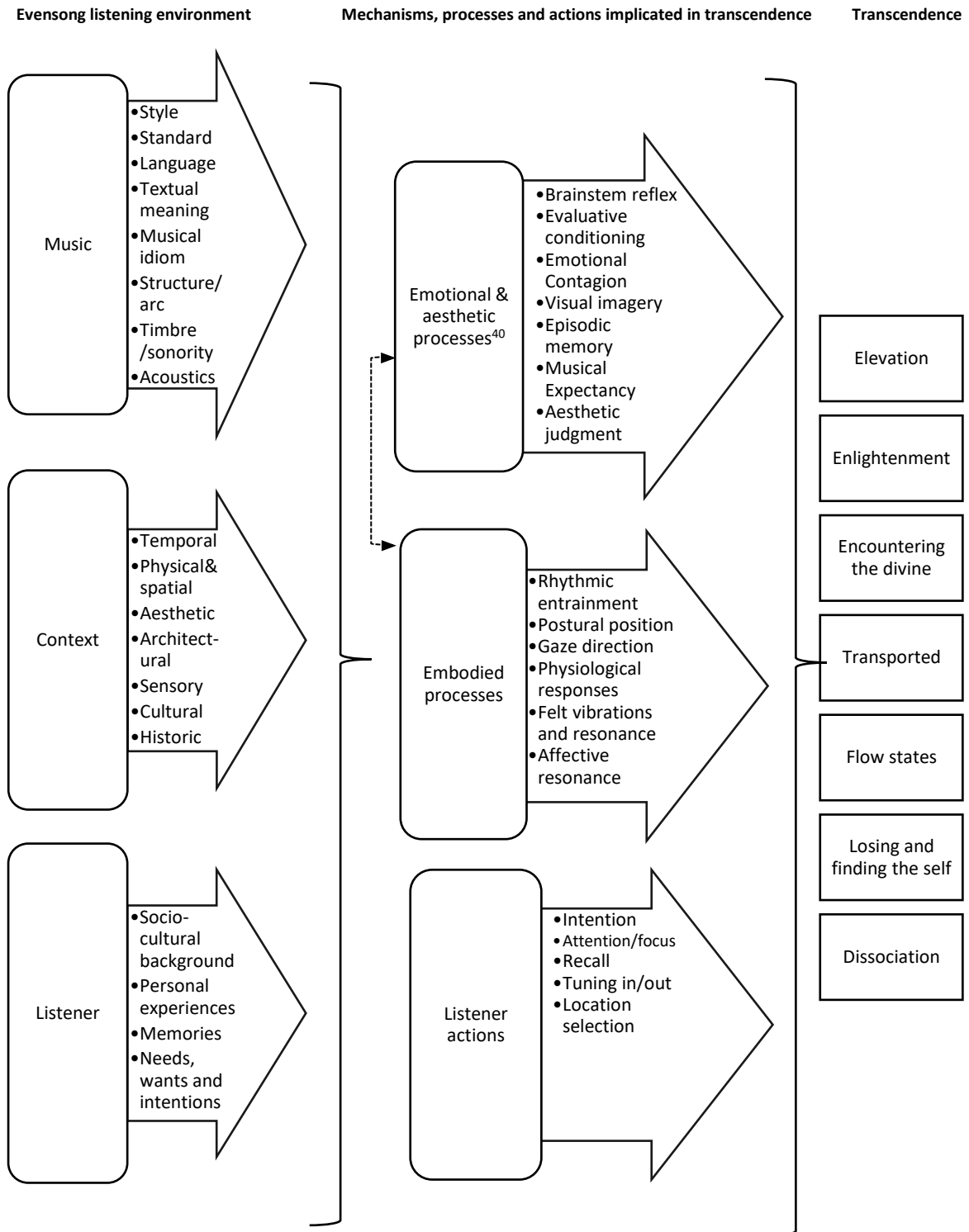
Of particular importance is the perception of Evensong as extraordinary: as operating outside of normal temporality, and outside of everyday life. This perception is afforded by the music itself, the musical context, and the listeners’ social and individual associations. Musically, it is Evensong’s singular musical idioms, its historical texts, the exceptional performance standards of the children and adults who sing it, its unique performance

practices, and the unusual acoustic effects of the buildings in which it is performed that are particularly implicated. Contextually, the rituals of Evensong, and the physical setting in which it is performed are important contributors. And for each individual, related to both of these are the connotations that are socially and culturally embedded, such that treble voices specify angels, for example, and those that are personally, individually accrued, so that they evoke childhood Christmases or other special occasions.

The primary mechanisms by which what was perceived at Evensong was evidenced to afford transcendence are of three types: those related to the evocation of musical emotion as identified in Juslin's (2013) BRECVEMA model, and especially, evaluative conditioning, episodic memory, contagion, visual imagery, rhythmic entrainment, and aesthetic responses, like awe; the embodied musical responses elicited by the felt experience of sound, and the constraints and potentialities of the Evensong environment; and participants' intention and volitional actions, and practised engagement – from selective attentional focus and active recall to choosing a seat for maximum exposure to the elements that individual finds most conducive transcendence (see Figure 27). In combination with one another, these components and mechanisms, and each individual participant's intentional practices, can regularly if not routinely lead to experiences perceived as extra-ordinary, 'out of this world', and, in potentially all of the many senses of the word, transcendent.

Figure 29. Schematic description of the processes of transcendence in Evensong listeners

(as conceived by the author of this study)



⁴⁰ Juslin's BRECVEMA model (2013)

Section Three. ‘Music is the best escapism’: Sanctuary, selfhood, and the Evensong asylum

Every institution captures something of the time and interest of its members and provides something of a world for them... every institution has encompassing tendencies.

Erving Goffman (2017, 4), *Asylums*

Cathedral[s] should be a safe place to do risky things... a safety net for when we fall, and a resource for when we need renewal... you can succeed and fail and be loved... you can say controversial things and be accepted.

Archbishop Justin Welby (Atherstone 2013)

Evensong is a haven when the world is too much.

SR, frequent Evensong attendee.

Music and churches both have long and venerable histories in the provision of sanctuary. Music and sound delineated places of respite and refuge in the temples of the early Greeks (L. Kramer 2013; Power 2019), and the status of sacred sites as places of safety was enshrined in law by the Romans, became integral to medieval Christianity, and was subsequently recognized in parliamentary statute (Baker 1990; McSheffrey 2017, 2). The term ‘sanctuary’ itself originates in the Old French *sain(c)tuarie* or *sain(c)tuairie* meaning a holy place (‘Sanctuary, I and II.’ 2018).

In contemporary scholarship the idea of sanctuary is conceived more broadly to include the sites of lived experience, including musical experience, that afford subjectively perceived protection, shelter, or wellbeing. In Michael Bull’s (2000; 2007) work on the use of personal listening technologies in the urban environment, music played through personal stereos and iPods is shown to offer this place of safety. Bull terms this a ‘habitat’, and an ‘imaginary realm’, where headphone-wearing listeners can escape to be themselves, withdrawing into ‘public forms of solitude’ (2000, 160). DeNora, in dialogue with the work of Goffman (2017), defines music used in this way as an ‘asylum’, to denote its ability not

only to afford ‘respite from distress’, but also to create ‘a place and time in which it is possible to flourish’, where flourishing includes a sense of flow, creativity, identity validation, connection to others, pleasure, and relief from pain (DeNora 2013, 1; Ansdell and DeNora 2012).

Choral Evensong is self-evidently not the classic asylum with which Goffman was concerned in his seminal text. It is not a ‘total institution’ in which participants are resident, conducting all daily activities and all aspects of life in the same place and ‘under the same single authority’; nor was it designed to be a ‘retreat from the world’, like the cloisters and convents that are perhaps the closest examples he cites in illustrating his concept (Goffman 2017, 5–6). This study has found that for its duration, however, one of Evensong’s most important functions for many who attend it is as ‘a sanctuary’, a ‘refuge’, a ‘haven’, and an ‘escape’ (more than 30 SRs used the latter term alone) from life or the world outside. As such, it offers respite from that world, and ways of being and modes of flourishing not readily available within it.

This section builds on DeNora’s conception of music as a respite from distress and a place and time to flourish by taking the two interconnected ideas of respite and flourishing, conceived of here as a ‘freedom from’ and a ‘freedom to’, and illustrates Evensong’s pivotal role in affording both. Taking each idea in turn, Chapter 8 discusses how, and from what, Evensong offers asylum and respite from distress, and how its music functions to afford the sense of sanctuary those seeking it desire. Chapter 9 explores the sorts of freedoms Evensong offers, and how its listeners find flourishing in it and through it.

Chapter 8. ‘When the iPod doesn’t do it...’:

Evensong as asylum from everyday life

Listening to music to manage stress and mental distress is commonplace (DeNora 2000, 62; Lamont et al. 2016; van Goethem and Sloboda 2011), and has been found to be effective both in therapeutic settings (Ansdell 2014) and in everyday life (Zentner, Grandjean, and Scherer 2008; Sandstrom and Russo 2010; Seinfeld et al. 2016). Going to hear music performed live, however, is generally motivated by the desire for enjoyment, and accordingly is considered a hedonic activity, associated less with managing a negative mental state, than with attaining a positive one of pleasure and positive affect (Lamont 2011, 231). This study found that while – consistent with the literature on live music attendance – Evensong is normally a pleasurable experience for those who choose to attend, and the attainment of such pleasure is an important motivating factor,⁴¹ equally important as the service’s hedonic function is its capacity to protect emotional and psychological wellbeing at times of stress, distress, and uncertainty.

This chapter begins by identifying the two main contexts in which Evensong is called upon, or retreated to, for these reasons: acute personal challenges, and the general difficulties of everyday life in contemporary society. It then discusses the characteristics of Evensong that enable it to afford asylum in each of these respects, and the mechanisms by which it does so, in dialogue with Seligman’s (2002) model of routes to wellbeing.

8.1. Reasons for seeking asylum at Evensong

(i) ‘Some peace in your day’: asylum from acute life challenges

‘I’m a courageous person but I’m also anxious and highly sensitive to suffering, and so Evensong became a way that I could manage anxiety. ... with that arbiter between managing what you’ve seen and experienced, and the pain you carry, and

⁴¹ As shown by analysis of free text responses to Q8 of the survey, ‘Why do you go to Evensong nowadays?’

what can just take me to another place, the choral tradition – it’s never failed me.’
(Simon)

Simon’s need for asylum, or what he called ‘escape’, and ‘a temporary place of peace’, has, at times, been acute. Hearing about the research on which this thesis is based, he wrote to explain that while working in armed conflict zones, among extreme human suffering, he had found Evensong an invaluable source of solace, and that it had ultimately become the focus around which he decided to build a new way of life. In a subsequent interview, Simon said that he had been introduced to Anglican choral services as a child and was a regular Evensong attender at university, but that it was during his working life, sometimes in fear of his life, that the music of Evensong became an essential tool in managing his mental health and bolstering his resilience:

... that music became a way that I could manage fear, manage uncertainty ... it became- listening to choral music was for years the only way I got to sleep at night.

I had to learn to manage fear, and I knew I couldn’t change the circumstances, I couldn’t change the risks, but I could change mentally, I could suspend fear. ... [I] could go somewhere and not feel afraid. That could just be ten minutes of turning on this music...

The place Simon went in order to suspend fear was Evensong. Sleeping in communal accommodation, he played recordings of the service through headphones, so as not to disturb those around him. Whenever he was on leave, rather than taking a holiday, he went back to the UK to attend Evensong services there. He describes the music as transporting him ‘to another place’:

Simon: ... it’s the physical- the way we internalise fear, dread, a tight stomach, a tight chest, so there’s physically easing that sensation, but it’s [also] very much the ability to just be fully present with what I’m hearing ... people that are working under these conditions now, one thing to ask, what will transport you, how can you escape ... where can you guarantee that you will find some peace in your day?

Q: And for you, the answer is-

Simon: Choral Evensong, yes.

A ‘close call’, when he only narrowly avoided serious harm, prompted him to rethink the way that he was living his life. Simon recalled asking himself ‘what do I need apart from food and shelter? What would I put into my life?’. His inner response, he recounted, ‘was silence for a long time, and finally the words “Choral Evensong” came into my mind. And I thought, “Okay, somehow I’ve got to make it work”.’ Simon’s decision, which he has now been able to implement, was to find a different way of life, based permanently back in the UK, in a place where he can attend Evensong regularly.

Simon’s story is presented in some detail here not because it is exceptional, but because, in the context of the accounts gathered for this study, it is not. It exemplifies, albeit with a particular acuteness, two strong and recurrent themes in the survey data, interviews, and IES: first, that at times of profound personal difficulty, Evensong affords a valuable temporary escape, sanctuary, or haven; and second, that in these circumstances, the desire to be at Evensong is often experienced as a need. Several SRs described how powerfully they felt this need, including one who described it as an ‘almost physical’ necessity:

I value the stillness and the peace... There were days when... the need to be at Evensong became almost physical.

Another research participant, Lara, who has no religious faith, and who cares for a family member with acute needs, put it like this:

Lara: Sometimes I desperately need to be in that space [of the cathedral where I go to Evensong] because I can go in – I like to get in there a few minutes early – and then I don’t have to think about anything else.

Q: Under what sort of circumstances might you feel like that, like you needed that space?

Lara: The overall perception of everybody’s family life is that everyone is okay really, but there are times when I need not to be with other people. And so, this provides a bit of a sanctuary, a bit of escape if I can go there alone, in particular.

Many SRs also recounted how they turned to Evensong during times of acute difficulty:

‘I find it is a very fine service to attend when I need some solace from feeling overburdened or anxious...’

‘I find choral evensong deeply moving ... a sturdy rock in difficult times.’

‘It is a serene moment for me in the difficult times of life which crop up for us all now and then.’

Dominic, an interviewee who, like 52% of respondents to the main survey, describes himself as spiritual but not religious, decided to go to Evensong as what Angela Tilby (2018), quoting a Twitter correspondent, has called ‘the church of last resort’: a place to which to retreat when nothing else works. He is not from a churchgoing family, and until several months before he was interviewed for this study, he had never been to Evensong, although he does have friends who attend regularly. While dealing with the loss of someone close to him, however, he wondered whether he could access the solace that his friends seemed to get from attending the service:

I said to [a longstanding, non-churchgoing friend] ... “I’ve got to go Evensong”, and he just gave me a funny look. And I said, “I’ve tried everything else. I’ve tried alcohol, I’ve tried music, I’ve tried to relax, it’s not working. So, I’m going to go to Evensong.” And he said, fair enough, you’ve got to try something, and I went...

Dominic said that he did not know what to expect from attending Evensong, but he felt uplifted and nourished by it. He has returned several times since:

[Being at Evensong] is like meditation ...everything just disappears...all the shit that’s going through my head, disappears...

... I’m still not a religious person. I’ve always found music to be my religion because it’s got me through so much in life, and that’s what Evensong is to me: it’s just every now and again, when the iPod doesn’t do it or I’m at real rock bottom, I go to Evensong.

(ii) ‘It’s not easy, this business of being human’: asylum from everyday life

Less acute, but even more common, was for participants to regard Evensong as a respite from the everyday hardships inherent in daily life, both as they impacted directly and personally, and as perceived in wider social, economic, and political systems. Among the direct personal challenges, most prevalent were academic, career, and family pressures, everyday economic and health challenges, and unremitting demands for time and effort. Asked why they go to Evensong, the idea of escaping these was a prevalent one in SRs’ responses:

‘to escape my hectic student life’

‘to escape from everyday tasks and stresses.’

‘to escape the hustle and bustle of the world.’

‘On a working weekday, the service provides a haven of peace’

Another SR, echoing the comments of many others, wrote that they valued Evensong because it was one of the few encounters in life in which nothing was sought from them:

We have so little peace in the noise of cars, technology, internet, the constant barrage of commentary, information, everything wants our attention, to “take” from us – our time, energy, money so we have nothing left for our children, families, spouses. At Evensong I feel I am taken out of that for a while, something feeds me instead, I get space.

Like this SR, many participants connected their personal, day-to-day concerns to macro-social matters, and especially to contemporary consumer culture, and a world experienced as dysfunctional, corrupt, and uncaring. Evensong was considered an effective asylum from this too. Kristen’s account was not unusual. At work, she said, she

...almost felt people were being commoditised, treated like commodities, and I wanted to counter that. ...So I think one of the things that pushed me towards attending Evensong, was because I could sit there and understand that the world doesn’t have to be that way, like the world is about finding an inner peace and supporting each other, and being welcoming to each other... ultimately I think [services like Evensong are] sanctuaries for people, certainly for me they have been sanctuaries when I needed to know that life doesn’t have to be this bad or harsh.

There were many others who, like Kristen, experienced Evensong as a conceptual asylum from contemporary consumer values:

[I experience Evensong] as something which interrupts and rejects the cycle of production and consumption that characterises the rest of life (SR).

Others, like Scott, experience the service as a practical retreat from the audible manifestations of human economic activity:

You get very weary of the endless crass, loud, brash materialism thrown at you 24 hours a day, and here is a space where you can just shove all that to one side, and absorb whatever you want to absorb... What you’re getting is a stimulus which you don’t get anywhere else.

Many SRs explicitly identified these and other constant pressures in daily life as a threat to their wellbeing, and Evensong as one of the few places where they could attain respite:

The beauty, the music, the interest in what is being said, time for reflection, the peacefulness, the sense of a meaningful alternative to the bustling, materialistic, shallow aspects of society that are so unsatisfying and often damaging to one's wellbeing. Essentially that's why we attend Choral Evensong - because it is good for our wellbeing. We are very grateful for that. (SR)

Some regular attendees also referred to Evensong as a source of strength and perspective that fortified their ability to function and flourish in the world, and as such, as an experience that needed to be regularly repeated for resilience to be maintained. This was often referred to as 'recharging my batteries', or a 'top up'. Ethan, for example, who normally attends Evensong on Sundays, described how 'by Friday, I need a charge of Evensong. I really do. I realise that I've sunk.' Observing that the 'business of being human' can be 'quite hard', he said that Evensong lifts him out of everyday life, and in doing so, helped him to make sense of it, and better manage its challenges.

One way to understand the ways in which Evensong affords the sense of sanctuary its participants describe is through Martin Seligman's (2002) framework of routes to wellbeing. Drawing on positive psychology and the idea of eudaimonia, or living life well, and in a way that is good, satisfying, and in accordance with one's virtues (Peterson, Park, and Seligman 2005, 25–26; Vittersø 2018, 6), Seligman proposes that there are three routes to wellbeing: hedonic pleasure, meaning, and engagement. Research suggests that to achieve subjective wellbeing, a high and balanced level of all three of these is required, because the different domains meet different needs (Joseph Sirgy and Wu 2009). This approach acknowledges that wellbeing is a broader concept than pleasure, and that engagement and meaning are greater predictors of life satisfaction – and hence wellbeing – than pleasure (Peterson, Park, and Seligman 2005). Three recent studies have identified the potential for music listening to offer all three of these routes to wellbeing (Groarke and Hogan 2016; Lamont 2011; T. Schäfer, Smukalla, and Oelker 2014), and analysis of the findings from this study suggests that listening at Evensong similarly provides these three routes, and in each case, through a

variety of mechanisms. The next section explores how, in respect of each of the three routes in turn.

8.2. Routes to wellbeing in retreating to Evensong

(i) Pleasure and positive affect

Pleasure is defined as the experience of any good, desired, or positive emotion (OED 2021b). The findings of this study suggest that at Evensong, the most commonly experienced desired or positively-valenced emotions are tranquillity and feeling at peace, feelings of transcendence, and a sense of safety and security. All of these are relevant to the wellbeing framework and to participants' feelings of wellbeing, but as tranquillity and its effects were discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, and transcendence in Chapters 6 and 7, this chapter focuses on the pleasure or positive emotion arising from the sense of safety and security.

An escape

On a basic level, it is apparent that Evensong offers asylum in the literal sense of providing a place to which people can go to get away from the source of their difficulties – a challenging relationship, the demands of everyday life, or the noise and values of society. It was in this context that Evensong was most frequently regarded as an escape. What distinguishes Evensong from the many other places which might provide similar physical separation, however, is the different character of the time spent there. Many participants commented that Evensong is the only time of the day or week when they are not available, either in person or via technology, to others. One SR wrote that 'I can immerse in it without people I know coming up to talk or sit with me'. Others described how they like to chat to people while waiting in the queue, but that once they enter the building, they like to be alone; one group of friends I encountered have a regular routine of meeting before Evensong on the same day each week, but on entering the church they separate, as they each prefer to sit alone for the service, in different parts of the church. Again, several noted that the service itself asked

nothing of them unlike a Eucharist, where it is necessary to interact with others, ‘or even a busy Mattins’, as one wrote, and consequently, ‘One can be absorbed into it’.

Another SR, who described Evensong as an escape and ‘a complete break from everyday life’, wrote that it is ‘the one hour in the day when I’m unreachable, and not disturbed or tempted to look at social media’. In this regard Evensong is distinct even from classical music performances and less formal church services, where it is not unusual to observe attendees discreetly using their mobile telephones, and where using such devices is increasingly expected and even encouraged (Burland and Pitts 2014). At Evensong, however, this is not the case. Not only do programmes, announcements, and in some settings, stewards, make clear that this would be improper, but social norms around sacred settings seem to be sufficient to ensure that most people comply. In the IES recording, for example, a mobile telephone can be heard to ring briefly during one of the readings. Its low volume and high pitch made it inaudible to some IES participants, but participants who did hear it were visibly surprised, incredulous, and universally disapproving, regardless of faith or religious affiliation. One of the atheists who took part, for example, immediately whispered ‘Whose phone is going off? Sort your life out!’. The requirement to switch off technology and be out of contact at Evensong is perceived by most as an absolute. As such, Evensong provides a permission to be unavailable – a haven from accessibility, and a guarantee that nothing will interrupt you or your thoughts, or be required of you – that is rare in contemporary culture. Paradoxically, therefore, the good listening protocols of stillness and silence often described as oppressive in the concert hall can function as a liberator in these circumstances. As Maisie, a Christian who has been regularly attending Evensong in multiple locations for many years, observed, ‘there are lots of people who come in frazzled and burnt out and they want to come in with their phones off, and no-one can get at them for the next half hour.’

Retreat, belonging and the sense of home

A second sense of security arises from the experience of Evensong as a place of belonging, and frequently as somewhere to feel ‘at home’ that many participants described:

‘[E]vensong creates a space to breathe in an otherwise very busy and sometimes stressful lifestyle. It provides respite and sanctuary, and provides structure... For me, the familiarity of evensong has become almost a ‘safe space’ where I can be at home if I’m experiencing difficulties.’ (SR)

It is where my musical and spiritual journey started. I love it deeply. I rarely feel more content or ‘at home’ than at Evensong. (SR)

The idea of home was evoked in two main ways. First, for many attendees, the place where they go to Evensong has a sense of home because it is somewhere that they feel they belong: the chapel of their school, college or university; the cathedral where they are a subscribed life member, a member of a ‘Cathedral Friends’ association, or a regular attender; or because of a more conceptual belonging to the Evensong tradition, often arising from having been involved in its delivery in the past. Almost half of all SRs who said they attend Evensong regularly nowadays were members of a church choir as children (48%, $n=941$), and six out of ten (61%, $n=1194$) had sung in a church choir as an adult, including 46% of those who never attend Evensong as a musician, singer, or clergy member now. Experimental studies investigating social identity theory have shown musical taste to function as a ‘social “badge”’, symbolising membership of a social group and contributing to individuals’ social identity: their self-concept based on group membership (e.g., Lonsdale and North 2009). In accordance with those findings, this study found that in many of these cases, going to Evensong was presented as identity affirming, reminding and reinforcing to participants that they belong to a (sometimes exclusive) group, institution, or tradition, and that there, they are accepted and connected:

... boarding away from home, the cathedral and its life are your real home. Evensong cures homesickness, which is why I tune in [now]. Including to close my eyes, listen to the sounds and echoes, and once again be young, carefree, calm, and whole.... I didn’t realise it at the time, but it shaped me... (SR)

The cathedral is part of the college, so it's almost as if going to Evensong is part of my domestic situation as a student. (SR)

The reason it's so satisfying for so many people, is, it's not exactly *cognoscenti*, but it's people who are musicians, who were a chorister, or they are a member of college, or like me, have a background in boarding school. (Simon)

The second way in which the evidence suggests that Evensong evokes feelings of safety and belonging is from the memories and autobiographical associations that it elicits, and especially memories of childhood, being with family, and for those overseas, home in the UK:

I have only to put in a CD of evensong at the approximate right time on a Sunday evening to be transported back to my childhood and the sense of home, God, love, rightness, that Evensong instilled. (SR)

Experienced the world over you feel at home no matter where in the world you are. (SR)

I like to be an evensong tourist when I'm visiting a new place – it helps me feel at home... (SR)

Although I was not raised Anglican it is my family's heritage, so I feel somewhat at home... (SR)

The need to belong and to feel accepted is profoundly important, and has been argued to be second only to the basic requirements for survival, such as food and shelter, in humans' hierarchy of needs (Maslow 1954; K. Schäfer and Eerola 2020). Historically, these needs have generally been theorised as being met principally through social interactions, but according to the social surrogacy hypothesis (Derrick, Gabriel, and Hugenberg 2009), non-human substitutes can also provide a fulfilling experience of belonging. Derrick and colleagues (2009), for example, found that watching favourite television programmes enabled viewers to 'immerse' themselves in a familiar virtual social world that increased belongingness and mitigated feelings of low self-esteem. Gabriel and Young (2011) showed that people reading a novel felt themselves to become a part of the collective described within the novel's narrative, with concomitant increases in life satisfaction and positive mood, two primary outcomes of belonging. Bull (2000, 38) similarly found that people who listened to

music that reminded them of home experienced ‘a sense of well-being and security’. Since Evensong is a similarly immersive experience that reminds many participants of home, and/or of their membership of a real or imagined – in Born’s terms – sociality, or collective, it is consistent with this literature that participants experience this sense of belonging as an increase in positive mood and life satisfaction, and accordingly, wellbeing.

Although Evensong does not offer opportunities for conventional forms of social interaction, and is valued by many for this very reason (as discussed further in Chapter 9), as a co-present musical experience, it also supports participants’ feelings of belonging through the sense of shared experience, and the related perception that they are among people who share their values and worldview: the ‘likeminded’, as several SRs termed it. The creation of such a sense of community is an important function of organised religion in general (Durkheim 2008), a priority of the Church of England today (Church of England General Synod 1992, 24); and one of the purposes of ritual, as Victor Turner (1996) highlights in his term ‘*communitas*’, which encapsulates feelings of collective belonging that obscure individual differences. It is also a common outcome of the other important dimension of Evensong: musical participation. Research has shown that that feelings of belonging, group membership, empathy, and affiliation arise both from the perception of shared musical taste (Lonsdale and North 2009), and from listening to music associated with a particular social group (Vuoskoski, Clarke, and DeNora 2016). In addition, and despite the repositioning of traditional stratification theory’s model of a homologous relationship between musical taste and social class within more complicated conceptions of identity and cultural expression (Devine and Savage 2005; Friedman et al. 2015), there is evidence of an association between musical taste and moral and political beliefs (North and Hargreaves 2007a), and social-class related lifestyle factors, such as financial situation, education, employment, and alcohol consumption (North and Hargreaves 2007b). Consistent with these findings, the data from

this study show that Evensong participants have much in common, in areas including musical taste (93% enjoy classical music; 5% enjoy HipHop/Rap); religious affiliation (80% were Anglican); education (85% of SRs had at least an undergraduate degree); musical training (85% had learned a musical instrument or had voice training) and ethnicity and nationality (97% were white; 84% were British). Small (1998, 42) wrote that the concert hall is a place where people who are alike ‘can feel safe together’, and these common characteristics among Evensong participants similarly afford feelings of belonging and a legitimate sense of ‘like-mindedness’, and consequently a sense of being safe and secure as part of a tribe, or a group of people like them. That is not to say that participants are alike in every way, or even in some ways that might be expected: 7% of SRs said that they did not belong to any faith or religion, for example, and 12% did not believe in either a personal God or any kind of God; 8% did not know. Few participants, however, saw these differences as a barrier to inter-subjective connection – ‘we are all connected in this vast shared experience, wherever we are in faith’, as one put it. Rather, the perception of shared musical appreciation, and a sense of shared values that might be located in faith and religious affiliation but can also transcend them, felt in the context of shared musical experience, were the salient factors, as this participant’s comments illustrate:

...to experience the live singing and liturgy with others creates a sense of connectedness with them through the shared experience - it is not so much about the identity of the others or even any opportunity to speak to them before or afterwards - it is the shared experience of technically proficient choral worship which is the powerful aspect.

Sanctuary in certainty and stability

A further sense of safety and security is afforded by the unchanging nature and content of Evensong, a quality often described as ‘reassuring’. For Maisie, the fixed framework of the unchanging daily liturgy is crucially important for its ability to afford her some respite from

‘a chaotic and disorderly world’. For many SRs, it represents a comforting consistency that contrasts with the destabilising pace of change elsewhere in modern life:

The sense that I am experiencing something similar to that which was experienced by generations before me is comforting and suggests a stability in the church which is decreasingly present in modern life. (SR)

In a world of change, evensong is a spectacular rebellion against the tide. (SR)

According to Rita Felski, the value of ritual lies in its repetition and the connection it consequently provides to ancestry and tradition: in Nicholas Cook’s (2013, 396–97) words, ‘it situates the individual in an imagined community that spans historical time’, and thus provides the means to transcend one’s own temporally limited existence (see also Ihde 2007, 51). This was particularly true for the study participants who valued Evensong as a refuge from change and/or modern values, many of whom identified the sense of timelessness afforded by Evensong as functioning as a link to a simpler and more stable past.

More salient for those seeking an antidote to perceived disorder and daily anxiety, however, was the lived experience of certainty Evensong affords, both as a regular and recurring point of fixity in an unpredictable day, week, or month, and as a protected temporal period within which order is assured and internalised by participants through entrainment to the ritual structure. In this regard, Evensong’s routine, structure, and discipline were frequently cited as important, in particular by people with relatively unstructured or non-routine daily lives. Several SRs, for example, wrote that attending Evensong had brought order and rhythm to their lives while studying as an undergraduate.

The other group to value this ‘rhythm’, as it was often termed, were those for whom attending Evensong was a regular, or long-term – sometimes life-long – practice. For some in this cohort, Evensong is seen, as one SR put it, as ‘part of the rhythm of the day, a coming to God’. Others called it an integral part of the rhythm of the year, or the rhythm of life, which both reflected and engendered a strong sense of the seasons and the calendar through the

cycles of readings and music. The importance of this pattern was confirmed in the Absence of Evensong survey, in response to which several SRs reported that the service's absence 'left the day without structure' or 'the week miss[ing] a certain rhythm'. One said that they even engaged with online services at the time they would normally have attended a live service simply 'to ensure that something marked [that time] as "different"'. For others, it was the sense of belonging to something both current and timeless that the regular routine of Evensong affords that was important:

I have mental health problems and tended to isolate even pre-Covid. Attending Choral Evensong [on the same days each week] was not just a tranquil and spiritual sanctuary that helped me feel better, but it also made me feel part of a community, a tradition and a ritual that has taken place for hundreds of years. It was a bright shining moment in my lonely week, and it brought out the best in me and made me want to go on living. (SR, Absence of Evensong survey)

Routine, defined by Tom Burns (1958) as a repeated set or cycle of consecutive actions, has long been recognised as beneficial for wellbeing. Feelings of safety and self-confidence are elicited by it (Avni-Babad 2011), and it strengthens social bonds, supports identity development and expression, and promotes order (Koome, Hocking, and Sutton 2012). In the specific context of ritualised religious practices, empirical studies have also found that routine can reduce anxiety and provide a perception of control at times of stress and uncertainty especially through the small, mundane acts of everyday ritual (Sosis 2007).⁴² The importance of what one participant called the 'unchangedness' of Evensong is underscored by the resistance with which proposed changes to elements of the service were initially met by some (although by no means all) of the service's advocates: the unofficial replacement of the Prayer Book by updated alternative liturgies in the 1960s prompted the founding of a Society for its protection in 1972,⁴³ and the introduction of girl choristers to

⁴² In contrast to the highly arousing and unusual rite-of-passage rituals on which ritual research has often focused, e.g. in the work of van Gennep (2013) and of Turner (1996).

⁴³ See The Prayer Book Society (2021).

cathedrals has led to the formation of the Campaign for the Traditional Cathedral Choir, which supports the continuation of ‘the all-male choral tradition’ (Campaign for the Traditional Cathedral Choir 2018, 66; 2021). But for many, it is the consistency in the details of the service that are most important:

The order and dignity of the familiar words give a unique feeling of calmness and peace. Any deviation or alteration due to political correctness destroys these feelings. Very irksome! (SR)

[I] know exactly what I’m getting. No uncertainty about whether I’m going to have to sing some contemporary tripe or muddle through the innovations of the day, just the beauty of traditional language, the Magnificat and Nunc, anthems, hymns, and a tried-and-true method of encountering God. (SR)

When asked in the survey if there was anything else they would like to add, one SR, who has been attending for more than forty years – and also mentioned that they enjoy mixed choirs, choirs of women and girls, and contemporary compositions – wrote simply, ‘Please don’t let them change anything!’

World without end: the security of Evensong’s existence

In addition to the practical forms of retreat that Evensong affords, for some of its participants, the simple knowledge of its availability, combined with an expectation of its continuing existence, provide a sense of safety and security that is in itself a form of sanctuary. As already discussed, many attendees go to Evensong at times of most acute need – when listening to music is not enough, as Dominic explained, when the need to escape is profound, as it sometimes is for Lara, and when other coping mechanisms are unequal to their needs. It is therefore vital that they can rely on the service being there when they require it, and knowing that it will be provides a reassurance that is separate from that afforded by the service itself. Simon, for example, explained that ‘part of the power’ of Evensong is ‘knowing that if I can just get myself there, that I can guarantee how I will feel – that’s a good feeling’. For Billie, who has been lonely since she retired, Evensong affords ‘a feeling

of pleasure, a contentment, quietness. I've got out of a crazy world', and on the days when she routinely attends, she is lifted, she said, just by the thought of it:

Billie: There's something about it that I look forward to because it's- you know, I think, "What a day today, seriously. Then, oh, yes! Choral Evensong - I look forward to that." And it makes my day to remember it ...

Q: How important to you is it?

Billie: It is important actually because I look forward to it, I look forward to it. I live on my own, it's very lonely, yes. It's very lonely. [clears throat]

In a recent study, Nord-Ljungquist and colleagues (2020) found that people dealing with a medical emergency experience feelings of relief and calm once they know that an ambulance has been despatched, even if they are aware that they will have a long time to wait before it arrives, and even though their knowledge of the ambulance's departure has not changed the practicalities of their situation in any real way. In the same way, comments like Billie's suggest that for Evensong participants seeking relief from a condition or state, the anticipation of the respite the service is expected to provide can be a powerful positive force. Further support for this is provided by the responses to the 2020 'Absence of Evensong Survey', in which one participant, for example, identified the denial of 'the option to attend' Evensong, rather than the inability to attend of itself, as the cause of a significant sense of loss:

[The suspension of Evensong] has left more of a gap than I expected. I normally attend infrequently, however the absence of the option to attend has felt like a loss of something important in the warp and weft of life... It has affected my sense of wellbeing, as it represents part of the loss of identity, culture, and collectivity that has dehumanised us all under lock down.

Elsewhere in the response, the same SR refers to having taken Evensong 'for granted', pointing to the previously widely held belief that – as one SR wrote in response to the first survey, conducted before the pandemic – 'Choral Evensong will always be there, as a refuge, comfort, escape from the here-and-now'. This was a recurring theme in survey responses and interviews completed before the world was aware of Covid-19. In an interview with Curtis, a

religious person who attends Evensong regularly, I sought to understand what Evensong meant to him by exploring the counterfactual: how he would feel if Evensong were no longer sung? He found the idea improbable:

Curtis: ...That will never happen. So, I don't think I have to answer that question... That's unthinkable. The[y] would never do that...

Q: Do you see it as, sort of, intrinsic to what [cathedrals etc.] do...?

Curtis: Yes. That will never change. They will always keep it the way it is, they will never change it.

Evensong's ability to instil in its participants this sense of permanence is critical to its ongoing effectiveness as an asylum, and to the sense of wellbeing it affords as such. It can only function as an escape, or what Goffman (2017) calls 'a removal', if it is accessible when it is needed. As a technology of the self, called upon in the most acute circumstances, and one also relied upon as a regular resource, the assurance that this availability will be constant and permanent is particularly crucial. But, equally importantly, the sense of asylum Evensong affords through knowledge of its presence and availability relies on participants' confidence in its availability and durability.

(ii) Total engagement and gratification

Seligman's second route to subjective wellbeing is through the engagement of strengths and virtues in a way that is fully absorbing. In a musical context this has been broadly interpreted as encompassing the sort of intense, focused music listening that is normally associated with the concert hall, and that is capable of changing the way that listeners think and feel (Lamont 2011). As discussed in Chapter 6, Csikszentmihalyi (2002) proposed that music listening could have the potential to induce flow in participants, if listeners had a high degree of attentional focus and were fully engaged in the music. This study found that it is not unusual for Evensong attendees to experience flow, although not, as Csikszentmihalyi proposed, through analytical, structural listening. Rather, it was found that focused engagement on one

or a combination of a broad spectrum of sonic elements, heard by an individual participant as specifying and affording the conditions for transcendence, enabled them skilfully to attain transcendent states, including dissociation and losing themselves. Chapter 7 discussed how Evensong has a range of characteristics that afford these sorts of absorbed experiences, including its predictability, its limited active congregational involvement, its rhythmic nature, and the multi-sensory immersion it provides. In addition to facilitating transcendence, however, the evidence from this study suggests that these experiences also function as a type of emotional and cognitive refuge, because when immersed in them in the way that Dominic, Billie, and others describe, they are afforded respite from sadness, worries, and some of the other negative thoughts that otherwise occupy their minds, replaced, instead, with Evensong:

When that sound opens up into the cathedral, my mood changes and the distractions of the world disappear. (SR)

It is a time of peace and consolation, a time in which to forget the material world and focus on the interior spiritual life the music is often sublime and uplifting. (SR)

Choral Evensong is a service where you can forget all your personal and worldly problems, and be absorbed by the beauty of the music and words. It can create a feeling of peace, joy, and many other such emotions, which will prepare you for life and relationships with others. It can lead to a spiritual experience, and straighten one's faith. (SR)

'Everything disappears and all I can see is music.' (Dominic, interviewee)

Critical theorists such as Theodor Adorno (2002) and Jacques Attali (1985) have argued that listening to music for distraction is regressive – a trap designed by the culture industry to offer false reassurance by replacing legitimate concerns about society with superficial distraction, in turn creating a dependency on capitalism and its consumables that compounds the entrapment (Adorno and Bernstein 1991, 47). It was for similar reasons that Karl Marx (1990, 165) famously called religion 'the opium of the people'. Evensong participants, however, did not perceive it in this way. As the comments of the third SR above indicate, the absorption in the words and music of Evensong, and the forgetting of the worldly concerns

that this permits, were instead generally regarded as allowing them to feel positive emotions that prepared and fortified them for their return to the real world and the challenges they faced therein, an opportunity to think in a different way, and an avenue to spiritual experience:

...one is comforted and strengthened by the words, and it is a spiritual experience - enhanced, of course, by the music. (SR)

A time of contemplation and worship where my soul is filled and refreshed by the offering of prayers and music. It sets me up for the week ahead... (SR)

I go for the whole musical and absorbing experience which I have loved since childhood... [It] encourages thought and meditation. (SR)

Laboratory studies have shown that cognitive distraction can play an important role in reducing people's negative emotional responses (Strick et al. 2009), and assist in their attainment of a more positive mood, even where the activity itself has no inherent positive or negative valence, such as drawing (Drake and Winner 2012). The research also suggests that the more the activity captures attentional resources, the greater the effect on negative emotions (Strick et al. 2009). This offers one explanation for Evensong participants' common report that even in the most difficult circumstances, Evensong affords emotional and cognitive sanctuary, in that they can escape or reduce negative thoughts and feelings – 'to feel better' as it was regularly put – when they are there, and, as has been discussed, often for some time later, until they discern that the next 'recharge' is required.

(iii) Meaning and purpose

Seligman's (2002) third route to wellbeing is the pursuit of a meaningful or fulfilling life, which refers to pursuing goals higher than oneself, for example through spirituality, religion, or philanthropy. Spirituality has been found of itself to be a significant contributor to wellbeing and life satisfaction (Wills 2009), and this study's findings indicate that attending Evensong affords this pursuit because for many it is an inherently spiritual and/or religious experience, and because it can give rise to transcendent forms of meaning-making, including

through noetic enlightenment and encountering the divine, as discussed in Chapters 6 and 7. Evensong is also seen by participants as a place where they can get distance and perspective from the values of contemporary society, variously described by participants as materialistic, superficial, consumerist, capitalist, selfish and dysfunctional, and encounter more meaningful and fulfilling values instead:

[I go] to step out of the negativity and dysfunctional world! To sit quietly, to fill my heart with peace, joy and love. It helps me become a committed messenger to/of and for God, and, by the way, I do not call myself “a Christian”. (SR)

It feeds me. Music allows us to see past the horror of today’s unstable world and to latch on to what might be eternal. (SR)

It creates a lovely contrast with the shallowness of the world these days. (SR)

Miles, an Anglican, was one of many participants who said he went to Evensong in part because he was looking for answers and meaning in life, and felt encouraged by being in the presence of other people whom he felt also aspired for something better:

I’m retired, I’m financially comfortable, but I’m nowhere, I’m still a lost child in the woods...All that other stuff is so superficial... and so there’s value to knowing that I’m there with other people, I’m not alone in that there’s much I don’t understand. And there’s so much about the Christian tradition that is so aspirational. It encourages me to think that somewhere on some level, the human craves to be kind and good, and compassionate and thoughtful, and caring and generous...

These ideas are explicit in Evensong’s sung texts, as well as the readings from scripture. Every day in the singing of the Magnificat, congregations hear that the Lord ‘hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent empty away’, for example. For many participants, like Finley quoted in §5.2, this represents a counter-cultural worldview that is, apart from the music, what keeps him coming back: moreover, his alignment with these values gives him a sense that at Evensong, in his words, ‘I belong without believing.’ Another SR commented similarly about the alternative perspective the words of the service invoke:

It makes me aware of my own cosmic insignificance and tears down the ego boundaries that underpin so much of our modern materialistic way of life. It is important to participate in things that can do this to us. (SR)

Evensong's ability to exist apparently outside a 'commercialised environment', as one respondent put it, by being available without charge to every participant, every day, was also important in terms of its values and meaning. This was widely perceived as a welcome disruption of economic norms, a 'rejection of the cycle of production and consumption', and valued for the alternative ideals it was perceived to model and promote in so doing.

Evensong's articulation and exemplification of values which span the continuum from traditionalist to counter-cultural – humility, modesty, admission of our fears and flaws, forgiveness, obedience, faith, the exaltation of the poor, the rejection of material goods, and redemption through reformation, for example – lend it an ideological appeal among a wide variety of participants who are able to find meaning within it that is sympathetic to their ideals. One manifestation of this is in the broad range of political identifications among regular Evensong participants. Contrary to the old saying that the Anglican church is 'the Conservative party at prayer' (Anderson 2016), and in contrast to the data that shows that this is still generally true (Clements and Spencer 2014), fewer than one in four SRs in this study (23%) identified as Conservative, only slightly more than had no political affiliation (21%), or were Liberal Democrat (19%). Those identifying most closely with the Labour party, although still in a minority, constituted 14% of the sample, with Greens comprising a further 7%.

8.3. Summary

Evensong performs an important function in affording its participants asylum. It offers respite from the demands of modern life, it provides a mental and physical escape from acutely challenging situations, emotions, and thoughts, and it is a place of retreat from the prevailing values and ideology of society. In doing so, it provides several routes to

wellbeing. It affords positive emotional experiences through separation from the source of the negative affect, through cognitive occupation and distraction, and through its promotion feelings of peace, security, stability, and belonging. It engages the mind and body by catalysing immersive and absorbing experiences, which in turn can support transcendence and positive affect. And it can assist in the pursuit of a meaningful life through religious and spiritual experience, and by presenting and performing alternative ideologies that are perceived as more meaningful than those prevailing in wider society. Notably, the study found Evensong to support a broad spectrum of alternative ideologies, with traditionalists and radical anti-capitalists both able to find comfort and potential in what they hear.

Approaching Evensong from the perspective of routes to wellbeing highlights the importance of both hedonic and eudaimonic experiences at Evensong. It also demonstrates the multiple ways that the service's capacity to afford peace and transcendence are tightly woven into participants' experiences and perceptions of wellbeing, and underscores the importance for participants of Evensong as a safe space, temporarily separated and protected from an existence in which, as one SR, quoting William Wordsworth, wrote 'The world is too much with us.'

Chapter 9. Flourishing in the asylum: performing the authentic self

In *Music Asylums* (2013, 78), DeNora argues that music can ‘refurnish the perceived world’, by re-presenting it as a place in which an individual can explore different forms of identity and selfhood that support their wellbeing. For many people, as has been shown in Chapter 8, Evensong’s refurnishing of the perceived world can provide a sense of removal, in Goffman’s terms, from the challenges of life. This study shows that for many others, however, the sanctuary that Evensong provides is more than a mechanism for the removal of a negative. Instead, or in addition, it is a sphere of action that positively affords flourishing through explorations and expressions of authentic selfhood, as DeNora proposes.

A powerful theme in the findings from this study was that for some participants, Evensong provides a valued opportunity to act in a way that feels natural, instinctive, and congruent with their beliefs, values, and identities: what is, for some, a rare opportunity to ‘be myself’. The data suggest four main dimensions of self and identity supported in this way: the introverted and introspective self; the privately religious self; the worshipping self; and the traditional Anglican identity. This chapter takes each of these four forms of selfhood in turn, and explores how Evensong supports their exploration and expression, and in doing so, affords further routes to wellbeing.

9.1. ‘At Evensong I can just sit and be me’: introversion, inner worlds, and the Evensong Persona

The frames of Evensong and Evensong persona

According to Goffman (1971), in any social situation, people seek to influence how others perceive them by deliberately endeavouring to project whatever impressions of themselves they consider to be to their best advantage. They aim to perform, or present, the best version of themselves. Philip Auslander (2006, 102) calls this performed self a ‘persona’: an identity constructed through the act, or more typically repeated acts, of performance. He links this

idea to Goffman's concept of 'frames', the socially defined rules of organization that govern an event and so allow participants to understand what is happening, and the parameters and possibilities for engaging with it (Auslander, 10, 41-42). In music, Auslander suggests, genres function as frames, so understanding the genre in which a musical performance is situated is also to understand how to participate in that performance correctly and meaningfully, and thus what kind of persona to adopt (Auslander 2020, 42). People are capable of adopting a wide variety of personae and adapting them to different frames, but people are most comfortable and most able to flourish when they can adopt a style of behaviour that accords with their own inherent personality preferences; in situations where a person is required to adopt less preferred styles of behaviour, this can be to the detriment of their wellbeing, resulting in stress and feelings of loss of control (Houghton 2005; Quenk 2000).

During Evensong, participants perform the role of congregation member: what might be called their congregant persona, or Evensong persona. The frames of Evensong mean that this performance will not normally involve any significant self-expression, interpersonal interaction, or activity that might draw attention to the self. In addition to these formal frames, and perhaps in part because of them, a notable number of participants commented that once inside Evensong, they did not feel subject to the same imperative to project impressions of themselves that they experience in the world outside Evensong. As one SR, a religious and spiritual Anglican who described the service as 'intensely personal and private', concluded 'It is my time. I go for myself. Selfish as that sounds. So much of time nowadays is busy – online and offline. At Evensong, I can just sit and be me.' Another regular attendee wrote:

... for the duration of Choral Evensong, nothing else really matters. It does not matter who you may or may not be; all are welcome, and all are included by default.

It does not matter if this is the first time you have ever attended Choral Evensong (or indeed any church service at all), or if you happen to have been attending every single day for a hundred years. It does not matter if you happen to be intimately familiar with every aspect of the liturgy, or if the entire experience is completely new and you feel rather overwhelmed and disorientated. It does not matter whether or not you are there principally out of curiosity, or as a music lover or choir aficionado or groupie or friend or relative, or as somebody with no particular interest in or love for music at all. It does not matter what your own personal religion, faith or beliefs may be, or indeed if you happen to have none (at least, for now). It does not matter if everyone else there knows exactly who you are and is on first name terms with you, or if nobody has ever seen you before or knows anything about you.

Another explained that at Evensong, 'I ... feel free to ignore the people around me and who are leading, without them becoming actually irrelevant, which is a beautiful way to worship - still together, but not intrusive on each other.' The responses therefore illustrate the appeal of this mode of conduct as a form of freedom from the normal social expectations of self-performance that is seldom available, and is valued by a variety of people in a diversity of situations. As one SR succinctly put it, '... it allows me to come just as I am and demands little of me which is profoundly liberating'.

Flourishing in introversion

This study further found that people with introvert rather than extrovert preferences in church, whether as a characteristic of their personality, of their circumstances or condition at a particular time, or as part of a theological preference, found the frames of Evensong particularly conducive to the expression and support of their preferred forms of selfhood. For several participants who described themselves as shy, introverted, introspective or as possessing similar personality traits, the lack of active and interactive participation at Evensong was of paramount importance:

I am an introvert, and Evensong allows for a fully immersive worship experience that does not force extroversion (many evangelical services ...are very obviously "audience participation" events, which makes me uncomfortable) (SR)

The comments of another SR who found more participatory rites 'just anathema to my introversion', point to the additional value of knowing that the delivery or the success of the

service does not depend on your own performance: ‘Evensong seemed, like the cathedral, like God, that it would happen with or without me, and I could come to it in any frame of mind.’ Others appreciated the privacy of the rite, and the attendant certainty that they would not be required discuss their faith, in contrast to some non-Prayer Book services where congregations said they felt an expectation that they should express their beliefs and spiritual experiences openly. As one Anglican SR put it, ‘I love the combination of deep privacy and moments of personal prayer and a feeling of anonymity (no [sign of the] peace, no communion)’.⁴⁴ Closely linked to these sentiments, and often overlapping with them, was the appreciation of not feeling compelled or ‘coerced’ to adopt an artificially extrovert or gregarious persona while attending Evensong:

[In my parish] which offers a modern, evangelical style of worship, I cannot feel part of church anymore. There seems to be no depth, no peace and quiet, just a constant requirement to be jolly and love Jesus. I feel coerced into jollity. (SR)

In some cases, this derived from the participant’s discomfort in adopting a manner or mode of behaviour that did not come naturally to them. For others, it was the result of a belief that worship should be solemn and serious, and that Evensong is a service that ‘takes God seriously’. Several SRs contrasted this with ‘happy clappy’ services – the term they used to describe Anglican services that take a more participatory approach, using contemporary liturgy and a livelier musical style – and said that they go to Evensong because it is not like that, or, in one case, was ‘a refuge’ from it. Others said that they go to Evensong especially when they are unhappy, stressed, or anxious, and did not want, or feel able to enact false cheerfulness at those times. As one wrote, at Evensong, ‘You can sit and be happy (or sad) with your own thoughts’. For all of these reasons, many participants appreciated the freedom Evensong affords to focus productively on their inner world, their private prayers, or their

⁴⁴ In the Common Worship communion service, congregants are invited to offer one another a sign of peace. This generally involves the congregation shaking hands with one another, and saying ‘peace be with you’.

relationship with God without having to express it outwardly: ‘it allows me to channel whatever emotions I am feeling without having to talk about them’ as one SR wrote; another said, ‘I can commune quietly with God without the expectation of socialising’. This, as one SR wrote, creates an ‘unmatched’ space for deep reflection.

The opportunity to engage in deep reflection was identified as an important factor in the decision to go to Evensong by more than 80% of SRs, consistent with previous studies of cathedral visitors (Holmes and Kautzer 2013, 42). To connect with a spiritual part of themselves (65%) and the style of the worship (62%) were also widely cited motivations for attending.⁴⁵ Central to Evensong’s affordance of this deep reflection, as discussed in Chapter 7, is its music. In this context, music has the dual function of providing a fruitful affective and cognitive background that supports deep thinking, and creating a setting which militated against congregation members talking to one another or interrupting one another’s thoughts, because protocol and social conditioning precludes it, and the music provides attentional focus. As these two SRs wrote in response to the question ‘why you go to Evensong nowadays’, both are key:

The ability to be quiet and thoughtful without outside intrusion (e.g., noisy children). The power of music to reach the emotions and thoughts. The ability to be alone and not interrupted...

The music serves not to supplant, but to enhance, one’s experience of the prayer and the spoken word elements of the service... the mind is allowed and encouraged to open itself up to God.

The normative Evensong persona, then – the one congregation members are influenced to adopt through a variety of mechanisms including socialisation, explicit instruction, and tacit cues – is self-contained, reflective, inward looking, and engaged in deep contemplation, uninterrupted by thoughts about self-presentation, and not engaged in social interaction. In

⁴⁵ By contrast, only 32% found the company of others an attraction, and only 28% were motivated by the desire to be part of a community.

the IES, participants' efforts to adhere to this model were evident in their hushed tones, the reticence of some to speak at all during quieter parts of the service – 'I ... feel that if I speak I'll disturb them' as Scott said, referring to the choir – and their endeavours to avoid even looking at the other (virtual) participants:

If I look straight ahead or look across, it almost feels like I'm invading the privacy of the other congregation members directly opposite... It's a different thing to watch the choir and not participate than it is to watch another congregational member who it's obvious that you're on the same terms with. (Josh, IES commentary)

Several IES participants also articulated discomfort at the end of the service, explaining that it was often difficult to know when to leave, because they did not wish to interrupt or disrupt the experience of other congregants:

You don't know how long the organ voluntary is going to last. You might want to leave, but then the person next to you is listening, and you don't want to disturb them. (Mason, IES commentary)

In a study of concert going, which shares with Evensong the behavioural expectations of stillness and silence, Gross (2013) found that some participants felt oppressed by these conventions and wanted to subvert or overcome them. Among the Evensong participants who took part in or were observed during this study, not only was there no evidence of this, but the opposite was true: participants experienced the constraints as desirable, safe, and thus freeing:

Evensong forces me to sit still for 30-60 minutes and listen: to the service, to myself, to God. It's often hard. But I feel better for it. On some occasions it just feels wonderful to be carried by the service: I don't have to be the one making decisions or making things happen. I can just be.

Through its music, its concert-like frame, and its implicit and explicit codes of conduct, Evensong therefore affords experiences of self-containment and introspection that are regarded not as inconvenient controls to be challenged, but due to the purpose of the event and the objectives of its attendees, as a beneficial and intrinsic dimension of the service that

are conducive to the exploration and expression of identities, and dimension of identity, for which there can be little opportunity in wider everyday life.

9.2. Religious affiliation: ‘Prefer not to say’?

Religious affiliation is an important part of a person’s identity (Halsall 2006, 334), but it is not always an easy aspect of identity to perform in Britain today. Studies show that people with religious faith are more likely to be thought of as irrational and dogmatic (Voas and Bruce 2019), intellectually inferior and lacking scientific competence (Barnes et al. 2020), and as holding anachronistic and anti-liberal ideas (Moulin 2016). Two thirds of British people think religion brings more conflict than peace, and one in five have no confidence ‘at all’ in religious institutions (Voas and Bruce 2019, 22). Moreover, abuse scandals and the Church of England’s position on matters including equality and sexuality have alienated many (A. Brown and Woodhead 2016). Recent research has confirmed both the damage to the reputation of the Church that has resulted, and the harm suffered by some UK Christians due to contemporary attitudes towards their religion (Moulin 2016; Van Cappellen and LaBouff 2020). It has also evidenced a resulting impulse to self-suppress or conceal the religious aspects of their identity and their religious practices (e.g., Ipgrave 2012; Uzarevic and Saroglou 2020). Former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams (2015) has observed that British tolerance for Christian faith relies on its adherents keeping matters of faith ‘outside the public square’ – what Bruce and Voas (2007) call ‘be[ing] peculiar in private’.⁴⁶ The loosening of the link between a positive faith identity, the feeling of belonging to a religion, and participating in religious practices – what Davie has theorised as ‘believing without belonging’ (Davie 1994), and ‘vicarious religion’ (Davie 2015) – further

⁴⁶ See for example the experience of UK Member of Parliament Tim Farron (BBC 2017)

problematizes the question of how to present and explain involvement in faith-based activities to others.

All of these concerns and complexities were evident in this study's data. Even though the Experiences of Evensong survey was anonymous, three per cent of respondents (53 people) said that they would prefer not to answer Q21, which asked which of six statements best described their religious beliefs. Several respondents made clear that their attendance of Evensong was not an endorsement of the values of the Church as an institution, and that they viewed it as separate from what they variously called 'the doubts and anxieties I feel about the church as an institution and the doctrine I can't wholly accept', 'the political trappings of the institutional church', and the wider Christian church's 'socially regressive and conservative' values. It was also common across the study for participants to present their religious beliefs or affiliations as a dynamic, evolving, nuanced process of questioning, and to challenge the notion that they could be a complete ideology that fitted into a fixed category. Thus, while it was not unusual for participants in this study who identified as atheists to suppose that participants who identified as Christian or Anglican believed what the Church teaches, and to express perplexity as to how they could do so – one commented, on the subject of the Creed, for example, 'I find every sentence completely bonkers, and I do not understand how highly intelligent people can actually say this and believe it' – it was also common for participants who said they had a Christian faith affiliation to clarify that they did not have the all-encompassing or unquestioning belief that some outside the Church might suppose, as these comments made in response to the Experiences of Evensong survey indicate:

By the way, your question about doubt was, I thought, a bit narrow. Faith is impossible without doubt. Doubt spurs faith's creativity... (SR, Protestant)

I was unable to answer Questions 20 or 21 because I have no idea what you might think the words "spiritual", "religious" and "God" might mean. A discussion of

what I might think these words mean would be very lengthy indeed, and I might keep changing my mind. (SR, Anglican).

One interviewee, in answer to my enquiry ‘If someone asks if you are you a Christian, what do you say’, replied that it depended what was meant by that, and, alluding to the complexity of the questions implied by the enquiry, suggested that it would be interesting if one day the congregation could be instructed to say only the parts of the Creed with which they agreed, because ‘there are certain lines ... which no-one will say’, and others where the response would be ‘I don’t know, maybe ... probably, possibly’. Another interviewee said he did not interpret the Creed literally, but treated it as ‘metaphor’ and ‘figurativeness’; while another participant, who identified as an Anglican who believes in God, suggested that this statement of belief was a part of the service with which ‘we all struggle’. Furthermore, among survey respondents, one in five Evensong-attending SRs who self-identified as Anglican said that they did not believe in God, did not know, were in doubt, or believed in some sort of spirit, but not a personal God (20%, $n = 318$).

The findings of this study suggest two ways in which Evensong provides asylum for those who have some faith or religious belief and would like to practise it, while at the same time, preferring ‘not to say’ publicly – in words or actions – what that might be. The first is through the plausible and socially acceptable alternative explanation for attendance that its world-class music provides. That this is, in itself, considered a sufficient and legitimate explanation for attendance is evidenced in the comments of the non-religious participants who cited it, as illustrated by these three SRs, all of whom identified as ‘neither spiritual nor religious’:

[I go to Evensong]

For the music primarily and the timeless words (certainly not religion)

For the music and BCP liturgy. I have no religious belief.

Mainly for the music!

George Lipsitz (1994, 71) has suggested that seemingly frivolous acts of musical entertainment enable people – ‘members of aggrieved communities’ – to make serious ‘covert claims’ about their status and to express otherwise-suppressed aspects of their identity, that might be dangerous to present by more direct means. He argues that for many musical consumers, these claims exist in parallel with the traditional and overt functions of the music, including diversion and exoticism, and so create a ‘multiply lateral dialogue’: one that can be engaged with on several different levels. This, he proposes, enables people to practise identities and social relations not permissible in more open ways, while also creating a concrete social site where real social relations are enacted and envisioned (Lipsitz 1994, 12, 137).

There is a widely held view that there is a large cohort of people who treat Choral Evensong as a free concert, without having a religious or spiritual motivation. As one Anglican SR put it, reflecting the views of many others, ‘I think those who come for the music and historic experience outweigh or equal the believers in the congregation’ (see also, e.g., BBC Radio 1993; Brett 2016; McGeary 2021; Temperley 2013, §8). Another Anglican SR, a trained musician with a religious faith, who wrote that Evensong ‘leaves me on a spiritual high’, hypothesised that the popularity of Evensong was attributable to ‘visitors [who] come to hear music that is after all free to them with no cost whatsoever. And it’s music performed to a very high standard’.

The theory that the majority of today’s Evensong congregations are not there for religious or spiritual reasons was not, however, borne out by this study’s survey data. None of the 2,030 respondents said that they attended only for music, as measured by no SR selecting only any of the three musical options, or any of the three musical options plus the ‘no cost’ option as factors of importance in their decision to attend Evensong (Q9). Furthermore, while this could be explained by their enjoyment of other aspects of the

experience – the ritual, the history, the building, for example – in non-religious and non-spiritual ways, among the survey respondents who attended Evensong at least once per year, it was notable that just six per cent ($n = 123$) said that they did not belong to any faith or religion, only ten per cent said they were neither religious nor spiritual, and 78 per cent knew or believed in God or some sort of spirit.⁴⁷ One possible explanation for the lack of evidence in support of the free concert hypothesis, therefore, is that at least some of the Evensong attendees who have been assumed by others to be there for the music are in fact there for other reasons. This possibility is supported by the emphasis many participants placed on not having to explain their motives or beliefs at Evensong. One Anglican SR, for example, who believes in God and identifies as spiritual but not religious, and who goes to Evensong because he finds it ‘the best way to be closer to God’, said that he was attracted to the service by ‘the ability to be anonymous...there is no undue pressure on one to explain or justify one’s presence.’ Another called Evensong ‘Anonymous worship. Pop in and out’.

A further way in which Evensong obscures participants’ religious affiliation is in configuring them as listeners, which liberates them from the active, visible – and potentially revealing – participation in the ritual. Some participants contrasted this with the Communion service, now the main service in many parish churches, in which confirmed members of the Church are differentiated from others by their taking of the eucharistic bread and wine. Maya, for example, who identifies as a Christian but has not been confirmed, explained that she always feels ‘slightly excluded’ at communion services, as if she is not really part of ‘the club’. She prefers to go to Evensong, where all congregational participants perform the same role – that of listener – rendering membership or otherwise of the club invisible and irrelevant. Tom, also a Christian, started going to Evensong for similar reasons. He is a

⁴⁷ When those who also have roles in the church were removed from the data, the statistics were substantially the same: 7%, 10% and 78% respectively.

confirmed member of the Church, but his parish church told him that because he was gay, he could only take communion if he undertook to remain celibate. He began attending cathedral Evensong services instead, because he felt that his sexuality was as of little relevance there as it was to him: ‘a null, it’s like a zero... It’s like a morally zero fact about me.’ Another SR put it like this:

I like the fact that [Evensong] is open to all....it provides an opportunity for all people to come to church without the obligation to actively participate, and not to be excluded from the central act, as is the case for Eucharistic services.

For Alistair, who gave up attending communion services in early adulthood because his changing beliefs meant that he felt hypocritical attending, Evensong remained a regular practice:

... I gave up going to communion services, but I retained an attachment to Evensong. Evensong is the great agnostic service, in a way, isn’t it? It’s the one that people go to, there might be something in it, but they don’t want to go too far. [Laughs]

That belief or faith affiliation cannot necessarily be inferred from attendance at Evensong was emphasised in the IES by speculation among participants about the motivations, religious beliefs, and faith identities of the other attendees, and by participants’ willingness to bring non-believing friends to the service on the basis that it is accessible to all:

I wonder how many believe that stuff. (Darren, IES, after the Creed is said)

Some people are so sincerely listening [to the bible reading]. I wonder how many are really feeling it sincerely. (Josh, IES)

I am most likely to invite my friends along to an Evensong service than any other type of service, because they can be enjoyed for the music alone but can also introduce nonbelievers to the beautiful space of a historical building associated with religion. Evensong is uniquely accessible. (SR)

Evensong feels more accessible than (for example) Communion, due to the music, the timing and (since I am not a believer) the absence of Sacraments. (SR)

‘Nobody asked me why I was there’

Another cohort of Evensong attendees who find enrichment in the service and value being able to participate without discussing their beliefs includes some of those of non-

Anglican faiths. Jay, for example, a Hindu who attends both the temple and Evensong, described the service as an experience that immediately resonated with him:

[It] has some things in common with Hinduism... music is such an integral part of Hinduism and Hindu culture, and Evensong for me was the whole idea of preparing for the evening, so there was a meditative angle to Evensong, there was the getting ready to settle yourself for the evening, getting ready to think about the day, reflecting on the day... I mean I love all of that, and of course in conjunction with that was also the music, and I just loved hearing choirs and I appreciated the tradition of choral music...

Jay explained that in Hinduism, 'we just see the church as another place that offers you the opportunity to meditate or to pray, it's just another way to expend your spiritual energies...' After attending several cathedral Evensongs, which he found inclusive, Jay started going to Evensong at a parish church. He said, however, that some of the other parishioners seemed shocked that he was not a Christian and could not understand why he did not want to convert to Christianity, and he began, he said, to pick up 'a signal that "you're not a Christian so you're not quite part of us"'. He contrasted this experience with attending Evensong in the cathedral:

I almost felt anonymous in the cathedral, and I actually quite liked the fact that I was anonymous in the cathedral, and nobody asked me why I was there or what I was doing there, or put any pressure on me to become a Christian.

It is often proposed that one reason that the ability of cathedrals and Evensong to afford anonymity is important is the protection that this offers to people exploring a religious identity or 'finding their way back into the faith' (Holmes and Kautzer 2013, 28; see also, e.g., The Grubb Institute and Theos 2012). The accounts of many SRs supported this: comments like 'I have found it an important way of reconnecting with God after many years spent away in a personal wilderness', in part because of 'not feeling pressured to "join in" until I was ready', as one wrote, were not unusual.

Importantly, however, these and the other data also show that anonymity is also valued by another group of people, who, like Jay, are certain that they do not want to become

a Christian, who do not fall into any of the conventional cathedral visitor categories of ‘worshipper’, ‘pilgrim’, or ‘tourist’, but who nonetheless find spiritual meaning in the service, and value not having to explain or justify their presence in terms of any of the established belief or visitor-typology categories. That Evensong can offer this inclusivity to people of all faiths and none was a view promoted and widely held by Anglican regular attenders, as explained by this SR:

Some people attend ... as part of their worship of a God (not defined) and they support the church with time, money, and commitment. But nevertheless, they may not hold with much of the detailed doctrine in those words, despite apparently professing them - virgin birth, bodily resurrection, the fall...etc. That might seem like hypocrisy, but there are wider cultural and spiritual dynamics at play here... So, yes there is something sentimental about Choral Evensong, but it is not daft sentiment: intelligent humans who have some spiritual self-awareness and belief in a God at a most basic level, can engage here - largely without judgement and demands being made of them, and with integrity.

A further cohort of participants said that they began attending Evensong as non-Christians and for non-faith-based reasons and subsequently found some form of faith as a consequence of their participation: one, for example, reported that Evensong

...brought me back to church after thinking I was an agnostic for too many years. The music attracted me, and then I wanted to know more, and now participate fully.

Another SR wrote that they first went to Evensong when they went to study in a college that had a chapel, ‘because the chapel was there in our community. I wasn’t a churchgoer at all before I went. Now I’m a Vicar.’ For this reason, Evensong is sometimes called ‘a gateway drug’ to religion (e.g., B. Lewis 2021; Potemra 2015; Smith 2021). As Michael Potemra (2015) elaborates, ‘people fall in love with the beauty in worship, and later discover that the beauty is a channel for even greater realities.’

Through its perceived socially ambiguous status as musical performance, cultural occasion, and religious event (and notwithstanding its explicit function as a religious service of worship), and its congregation members’ configuration as listeners to, rather than actors in,

the ritual, Evensong therefore affords the freedom for private, covert, or internal experience, self-expression, and experimentation. These are valued aspects of the service, and an important dimension of the experience of it for many participants across the spectrum of faith, belief, and religious affiliation.

9.3. Faith: a private performance

Ernest Becker (1971) has argued that our most basic drive is for a sense of identity and self-worth, and that the attainment of this depends, in part, on the roles available to us. In addition to offering an opportunity to conceal or subvert indications of faith identity or to practise them in private, Evensong also offers opportunities for participants who wish to enact and express their faith to do so in a public, but subtly coded, way.

‘My love of Christ in ritual form’

Before the prayers that follow the Creed, cathedral service sheets often advise the congregation that they should ‘all sit or kneel’, requiring participants to choose one of these two options.⁴⁸ The choice participants make can be a socially significant one. For committed Christians like Callum, kneeling in prayer is a mechanism for performing his faith that in itself is powerfully affective as a refuge and an expression of identity:

[Callum IES commentary, prayers being said]

In this moment I would usually be kneeling, which always feels a little bit like curling up in the skirts of some much larger person. Because you always think of kneeling as, like, a statement of abjection and of course it is that, but it’s also like taking shelter ... you feel like you’re carving out a little hollow for yourself inside the music and just sitting there and confessing your need.

As Callum suggests, as ‘a statement of abjection’, kneeling in public is also highly symbolic, and as a symbol, like the bowing, genuflecting, and crossing ritual gestures of which the

⁴⁸ The Evening Prayer rubric states that the congregation shall be ‘all devoutly kneeling’, but the option to sit is now customarily included in service sheets.

liturgy makes no mention, but which are visibly publicly enacted by some attendees, it is attended to and read by others.

Bouma ((1992:110) in Halsall 2006, 334) defines religious affiliation as ‘a useful social category giving some indication of the cultural background and general orienting values of a person’. More recent research (e.g., Francis and Robbins 2014) has found that the relationship between religious practices, beliefs, and affiliation is complex and cannot be assumed to be one of direct correlation, but that such gestures do attract attention and observers do seek to read them and to draw conclusions from them. One illustration of this is offered by the gaze tracking data from the IES. When the closing organ voluntary was playing and congregants were beginning to leave the chapel, the gaze fixations show that the majority of IES participants were drawn to watch each of the other congregation members as they got up and left the chapel. Figure 30, for example, shows the way in which gaze directions coalesce on one of the congregants, who, in the process of leaving the chapel, bows to the altar. Figure 31 shows how attention has re-dispersed fifteen seconds later, when the participant has left. This attentional focus is reflected in participants’ comments, which included the observation ‘...so sincere. He really believes’. Throughout the service, other bodily cues were also read for indications of belief or affiliation by the IES participants:

I’m just watching this man... He’s clearly a churchgoer because he bowed his head at the Gloria. (Neville, IES commentary, during reading)

Not all of the choir back row say the Creed at all. Lots don’t communicate [take Holy Communion]. It’s good that they have that choice, [that the choir is not] restricted to people of faith... (Gabe, IES commentary, during Creed)

Figure 30. Gaze fixations of IES participants at 41m 51s as congregation member leaves.

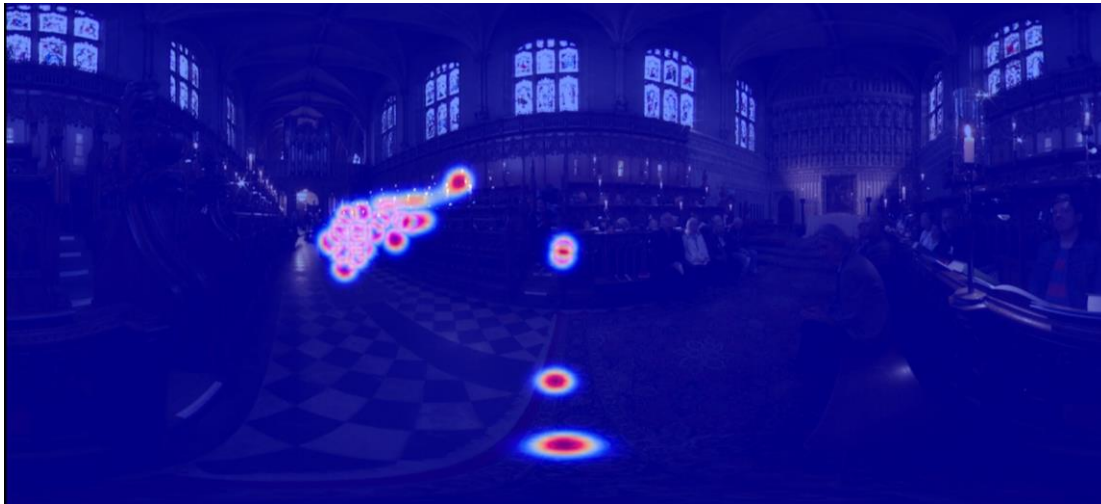
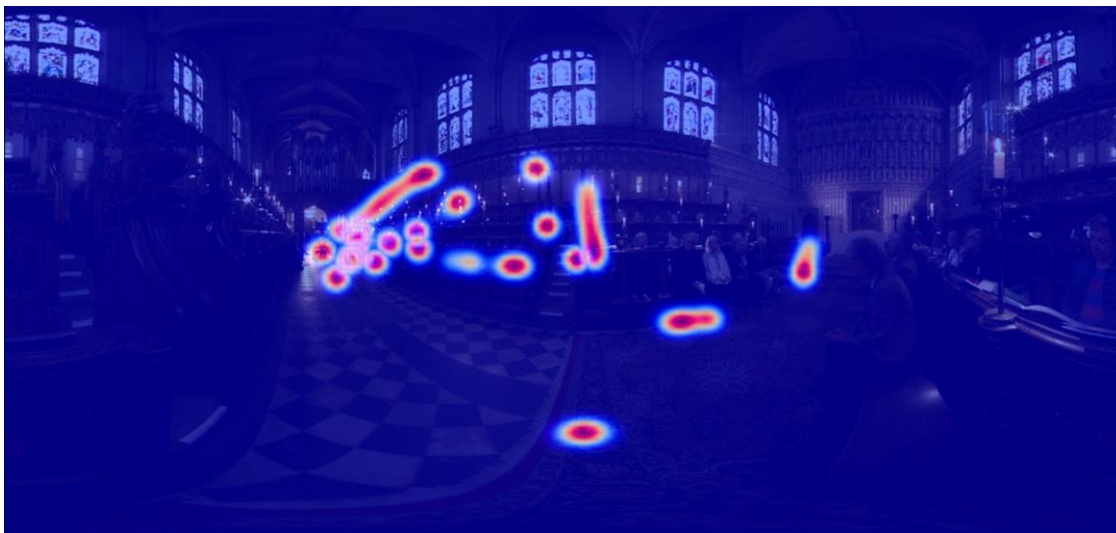


Figure 31. Gaze fixations of IES participants at 42m 04 after congregation member has left.



Durkheim (2008) maintained that every religion is made up of ‘intellectual conceptions and ritual practices’, and that rituals are an enactment of beliefs. As the above comments indicate, this view is widely shared, as people seek to read ritual participation as an indicator of belief. This underlines another of Evensong’s functions as a ‘safe’ place – a term used by several participants, in a variety of contexts – as one in which religious identity can be rehearsed and performed. Its liturgy offers substantial freedom to deploy subtle signifiers, the coded nature of these signifiers rendering them only fully readable by initiated others, and their ambiguity and ritualistic character affording the performer the possibility of masking religious intent.

Since social identity is not only articulated but reflexively constructed through performance (J. Butler 1988; DeNora 2000), the formative function of performative ritual is theoretically obvious, and empirically evidenced in Evensong participants' narratives. Tom, for example, characterised saying the Creed at Evensong as:

...maybe the most authentic I feel in my whole life. It's perhaps the only time that I'm not actually performing. Hmm [laugh]. It's maybe the one marker of identity that I'm completely comfortable just claiming.

Several SRs wrote of the importance of ritual participation in expressing their faith, including one who began attending Evensong 'three years ago when I realised that I had to declare my love of Christ in a ritual form'. Another felt 'very strongly' that 'as an Anglican Christian and the identity which comes with that', it was vital to engage in worship 'to grow and develop as children of God'. A third, writing in the lockdown survey, said that she had been surprised to find that 'not being in church has affected my sense of self and identity. I hadn't realised how much it meant to my idea of who I am'.

As Daniel B. Lee (2005, 6) has written, however, enacting ritual does not require belief, only knowledge of 'the right moves', and the ability to deploy them at 'the right moments'. In the same way that ritual can be deployed in identity work, for self-expression and communication, its enactment can therefore also be used to disrupt, conceal, or afford space to engage in experiences, play with identities, and attain or retain acceptance in communities of belief into which the actor may not be, or may not consider themselves a member. Evensong can be a fertile environment for this sort of activity, because 'no questions are asked', as one SR put it. Leslie, for example, has been a regular Evensong attender at the same church for some years. He explained in our discussion that he finds the Evensong environment a benign one, and one that conditions the ritual participation through which he 'accesses' the service effectively, affording him meaningful, moving, or enriching experiences. He went on to explain that it was, in his words, therefore, his 'sort of dirty

secret' that he was 'not actually a believer'. Essentially, his ritual participation in Evensong, engaged in for non-religious reasons, had also facilitated his 'passing' as a member of the church community (Goffman 1963), in that it had concealed his non-believer status, and enabled him to become a member of the community without making any explicit personal declaration of faith (or its absence).

9.4. Faith and identity: traditional Anglicanism and Englishness

By contrast, for another cohort of Evensong attendees, rather than affording an opportunity to obscure or subvert perceptions of their faith identity, the service offers a forum for a public expression of another aspect of their self-conception: their identity as traditional Anglicans, with the 1662 or 1928 Prayer Books central to their conception of that identity. Now that the main, and often only, Sunday service in most parishes is the Eucharist communion service (Dowling 2006), which generally follows a modern rite, Morning Prayer (Mattins) and Evening Prayer are not widely performed. For some who consider the Book of Common Prayer to be 'a part of my heritage as an Anglican Christian', as one SR wrote, cathedral-style Evensong is the only available service consistent with their conception of what it is to be Anglican.

...the opportunity to affirm and claim and celebrate my Anglican identity and heritage is ...very important. (SR)

It often feels like the last refuge of the Church of England I have known and loved always. (SR)

I go to Choral Evensong because I am a proud High Churchman (SR)

Dozens of respondents mentioned the Prayer Book specifically as an important attraction of Evensong, and 72% ($n = 1,416$) of Evensong-attending SRs identified its traditional language and liturgy as a factor of importance in their attendance. Some of these were older churchgoers, who had been brought up with the 'fully choral service' which had been the model for parish churches from the mid-nineteenth century until alternative liturgies were widely adopted in the latter part of the twentieth century (Rainbow 2001; Temperley 2013

§8), but others were younger participants, for whom Evensong was their first or only experience of the Church, often at university, interweaving ideas of Anglicanism inextricably with attendance at the service.

Psychological research has found that autobiographical memories cluster around certain types of event: first-time experiences; events that took place between the ages of 10 and 30; and self-defining experiences, and experiences of new self-image formation (for a review see Rathbone, Moulin, and Conway 2008, 1403). It is also thought that this effect is bi-directional, in that not only do these memories have a powerful effect on identity, associating the self with the context of a specific reality, but also that identity controls the way in which memories are retrieved, prioritising those that support self-conception. Consistent with this idea, many SRs contextualised their contemporary experiences of Evensong with earlier identities and past experiences of the service, including, for example, as a chorister (47% of SRs sang in a church choir as a child), or an undergraduate:

Why do you go to Evensong nowadays?

Spirituality of the music and familiar words from when I was a chorister as a child. (SR)

To engage with hopeful memories and show affirmation of my belief in the context of the Christian Faith as accessed through evensong where my father was a chorister. (SR)

When and why did you first go to Choral Evensong?

Aged 12 as a new boarder at [a historic English school] in 1950 – and fell in love with the music and ambience. (SR)

As a student in Oxford... The experience of being in the darkened cathedral lit by candles was amazing. Later...my sons were choristers... (SR)

For some, closely linked to the idea of traditional Anglican identity is the idea of traditional English identity. ‘Englishness’ is an ill-defined concept, traditionally conjoined with, or subordinate to ideas of Britishness, and lacking in clear cultural signifiers (Kumar 2010; Dorling and Tomlinson 2019; Gaston and Hilhorst 2018, 103; Gott 1989). Anglicanism and

cathedrals are two of the few. Foreign tourists I met told me that tourist guides in their home countries advertise English cathedrals as a quintessential experience of England (e.g., Allitt and The Teaching Company LLC 2020), and in the Netherlands, Anglican Evensong – which has grown rapidly as a popular religious/cultural event,⁴⁹ is sometimes known as ‘the English disease’ or ‘Cathedralitis Britannicus’ (Rijken 2020, 39). For many English participants in the UK, Evensong also represents an English national and cultural identity based on art, music, literature, language, and history. This is an Englishness seen to be epitomised by the ‘beautiful’, ‘traditional’ language of the 1662 Prayer Book – as it was often described; exemplified in the canticles and chants composed by the canon of English church musicians; enshrined in Anglicanism’s perceived founding ethos of seriousness and self-effacing excellence; and enacted in and exemplified by the sung service:

Choral Evensong is quintessentially English - something I would take people to, to understand what is unique about the country. (SR)

...a counter-cultural affirmation of traditional English churchmanship. (SR)

Evensong...carries a profound sense of cultural identity with the English-speaking world. (SR)

According to Robert Young (2008, 232), at the end of the nineteenth century, Englishness was defined more as a set of ‘transportable’ values, that could be relocated or recreated anywhere, than as a collection of inherent cultural associations or characteristics. Among the values he enumerates are language and literature, justice, order, morality, and Anglican religion. One hundred years later, for many of the Evensong attendees who spoke about Englishness, it was these values, more than cultural connotations, with which English identity is associated, and which they considered to be embodied in the Evensong service. This was true both for people who identified as English, and those of other nationalities. One visiting tourist put it like this:

⁴⁹ See Rijken (2020).

My view of Englishness is something that's more old than new... It's tradition, it's doing what you're supposed to do and not complaining. Remember the Moorgate tube disaster? It's the people lying there, just waiting, and not complaining, because maybe somebody else is hurt more and I'm not going to scream or yell, "Me first, me first." ...As [a visitor] it's hard to engage in Englishness much. You can't exactly join a bridge club or get an allotment. But you can go into a pub and chat with people. And you can go to Evensong.

Some with an insider perspective on English culture expressed similar perceptions. Claire, a member of the Church of England, for example, considers herself 'blessed to be English', and described how, for example, when she goes to Evensong even in an unfamiliar cathedral, she feels a powerful sense of belonging 'because it's my church, my religion, my country'.

When asked what it meant to her to be English, she too focused upon traditional values and behaviour, and what she called 'old England ... how it was in the fifties and sixties ... that was a nice time, [when] it was calm and happy without all this horribleness happening now'.

Particularly notable were the number of participants who saw a distinction between the English identity they felt was represented at Evensong, with which they identified, and the values represented in the Church and English society more widely, which they resisted.

Daryl, who identifies specifically as English rather than British, made a distinction between English nationalism – an 'imperialistic, arrogant, colonial view of the world' which he 'absolutely reject[s]' – and what he termed 'progressive patriotism', a different, values-based conception of Englishness which he also tied closely to the traditions of the Church:

I think there is a progressive patriotism that roots you in the traditions of the country. And I do think that the best traditions of the Church are part of that. The Church has got a very radical history which is forgotten, a very positive, socialistic, collectivist tradition, which is airbrushed out... I think Evensong and the Book of Common Prayer are part of that intangible cultural heritage of Englishness. And I don't think we do enough to recognise that.

The tension between participants' own moral values, and those perceived to be held by the Church as an institution in relation to people who are not white, male, and heterosexual, was a recurring theme, mainly because Evensong was regarded as a way of practising Anglicanism without subscribing to the contemporary Church's doctrines. One SR, a

‘questioning, doubting, liberal-minded Christian’, who described Evensong as a deep, emotional, ‘transporting’ experience, explained that in the service,

I feel as if I am in the presence of a truth that has been expressed down the ages...
It is a comforting, safe, place, away from the doubts and anxieties I feel about the church as an institution and the doctrine I can’t wholly accept.

Evensong was described similarly by other participants as one of ‘eternal values’ that transcend both the fashions and politics of the day, and the politics of the institutional Church. Through this sense of timelessness, embodied in its texts, music, ritual and values, Evensong simultaneously, therefore, affords the expression both of a highly traditional, even conservative cultural Englishness that looks to the past, and of a progressive, inclusive, collectivist Englishness that reflects the identities and ideologies of a vast range of participants who do not see themselves represented in the wider Church, and often in wider society.

9.5. Summary

Evensong’s role as a sanctuary extends beyond creating a retreat from the outside world. It also re-presents that world in a new way, that allows the exploration, expression, and development of dimensions of self and identity that can, in everyday life, be difficult to perform. Music is an important catalyst for these generative activities. Through musical sound, Evensong affords a space in which introversion and introspection can become platforms for flourishing. As a musical event, it affords the concealment of religious affiliation and the obscuring of faith identities, while at the same time, supporting the expression of those same identities in a variety of subtle ways, thus providing a safe space for the articulation of a range of spiritual and religious selves. And as a musical experience, it affords an encounter with a living manifestation of a positively-perceived faith, religion, and English identity that challenges the discourse – and realities – of everyday life, and in doing

so, nurtures beneficial self-conceptions and the hope that an alternative, better world is possible.

Chapter 10. Discussion, conclusions and implications: what is 'really going on' here?⁵⁰

The only true voyage... would be not to visit strange lands but to possess other eyes, to see the universe through the eyes of another, of a hundred others, to see the hundred universes that each of them sees, that each of them is...

Proust (1996, 291)

This study began with three questions: why do people today go to Evensong? What do they experience when they are there? And how does the music get into the action? This chapter sets out how this study's findings answer these questions, their connections to and development of existing scholarship, and their wider implications and ramifications. It is organised into two parts. The first draws together the findings set out in the thesis's three sections and briefly summarises them in the context of the research questions, aims and objectives. The second assesses the contribution of the study by reference to the existing literature, identifies its implications, and suggests some potential directions for future research.

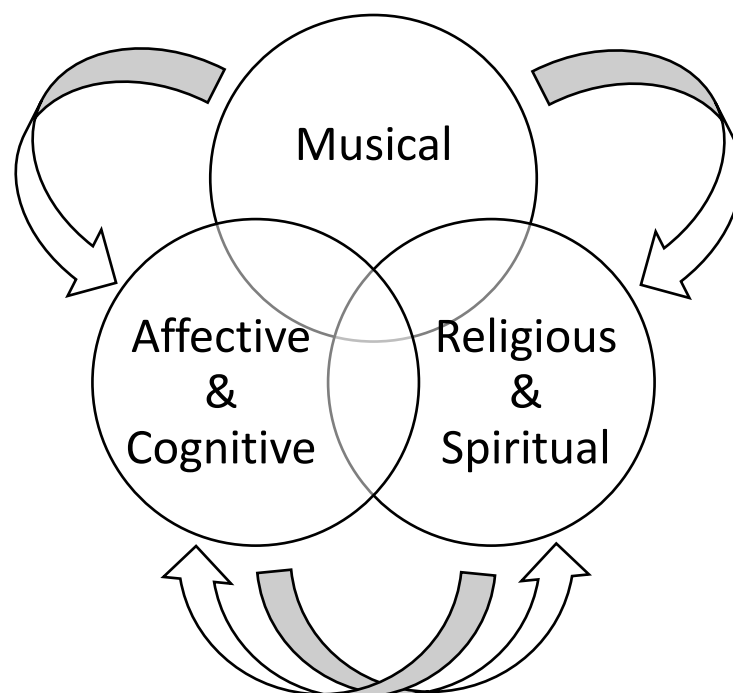
10.1. Addressing the research questions

This study provides the first empirically evidenced and systematic musicological account of why people go to Evensong in Britain today, what they experience when they are there, and the role of music in those processes. As to why people go to Evensong, four overarching findings emerged. First, the majority of people are motivated by reasons that are primarily musical, religious/spiritual, or affective/cognitive. For the majority of attendees, at least two if not all three of these motivations are engaged, and usually in combination with one or more of a plurality of other reasons. These include motivations that can be classed as cultural, aesthetic, nostalgic, autobiographical, dutiful, experiential, curious, and habitual. Second,

⁵⁰ 'What's really going on here?' (Small 1998, 17)

while these three central categories of motivation tend to be a constant at the centre of each individual's motivations for attendance, the additional, peripheral motivations vary inter- and intra-subjectively: each participant has their own personal combination of motivations which are not necessarily identical in content, combination, or weighting to those of any other participant, and these motivations vary from day to day, and over the course of each participant's life. Third, these motivations are characteristically inter-related. Attendees who cite music as a principal motivation, for example, frequently do so in part because of the affective and cognitive transformations the music affords, or because of the ways in which music supports prayerfulness, worship, or spirituality. Musical objectives were shown to be both an end in themselves and a means to other ends (religious, spiritual, affective, cognitive), but while religious and affective experiences and practices are inextricably linked with musical experiences, religious and affective motivations were seldom a means to achieving a musical end (see Figure 32).

Figure 32. The core motivations for attending Evensong and their relationship



Fourth, the study found that while the motivations and context for Evensong attendance vary between visits and over the longer term, and that attendance might be spontaneous or planned, regular or sporadic, casual, disciplined, occasional or routine, the desire and commitment to attend were characteristically strongly held. For this study's participants, going to Evensong is rarely an indifferent act or one considered of little consequence. It is not akin to attending a concert for entertainment, a historical building for awe or education, or a meditation class for relaxation. It is a matter of serious importance both at the time of attending and in its place in the life and identities of those who go. It is expected to afford encounters of profound meaning, feeling, and transformation. It is considered by many a necessity, and its value, significance, and power for those who attend are substantial.

What people experience when they are at Evensong was found to be closely linked to their motivations through a process of intention, action, practice, experience, and expectation. Three types of experience were found to be particularly prevalent: experiences of increased tranquillity, peace and calm; experiences of transcendence; and experiences of sanctuary, asylum, and a sense of retreat from the world. Increased tranquillity was shown to be an almost universal experience at Evensong, and, for the first time, it was demonstrated in an experimental setting that engaging in Evensong has a measurable physiological calming effect, as evidenced through the finding that participants' heart rates were significantly slower at the end of an Evensong experience than at the beginning of it. Transcendent experiences at Evensong were shown to be characterised by one or more of seven different varieties of altered state: elevation, enlightenment, encountering God, transportation, flow, losing and finding the self, and dissociation; and a defining characteristic of these experiences was their transience, their ineffability, and their transformative nature. Experiences of sanctuary, retreat and asylum were shown to be of two types: those that functioned as a

sanctuary *from* elements of the world, including acutely challenging circumstances, everyday life, and wider society and its values and practices; and those that provided a place of safety *to* think, to be, and to do in ways that participants found problematic outside of Evensong, particularly in terms of faith, personality, belonging and wider self-identity.

How, then, does the music get into this action? The study found that as an intrinsically musical event, the music is always already part of the Evensong experience, but that Evensong participants are nonetheless involved in multiple acts of agency in releasing and realising its potential. Specifically, they were shown to actively potentialize music to create the conditions for the experiences that they sought, before passing from activity to passivity in order to realise that experience through the relinquishment of agency. Their potentializing activities include self-directed acts of emotional and cognitive preparation in advance of the event beginning, such as getting into church mode, and directing their attention towards elements of the performance that will further their objectives and away from those that will not. This directing of attention was substantiated through real-time commentary, observation, and gaze tracking. Competence in performing these activities effectively was shown to be a skill refined through repetition, suggesting that engaging with the music of Evensong to attain experiential objectives therefore has some of the attributes of what Gomart and Hennion (1999, 243) have termed ‘a connoisseur’s practice’.

Additionally, it was found that there are particular elements within or derived directly from the music itself that afford Evensong participants tranquillity, transcendence, and the sense of retreat. Its singular musical sound, idiom, and acoustic, and its standards and style of musical performance, are frequently heard as a de-personalised sound of Otherness, as pure, elevating, and as evocative of heaven and angels, through processes of musical signification and cultural association. The particular rhythmic character of the chants affords a hypnotic and reassuring sense of calm, that also provides the pre-conditions for transcendence; and the

consistent musical structure provides an affective scaffolding that takes participants on a journey away from the everyday into another world, and then back again. The Evensong texts were shown to be powerful in their connotations and denotations, and the repetition of the same words each day affords a sense of stability and certainty, supporting a familiarity that becomes a key resource of agency. Furthermore, it was demonstrated that the music of Evensong is experienced as being in a synergistic relationship of mutual reinforcement with the other elements of the event, including its visual and embodied components, and that the transformations it affords intensify, and are in turn intensified by them.

Notably, little difference was identified between participants' Evensong motivations and the outcomes of their attendance based on religious affiliation, faith, or musical training and background. The principal differences were in their individual affective, cognitive, and practical objectives, and the way in which they exercised their agency to interact with the service to achieve them. Consequently, while Evensong evidently does not appeal to everyone, it was found to be a service capable of affording rich and rewarding experiences for a wide variety of people – what the Prayer Book calls 'all sorts and conditions of men'.⁵¹

10.2. Findings and implications in their scholarly context

Evensong as music in everyday life: affective, expansive, and vital

While there is now a well-developed body of work in the social psychology of music that explores and evidences the routine deployment of music for affective and cognitive objectives in a range of settings (e.g., DeNora 2000), few studies have found listeners to use live musical performances in this way. This study has, however, provided extensive evidence that many Evensong participants frequently use Evensong for self-regulation and affective

⁵¹ In the Prayer for all Conditions of Men (*The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments* 1662, 42)

scaffolding as part of everyday life, and a live Evensong performance can function for its listeners in a similar way to the recorded music that has been at the centre of previous studies. This was as true for listeners for whom the attainment of a particular, transformed state was a goal in itself, as it was for those who wanted to enter a different state in support of another goal, such as worship or problem solving.

It is not, however, because Evensong shares characteristics with recorded music that it is an attractive and effective mechanism for affective scaffolding – although its predictable format, performance standards, and musical style, together with its regular performance are instrumental in its success in this regard. Rather, it is the creative and purposive processes by which its participants manage Evensong’s lack of some of the key advantages of recorded music from a self-regulation perspective (such as availability on demand, absolute predictability, and listener agency) that configure it as a different and often more powerful mechanism for self-management and, as the 2020 lockdown data showed, for some people, in some ways, as superior to its recorded-music substitutes. Specifically, participants took comfort from the knowledge that Evensong was *not* available on demand, because that afforded a sense that it was not ‘all about me’. This was experienced as liberating and a relief, or as recalling or even prefiguring a simpler time, outside of consumerist rules of exchange. For some, the experience of having to await gratification on the timescale of the service schedule rather than on demand created a reassuring and calming awareness of a different sense of time and priorities, that in turn promoted patience and a different, broader cognitive perspective. Because participants could be certain of where, when, and how they could access Evensong in the future, they experienced a sense of both agency and certainty in a world often perceived as chaotic and out of control. And the practices they adopted to manage the time between the identified need for Evensong and the realisation of it appeared themselves to have positive affective affordances. For some, these arose through activities

and emotions of anticipation and preparation; for others it was through the embedding of Evensong into the structure of their day, week, or life as a framework of stability. Many described practical actions such as listening to recordings, reading the Evensong service text on the bus, and putting together their own private services through online music streaming and bible apps, which extended the practices associated with the event from the service and its peripheries into parts of life that the service itself would not otherwise access. These findings re-position the forty-five minutes of the Evensong service not as a standalone event, but rather – in many cases – as the culmination of a potentially prolonged period of preparation, in an ever-repeating cycle.

The implications of these findings are threefold. First, the evidence that people go to Evensong with self-regulation and affective objectives in mind, including to attain affective states that are conducive to the pursuit of other activities or goals like meditation or worship and enhanced wellbeing, both adds to an understanding of how people self-regulate through music, and has implications for the study of other live music listening experiences. Evensong has some unusual characteristics that might limit the generalizability of this finding: that it takes place daily, free of charge, and with a fixed format with an intrinsic affective character are perhaps chief among these. Nonetheless, understanding the affective goals of Evensong attendees could help to further an understanding of motivations for engaging with live music from a social psychology perspective, including by adding an additional layer to our understanding of music's role and potential as a technology of the self in modern life by bringing live performance into the discussion. Similarly, understanding the affective objectives of those attending church, and those who have stopped doing so, could add a new perspective on understanding the potential for music listening in other forms of worship event.

Second, the finding that participants engage in practices and behaviours in support of a transformation of their affective state at Evensong prior to, and during, the commencement of the event represents a step towards a further understanding of the processes involved in achieving musically supported affective transformation. It also sheds new light on the mental labour associated with preparing for, and prefiguring, a desired musical affect in advance of the listening experience itself.

Third, the finding that Evensong is considered vital, central, and indispensable in terms of its affective affordances by a significant proportion of participants re-contextualises the literature on the roles and importance of Evensong as an event. The findings about the effect of Evensong's absence during the 2020 lockdown highlight the considerable extent to which people rely on music to support the attainment of affective and cognitive conditions. This has implications for the way in which the success and value of Evensong performances are evaluated, adding weight to calls in the audience studies literature for more qualitative measures; and for an understanding of the significance of live and recorded music listening for personal wellbeing.

The study's findings in relation to identity construction and the presentation of the self – the other uses of music in everyday life commonly reported in the literature – were more complicated. Evensong was found to be an important site for the cultivation of an internal sense of a spiritual self, and for exploring religious and national identity, adding a new setting to the literature on music and self-identity. But rather than acting to present themselves either to specific others or to the outside world (Goffman 1971), or undertaking the collective work of identity co-formation (Hennion 2001), Evensong participants were often keen, as Chapter 9 illustrates, to undertake this identity work privately, and either to avoid the public performance and disclosure of their faith and religious identities, or to reveal them only in a carefully managed way, sufficient for their private expression. That music

was central to both the affordance and strategic obscuring of these identities builds on Lipsitz's (1994) work on aggrieved communities' use of music to make identity claims, while also demonstrating the importance of a private musical space in which to first explore those claims.

These findings position Evensong as a very different kind of social occasion to the classical music concert it might superficially resemble. In Evensong, participants often resist even the impersonal relations Gross (2013, 236–39) found at the Proms, and demonstrate a more abstract sense of belonging and shared purpose than that found by Pitts (2016) at a musical festival. Instead, in some ways, Evensong could be argued to have more in common with the 'imaginary realm' that Bull (2000, 160) found headphone-wearing listeners establish to enter 'a public form of solitude' (as described in Section 3). Another way to understand the collectivities that Evensong affords is through Born's (2000; 2011) conception of 'musically imagined community': a virtual collective that comes into being through musical experience, and in which people feel connected to one another through musical or other identities. At Evensong this imagined community operated outside the realm of contemporary society: participants often described feeling part of the communion of saints (Chapter 7), connected to God (Chapter 6), or to a community of worshippers through history or across the world (Chapters 5 and 7). Born calls this type of collectivity 'purely imaginary', as it is not based in human relationships, but suggests that it can, nonetheless, result in 'real cultural transformations of individual or collective self' (Born 2000, 35). This theory is supported by the findings of this study that the musically supported transcendent experiences described in Chapters 6 and 7 can prefigure, catalyse, or reinforce individual and collective identities.

In the context of the literature on arts participation, it is notable that ideas of social class, distinction, and cultural capital did not emerge as important themes in this research. This could be because of the study's focus on individual real-time experience, or because

participants were mindful that Evensong has been criticised for perceived exclusivity; the several SRs and interviewees who referred to suggestions of elitism or inaccessibility in their responses did so to assert that this was not a fair or accurate analysis. A perhaps more likely explanation, however, was that this research centred on people who choose to attend Evensong, and usually had done so multiple times, typically regularly, and often over many years: those who, in anthropological terms therefore have an emic, or insiders' perspective. Accordingly, they felt at home at Evensong (see Chapter 5), and perceived the service as inclusive, as operating outside usual societal classifications, and as welcoming, and had no reason to believe that outsiders would have a different experience (see Chapter 9). Two interviewees who had found their own way to Evensong adults without having prior connections to it, however, offered a different perspective:

I suppose until I found my way into it ... I would have thought it was a thing for posh people, and you had to be already connected... not for me. (Ben)

I wouldn't have dreamed of going into a church. I'd have expected them to check your membership card on the way in. (Kieran)

The perceptions of people of different backgrounds, types, and preferences who do not attend Evensong may therefore be an informative subject for further study.

Experiencing music listening: a holistic and pluralistic practice

The approach this study took to the experience of music listening built on the music psychology literature which emphasises the interplay of multiple factors in the listening experience, and Clarke's (2005) ecological approach to music listening. A characteristic of this literature is the idea that music is 'an endlessly "multiple" environment' (E. F. Clarke 2011, 196–98), in which many different experiences are simultaneously possible. The findings from this study, primarily from the IES but also triangulated by the other methods used in the research, confirmed Evensong to be an environment of great multiplicity,

illustrated vividly by considering a selection of simultaneous participant commentaries in parallel.

An important finding from this research is that Evensong has the capacity to afford the commonly sought affective/cognitive outcomes of tranquillity, transcendence, and retreat to a variety of different people, through different mechanisms, at the same time. The idea that musical experiences can be extremely varied is not new, as Section 2.2 illustrates, but the findings from this study make a new contribution to discussions in this area in three ways. First, they provide a robust empirical illustration of how a multiplicity of perceptions, meanings and experiences unfold for numerous listeners in an identical, naturalistic but controlled environment, and in direct relation to the same music, on a moment-by-moment basis. This, as far as it was possible to ascertain, had not been done systematically before, and enables new kinds of questions to be answered. It can show, for example, the level of attentional focus of music listeners. The study was designed such that analysis could be undertaken in units of one second, at the level of the musical note or short phrase, and so sighs and smiles in response to a particular musical expression were captured (see e.g., Chapter 5 Figure 10; Chapter 7), as well as longer and more reflective spoken comments. These data are consistent with Clarke's (2005) claim that in ecologically valid settings, people do not necessarily experience music at the level of the note but rather in an array of associative ways.

Second, because all of the participants had exactly the same audio-visual experience, it provides for the first time an indication of both the nature and diversity of the perceptions and experiences that might occur simultaneously, among a population of people listening to the same music, in the same place, at the same time. It also revealed the rapidity with which those perceptions, and the thoughts and actions that arise from them, emerge, change direction, and dissolve, and the variety of environmental elements engaged in them. This, in

turn, highlighted the multi-sensory, holistic, ‘*Gesamtkunstwerk*’ character of Evensong as an ecosystem in which elements including the music, the ritual, and the wider environment are perceived to exist symbiotically, complementing, supporting and intensifying perceptions – and especially other-worldly, transcendent, perceptions – of the others.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it has shown that despite the variation in Evensong participants’ attentional focus, thought processes, levels of engagement, and personal backgrounds and characteristics, the cognitive and affective conditions they achieve in Evensong are significantly similar, particularly in terms of tranquillity, transcendence, and a sense of sanctuary. The finding that participants’ heart rates consistently slowed over the course of the study appears to confirm participants’ perception that the transformations catalysed by Evensong participation can have a significant effect on bodily state, and in a way that appears broadly consistent across subjects. This finding warrants further investigation. If replicated, the ramifications for Evensong participation and other forms music listening could be significant in terms of well-being and self-management.

The finding that for many Evensong participants, perception and affect arise not only through the interplay of spontaneous cognitive and embodied responses to external sounds, but also as a result of purposive actions taken by the participants themselves with the explicit intention of achieving a particular effect (see Chapter 4), contributes to an understanding of Evensong experiences in several ways. It suggests that many people who go to Evensong do so with very clear self-regulation goals. This enriches the widespread previous findings that cathedral visitors experience a feeling of peace or spirituality in the setting, by highlighting the role of intention, motivation, and self-directed structuring in the realisation of this desired state, and the others identified here. Further, the findings indicate that while the use of Evensong as a technology of the self is common, often its most important function is allowing the controlled relinquishing of control through strategically alternating active

engagement and active disengagement, as with the potentialization of resources like drugs and erotic agency, as described by Gomart and Hennion (1999) and DeNora (1997). This discovery potentially recasts the idea of Evensong passively ‘washing over’ a recipient as a much more tactical act to which participants actively submit, and connects it to Herbert’s (2011b; 2011c; 2013) theory of low-level everyday trance as a normal part of psycho-physiological self-regulation. It also intersects with the Csikszentmihalyi’s (2002) theory of flow, in that flow-type peak experiences were found to be not unusual at Evensong. Since flow is considered to happen only while engaged in effortful tasks, and Evensong is not approached or experienced as such a task in Csikszentmihalyi’s terms, albeit that participants were found to be involved in types of self-regulatory labour (Chapters 6 and 7), this raises questions about the nature of flow and of Evensong participation that are worthy of further investigation, especially given that the cognitive and affective processes and conditions for flow during acts of apparently passive, receptive listening are little documented or understood.

Fourth, and relatedly, the intersection of these findings about listener agency with those in relation to the plurality of Evensong experiences, posits Evensong as a multiple environment in which people deliberately choose to engage with a variety of different elements at different times, sometimes simultaneously, in pursuit of their objectives. This makes plain the co-constructed character of Evensong experience, situating the listener as an influential creator of the experience through their selective prioritisation of attention and perception-directing labour. Aside from the possibility of achieving flow, managing attentional direction and controlling perception is considered a skill that is learned (Brick, MacIntyre, and Campbell 2014). This adds weight to the conclusion that experiencing Evensong in a way that is rewarding or fulfilling is a discipline and practice that its participants develop and hone over time. It also has implications for other music-listening

settings in which, as at Evensong, first-time listeners often experience very little that they consider to be of value (e.g., Dobson 2010). Understanding better how affective objectives can be pursued most effectively using perceptual/attentional control, and identifying the intersubjective differences and their root causes in attentional preference, might help to identify the mechanisms that would most assist new audiences and participants to have fruitful listening experiences in unfamiliar contexts.

Experiencing music in religious settings

The findings of this study contribute to the wider church music literature in four ways. They provide empirical evidence for the widespread theory, based on the extrapolation of other cathedral attendance data, that Evensong attendees place great value on the style and standard of its music, and more importantly, offer evidence-based explanations as to why. These improve our knowledge of the wide range of motivations for going to church services in the cathedral music tradition. They also re-contextualise previous data that suggested that the primary appeal of Evensong services lies in their aesthetic or artistic merit, by demonstrating that at Evensong aesthetic and artistic enjoyment are not, or not only, ends in themselves; they are also mechanisms by which to achieve affective, cognitive, and religious or spiritual transformation, including affective and cognitive transformations valued as a route to meaningful prayer, worship, and religious experience. These findings also contribute relevant data about the importance of music for those attending Evensong for religious reasons, with 90% of SRs who cited the opportunity to pray or worship as an important factor in their decision to attend, also citing at least one musical motivation.⁵² This is consistent with Davie's (1990) market principle of church attendance and the idea that people will attend services that suit their preferences, including their musical preferences, best, and contrasts

⁵² 70% of those citing a musical motive also selected a religious reason.

with the position evidenced in some evangelical settings, where musical is considered a neutral element of the worship (Porter 2016, 213). The findings here suggest that if the style of the music at Evensong changed significantly, or if the very high performance standards were not maintained, many participants would no longer find it a suitable tool for achieving their objectives in the ways that they have learned, practised, and honed.

Second, they add to our understanding of the altered ways of thinking and of being afforded by Evensong, by demonstrating that the widely reported sense of calm experienced in the context of cathedral music in religious settings (Holmes and Kautzer 2013; The Grubb Institute and Theos 2012) is just one of the many types of transformation that Evensong affords, with the findings demonstrating that experiences of being uplifted, becoming grounded, gaining a different perspective on the world, and transcendence also occur frequently.

Third, they provide a first step towards understanding the underlying mechanisms involved in the musical catalysis and scaffolding of these transformational processes in traditional choral music services. In doing so, they locate listeners as active co-constructors not only of their musical experiences but also of their transformational and transcendent ones: collaborating purposively with the music, musicians, their own minds and bodies, and the wider environment; engaging in self-guided practices of perception prioritisation; and managing a process in which intention, action, experience, and affect are in ongoing dialogue. This approach is consistent with the idea embedded in some of the Christian Congregational Music literature that music is ‘effective’ in worship only when ‘the “work” is done by the worshipper’ (see, e.g., Ingalls, Landau, and Wagner 2013, 9). It also develops it by evidencing how this work can be undertaken almost entirely internally, and highlighting the vital role of the strategic pausing of this self-directed work – through the relinquishment of agency – in the attainment of some forms of transformation. Understanding the active

practices involved in rewarding Evensong participation has implications for understanding why people unaware of or unfamiliar with these practices sometimes experience Evensong as passive, puzzling, and ultimately unrewarding, and adds to the understanding of the barriers to meaningful engagement in music-listening more widely.

Fourth, the study has shown that people who participate in Evensong as listeners have experiences that are as involving, important, and profound as those of members of Anglican congregations where worship and participation involve *making* music, as described in the congregational music making literature. At the same time, it has shown that in common with this literature, and with the scholarship on music and trance, socialisation and enculturation are as central in learning to achieve transcendence in listening activities as in more outwardly performative musical contexts (J. Becker 2004; M. M. Miller and Strongman 2002).

Understanding Choral Evensong congregations

The present findings are consistent with, and supplement, the central conclusions related to listener experience made by Jonathan Arnold (2014; 2019) about the appeal of sacred music in contemporary society, and the relationship between music and faith. In particular, they confirm empirically and develop Arnold's ideas that music and faith can be so closely aligned and mutually dependent as to be indistinguishable, and that there is no single recipient or type of recipient of sacred music. They also provide additional evidential weight to his findings that chant is perceived both to create and reflect the rhythm of life; that sacred music is theologically more powerful when performed to a high standard; and that the deepest experiences of sacred music are not reached by using music as a background wash of calming sound, but through active engagement. By proposing seven varieties of transcendence found at Evensong, in which ineffability is a key characteristic, they also build on Arnold's idea that sacred music might touch the soul by providing a perspective that exists beyond words – a proposition that has also been argued to apply to absolute music, in a secular context (e.g.

Jankélévitch 2003). This study's findings are also consistent with Hanna Rijken's (2020) study of Dutch performances of Evensong, in identifying the event as appealing to people of a wide variety of faiths and religions and none, who are seeking an experience beyond the everyday; and in the prevalence of ideas of transcendence and being transported through beauty, ritual and sacrality.

The similarities between the results of the present research and those of Arnold and Rijken are significant because each of the three studies approached the subject from different disciplinary perspectives, and focused on the performance of Evensong in different contexts. That they came to similar conclusions provides useful validation in this still-new area of research, and underscores questions about the value of designating performance contexts as sacred or secular in terms of the experiences they afford.

Methodological Contribution

The present study makes an additional contribution through its methodology, first in its demonstration of the value of implementing a multi-methodological approach, and second, through the development of the novel methodology of the IES. The overall multi-modal approach allowed each of the research questions to be pursued via an appropriate methodology, and allowed for triangulation, clarification, and the exploration of questions that could not be comprehensively investigated using any single methodology. This was particularly helpful given the relative scarcity of directly relevant previous scholarship at the time that the study was designed, and its consequently exploratory nature.

The IES methodology was novel and devised specifically for this study. It proved to be engaging, to provide an experience that participants considered realistic, and to be well-suited to the research questions; it generated new information about the real-time cognitive and emotional experiences of people in-Evensong that are unlikely to have been accessible in more conventional ways. The commentary method enabled access to participants' real-time

thoughts when the constraints of the real Evensong environment precluded it. The use of VR technology facilitated the use of gaze tracking, which provided original and otherwise inaccessible data about attentional direction. It also afforded a degree of control and between-subjects uniformity that is generally unavailable in real-world settings, and afforded comparisons between subjects at a highly granular level, in relation to precise musical materials, and in conjunction with other synchronized datasets, tracking the development of musical experience across time.

It is clear, however, that this methodology is not without limitations. The IES environment is not equivalent to, or a direct substitute for reality, and it was not possible to run a parallel study in the real world to compare responses between the real and virtual environments. Time and budgetary limitations meant that it was only practical to study responses to a single Evensong service, while in reality every service is different, and participants do not have identical experiences every day. A future study might fruitfully study the same participants' responses to Evensongs with a different musical character, or with a similar character but on different days. In addition, while the commentaries provided continuous stream-of-consciousness data and thus a nuanced dataset and a source of information that enriched the interpretation of findings emerging from the other elements of the wider project, an experience of the present moment is not, as Daniel Stern has argued, the same as the verbal account of that experience:

[S]ubjective experience does not passively “reach” ...into awareness fully formed.... [It] is often hard to grasp because we so often quickly jump out of the present ongoing experience to take the objective, third-person viewpoint. We try to seize what we have just experienced by putting it into words or images in the moment after. (Stern 2004, 32–33)

On balance, however, in the context of this study, the IES methodology proved a productive and revealing means of investigating musical responses that would have been impossible to gather in a live Evensong service, and informed and complemented the participant

observation case studies, semi-structured interviews, and a large-scale qualitative and quantitative survey.

The IES study's finding that heart rate changes while engaged with Evensong, indicating a general trend towards reduced stimulation and increased peacefulness, could be validated through replication, and followed up in an Evensong context by repeating the study while asking participants *not* to report their thoughts and feelings, to control for the impact of that activity, either using an immersive environment, or, ideally, in a real-world setting. The method could also, of course, be deployed in other virtual music listening environments, or other real-world settings, for example to assess responses to hearing different types of music in potentially stressful situations, like a hospital waiting room, or while undertaking a demanding task. The increasing prevalence of wearable technologies that monitor physiological markers might provide new opportunities for research of this sort.

The findings about attentional direction that emerged from the gaze tracking data could be built upon through further analysis and through the implementation of gaze tracking techniques in other environments. From an analytical perspective, it is possible to code gaze fixation durations to generate quantitative data about gaze duration that can be analysed numerically or graphically across subjects. That was not within the scope of this study, but could be applied to data generated by future studies in similar or different virtual music listening environments, to shed new light on attentional focus during music listening activities.

More broadly, the study demonstrated that VR technology offers the opportunity to create realistic virtual worlds which, while not identical to their real-world counterparts, can offer important methodological advantages over the natural environment including control of materials, inter-subject consistency, portability, and repeatability, and – as in this case – the potential to make significant discoveries about real-time musical experience. These

methodological advances have implications for researching other areas of real-time musical experience via virtual worlds created with this fast-developing technology.

Practical and policy implications

This project approached Evensong with an academic and explicitly musicological focus, and sought to understand the musical experiences of those who choose to attend Evensong in a musicological context. It did not apply a similar focus to other aspects that contribute to participants' overall experience of the service – the theological, religious, liturgical, and practical, for example – and it did not explore the perceptions, reasons, or experiences of those who do not attend the service. Nor did it compare the experiences of those who choose to attend Evensong with those who attend other services, or who do not attend church at all. It cannot, of itself, therefore, form the basis for conclusions about how new, different, or more people might be attracted to Evensong or to churches more widely, about the future of the Evensong service, about declining congregations at other services, or about the advantages or disadvantages of cathedral worship or cathedral music for participants compared with other forms of music or worship. It does, however, provide both the basis for a more nuanced understanding of the motivations and experiences of today's Evensong congregations, and a starting point for further investigations. Recommendations about how the findings of this study might be developed and built upon in this regard are set out in §10.4 below.

10.3. Limitations

A number of limitations should be acknowledged, in addition to those set out in respect of the IES methodology above, of several different orders.

A methodological constraint was the self-selecting nature of the research participants. In the surveys, the large and diverse respondent population provided some mitigation of this, as did the opportunistic recruitment of a large number of interviewees, who similarly became

a large and diverse pool with experience of a significant number of Evensong venues. It cannot, however, be known to what extent the experiences of those who participated in this study are representative of those who did not.

Research limitations arising from researcher bias, including from the researcher's insider status as a member of the Church and an Evensong participant herself, are difficult to quantify, and while steps were taken to ensure the research activities were undertaken as objectively as possible through rigorous and consistent methodological approaches, biographical determinants can never be eliminated from insider forms of research (LeCompte 1987). They are acknowledged here as relevant context in interpreting these findings.

The 2020 national lockdown imposed additional methodological limitations, and specifically caused two further, planned strands of research to be cancelled. The first, scheduled for Spring 2020, was an in-church survey designed to gather snapshot data from the entire congregation at six ordinary Evensong services, two in each of the three main sites. It included questions about musical, religious and demographic backgrounds, and was intended to contextualise the Experiences of Evensong survey data. The second was an experimental study designed to explore the musical responses of non-Evensong participants to Evensong music, scheduled for April 2020. Conversely, the lockdown provided the opportunity to adapt this plan, and to conduct an additional and, it transpired, revealing survey of Evensong participants' responses to the absence of Evensong.

The closure of churches, university libraries and most other public services and settings for much of 2020 also inevitably impacted on the research, although the research plan was revised to utilise alternative digital and online methods where possible.

10.4. Future directions

Several opportunities for future research suggested by the findings of this study have been proposed in the body of the thesis and elsewhere in these conclusions. Future research could focus on five additional areas in particular.

First, there is an opportunity to build on the information about the characteristics of a significant proportion of today's Evensong attendees generated by this study's surveys: their musical backgrounds and preferences, faith affiliations and identities, and demographic characteristics. A snapshot survey of the Evensong congregations of multiple venues, as planned for this project before the national lockdown, could helpfully contextualise the representativeness of those who contributed to this dataset, and the weight that might be given to the survey's quantitative findings. A further comparative survey to gather similar data from different congregations at other types of church and service, using different types of music, could be informative both in contextualising the data presented here, and in understanding the relationship (if any) between these factors and the church and style of service attended, with potential implications both for musicological understanding, and for the Church and other denominations' understanding of the composition and motivations of their various congregations, with a view to policy development.

Second, the findings here raise questions about the motivations and experiences of Evensong participants in roles and settings outside the scope of this study, in particular at other types of Evensong (festal, parish, sung by volunteer or visiting choirs, said Evening Prayer services, and so on), and in respect of Evensong participants performing roles that were not the focus of this research, especially the singers and musicians who perform the service. Such research could both build on the findings of this study by enabling a comparison between the experiences of people participating in the same service in different ways, and in other Evensong settings that remain musicologically under-examined.

Additionally, an in-depth ethnographic study of all the participants and congregations of a single church that holds multiple types of service, including Evensong, could also offer new perspectives on the motivations and experiences of Evensong participants, and of the wider ecosystem of musical worship, with implications for the sociology of music, for the field of Christian congregational music, and for the Church of England. Similarly, an immersive ethnographic study of any one of these settings could add further depth to the breadth of knowledge about participation in choral worship services towards which this study is a first step.

Relatedly, it is notable that a significant proportion of SRs said they attend other regular Anglican church services frequently: more than half (58%) at least weekly, and three quarters (75%) at least monthly. If this study's participants are representative of the Evensong participating population overall, this is an important challenge to the suggestion that there is a large cohort that attends Evensong without a religious or spiritual identity or objective. It also raises questions about the character of the other services Evensong participants also attend, and their respective motivations for attending each. This could be a fruitful area for further enquiry, including research with a policy and practice focus.

Third, the finding that for some participants, positive experiences of Evensong appear not to be a matter of passive reception, but an active, learned, and honed practice, could be developed by investigating the approaches, expectations, and experiences of first-time and/or non-attendees of Evensong – in the manner of Dobson's (e.g., 2010; Dobson and Pitts 2011) work on first-time concert audiences. The implications of the findings of such a study could be valuable from a social psychology of music perspective, in understanding the socio-cultural associations of both the event and its music among those unfamiliar with it. This could additionally elaborate on the relationship between these associations, and participants' affective responses to the service. It could also be of policy significance for the Church in

illuminating social or cultural barriers to engagement with the service, and could assist in developing methods to introduce and guide newcomers to the service effectively. Contact has already been made by one cathedral's outreach programme interested in using the study's findings to inform outreach activity plans; the study's wider findings could support similar work elsewhere too.

Additionally, a real-time, qualitative study of audience members at a live, secular concert, could provide illuminating data about the extent to which affective goals are set, pursued, and achieved in a different, but related setting. An alternative or additional approach would be to explore the experiences and perceptions of Evensong of people who have been to the service before, but have chosen not to go now. This would provide an interesting counterpoint to this study's focus on those who do choose to re-attend the service, and might offer a valuable contextualisation of the place of Evensong in contemporary society that could not be obtained through engagement with only its advocates.

Fourth, a comparative study of experiences of Evensong in the UK and in the Netherlands, where Evensong has a different history, cultural position, and relationship with religion, could be mutually informative about the motivations and experiences of Evensong participants in both cultures. The foundations for an international research project with this focus have already been laid, and it is hoped its findings will elaborate further on contemporary participation in Evensong, and the many varieties of experience that it affords.

And finally, undertaking a study of Evensong similar to this one, but within a liturgical or theological framework rather than a musicological one, could usefully develop and supplement the findings set out here. Liturgical or theological perspectives could shed new light on the elements of the service that necessarily receive less attention in a musicological study, such as those that were spoken rather than sung, as well as offering different ways of understanding the experiences described here. Bringing this study's

findings directly into dialogue with thinking in these related disciplines, in this way, could have the potential to reveal new implications for both.

In addition to taking important steps towards establishing what, in musicological terms, is 'really going on' for today's Evensong participants, this study therefore also raises important questions for musicology, for a range of other disciplines with which it intersects, and for music and worship policy and practice. In conclusion, then, it is hoped that its contribution will be threefold. First, that it will further understanding of the types, modes, and practices of music listening in which people engage to pursue cognitive and affective objectives; of the mechanisms by which the same music can elicit different experiences among diverse groups of co-present listeners; and of the creative uses to which listeners can put live musical events. Second, that it will illustrate the great importance of Evensong in the lives of many of those who participate in it, and in doing so demonstrate that its value to those individuals goes beyond, and can even be unrelated to, what can be shown by quantitative statistics. And finally, it is hoped that the study will act as a stimulus to further research into the highly valued practice that is listening at Evensong, and the tranquillity, transcendence, and sense of retreat – and the many other valued experiences – that it affords every day to those who hear, sing, and otherwise perform it.

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Appendix 1

2019 Experiences of Evensong Survey Questions

Experiences of Choral Evensong Survey

Page 1: About Choral Evensong - your experiences, practices and preferences

1. How often, over the last twelve months, have you:

	At least weekly	At least monthly	At least every three or four months	At least once in the year	Not at all
Attended Choral Evensong	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Attended another type of regular Anglican/Church of England church service (including, for example, said Evening Prayer, Messy Church, Common Worship services; but not including weddings, christenings, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Attended a regular service or meeting of another religious or faith group (not including weddings, christenings, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. If you go to Choral Evensong, on which day(s) of the week, typically, do you go? Please select all that apply.

- Monday to Friday
- Saturday
- Sunday
- There is no typical day for me to attend/it could be any day
- I do not go to Choral Evensong services

3. If you ever go to Choral Evensong, where is it that you go? Please enter the name of the church(es), chapel(s) or cathedral(s). This data will not be used or reported in such a way that you can be identified.

Page 2: About Choral Evensong - in your own words

The next three questions ask you to describe your experiences in your own words.

Please write as much or as little as you wish, in whatever format you prefer - a narrative, prose description; single words; or something else; whatever suits you best.

There is no limit to how many words you include here, and we welcome any information and comments you provide.

These questions may take a little longer to complete than the others in the survey. We are grateful for your contribution. Please also remember you can save your answers at any time and return to them by clicking the "Finish Later" link at the bottom of the page.

If you prefer, you can also create the text somewhere else, such as Word, and paste it into the survey using copy and paste.

4. How would you describe **the experience** of being at a Choral Evensong service? * *Required*

5. When and why did you **first** go to Choral Evensong?

[+ More info](#)

6. Why do you go to Choral Evensong **nowadays**? * *Required*

Page 3: About Choral Evensong - your experiences, practices and preferences, continued

7. Which of the following factors are important in your decision to go to Choral Evensong now? Please select any that are important to you. (You can select as many as you wish.)

	Selection
The opportunity to pray and/or worship	<input type="checkbox"/>
The company of others/the welcoming atmosphere	<input type="checkbox"/>
The quality of the musical performance	<input type="checkbox"/>
The style of the music	<input type="checkbox"/>
The musical repertoire on a particular day	<input type="checkbox"/>
The traditional language and/or liturgy	<input type="checkbox"/>
The familiarity	<input type="checkbox"/>
The chance to experience something new	<input type="checkbox"/>
The opportunity to reflect, meditate or contemplate/the peace and quiet	<input type="checkbox"/>
The beauty of the building/the space/the physical surroundings	<input type="checkbox"/>
The beauty of the service/event	<input type="checkbox"/>
That friends or family will be in the choir	<input type="checkbox"/>
That friends or family will be in the congregation	<input type="checkbox"/>
To feel part of a wider community	<input type="checkbox"/>
The history, tradition, or heritage	<input type="checkbox"/>
To connect with a spiritual part of myself	<input type="checkbox"/>
To experience something different from the everyday	<input type="checkbox"/>
The mood or state of mind it creates for me	<input type="checkbox"/>
There is no cost to attend	<input type="checkbox"/>
It takes place at a time that is convenient to me	<input type="checkbox"/>
The religious meaning	<input type="checkbox"/>
The ritual/ style of the worship	<input type="checkbox"/>
The ability to remain anonymous and/or participate without making a commitment	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am a member of staff, musician or a volunteer at the church where Choral Evensong takes place	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>

8. Can you tell us more about the factors that attract you to, or deter you from, going to Choral Evensong?

Page 4: About music, the arts and free time

9. Which types of music do you most enjoy? [Please select all that apply.]

- Pop
- Rock
- HipHop/Rap
- Classical
- Opera
- Traditional church music
- Contemporary church music, such as worship bands
- Heavy metal
- Reggae
- Electronic/Dance
- Latin
- Jazz
- World music
- Other

9.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

10. In a typical week, how often do you choose to listen to music - including live and recorded music, streamed music, and radio broadcasts?

- Every day
- Most days
- On two or three days each week
- On one day each week
- Less frequently than on one day each week

11. On the days when you listen to music, for how long, on average, do you listen?

- More than four hours
- Between two and four hours
- Around one or two hours
- Less than an hour

12. Have you ever played a musical instrument or had voice training?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

12.a. If you answered yes, at the peak of your interest, for how long per day did you play/sing/practise?

- Up to 30 minutes
- 30 minutes to 1 hour
- More than 1 hour, up to 2 hours
- More than 2 hours, up to 3 hours
- More than 3 hours

13. Have you taken examinations in music? [Please select all that apply. If you took non-UK examinations or other examinations that are not listed, please just select the level(s) that seem to reflect best the examinations you took].

- No
- Yes, GCSE/O level
- Yes, AS/A level
- Yes, ABRSM (or equivalent) Grade 1, 2, or 3
- Yes, ABRSM (or equivalent) Grade 4, 5, or 6
- Yes, ABRSM (or equivalent) Grade 7 or 8
- Yes, above ABRSM Grade 8

14. Have you ever sung in a choir? [Please select all that apply]

- No
- Yes, as a child in a church choir
- Yes, as a child in another type of choir
- Yes, as an adult in a church choir
- Yes, as an adult in another type of choir

15. As a child, were you a chorister in a cathedral or a church where cathedral music was sung? [Please select all that apply]

- No
- Yes, in a cathedral or a college chapel
- Yes, in another church
- Yes, and I went to a cathedral school
- Yes, and I went to another kind of choir school

16. Do you sing in a choir (of any sort) or sing or play in a music ensemble now?

- No
- Yes, at least once per week
- Yes, at least once per month
- Yes, at least once per year

17. Approximately how often, over the last twelve months, have you attended:

	At least once per week	At least once per month	At least every three to four months	At least once	Not at all
The theatre	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The opera or ballet	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Classical music concerts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other live music events, concerts, gigs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Restaurants to eat out	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Museums or art galleries	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A gym	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Arts clubs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Live sports events as a spectator	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Live sports events as a competitor	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A social meet up with a friend or friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Going walking	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Page 5: Church, religion and spirituality

18. Do you consider yourself to be [please select all that apply]:

- A religious person
- A spiritual person
- Neither spiritual nor religious

19. Which statement best describes your religious beliefs? * *Required*

- I know God really exists
- I believe in God
- I believe in some sort of spirit, but not in a personal God
- I do not believe in some sort of spirit or in God
- I am in doubt about God
- I do not know whether I believe in God or some sort of spirit
- I would prefer not to say

20. Do you regard yourself as belonging to any particular faith or religion? If you do, please select the option that describes you best. * *Required*

- No
- Don't know/prefer not to say
- Yes, Anglican or Church of England
- Yes, Anglican in the Anglo-Catholic tradition
- Yes, Protestant
- Yes, Roman Catholic
- Yes, another Christian denomination or group - please specify below
- Yes, Islam
- Yes, Hinduism
- Yes, Sikhism
- Yes, Judaism
- Yes, Buddhism
- Yes, another denomination or group - please specify below
- Other

20.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

21. In what faith or religion were you brought up? * *Required*

- None
- Don't know/prefer not to say
- Anglican or Church of England
- Anglican in the Anglo-Catholic tradition
- Protestant
- Roman Catholic
- Another Christian denomination or group - please specify below
- Islam
- Hinduism
- Sikhism
- Judaism
- Buddhism
- Another denomination or group - please specify below
- Other

21.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

Page 6: About you

Data will not be used to identify you, or reported in such a way that you will be identifiable.

22. Sex

- Male
- Female
- Other
- Prefer not to say

23. Age

- 16-18
- 19-29
- 30-44
- 45-59
- 60-75
- 76 or over

24. Ethnicity

- White
- Mixed
- Asian
- Black
- Other

25. Nationality

- UK
- Dutch
- Other European
- An African nationality
- An Asian nationality
- A North or South American nationality
- Australia or New Zealand
- Other

26. What is the highest educational qualification you hold?

- Up to O level/GCSE level or equivalent
- A level or equivalent
- Undergraduate degree
- Postgraduate degree/postgraduate professional

27. What is your main occupation?

- Full-time work, including self-employment
- Part-time work, including part-time self employment
- Homemaker/carer
- Student
- Retired
- Volunteering
- Not employed

28. With which political party, if any, do you most identify? (This question is optional)

- Conservative
- Labour
- Liberal Democrat
- Green
- UKIP
- Other
- No political affiliation
- Prefer not to say

29. What is the nearest town or city to where you live now?

Page 7: Additional thoughts or comments

30. Is there anything else you would like to tell us in connection with Choral Evensong and/or your experiences or views of it? If there is, please do so using the space below. *Optional*

Appendix 2

2020 Absence of Evensong Survey Questions

The next four questions ask you to describe **your own** experiences in your own words.

Please write as much or as little as you wish, in whatever format you prefer.

1. To what extent, if at all, would you say that being unable to attend live Choral Evensong services in person over the past months has affected **how connected you feel to other people and/or your sense of community?** Why? In what ways? *Optional*

2. To what extent, if at all, would you say that being unable to attend live Choral Evensong services in person over the past months has affected **your mood, state of mind, emotion, or sense of well being, if at all?** Why do you think that might be? *Optional*

3. To what extent, if at all, would you say that being unable to attend live Choral Evensong services in person over the past months has affected **your views about the role or importance of Choral Evensong services?** Has anything about that surprised you?

4. To what extent, if at all, would you say that being unable to attend live Choral Evensong services in person over the past months has affected you, in any other way? Please use the space below to describe any other impacts the absence of live Choral Evensong has had on you, if any.

5. This question asks about your used of online Choral Evensong services (such as recorded or live-streamed services on YouTube or Zoom) and live radio broadcast Choral Evensong services. If you used any of these, what was your experience of them? Which type of service or media did you choose and why? To what extent did you find it an adequate substitute for attending a live Choral Evensong? If you did not use any of these, what were your reasons? What, if anything, did you do instead?

Page 3: About Choral Evensong - your experiences, practices and preferences

6. Approximately how often, before live services with congregations were suspended in March 2020, did you typically:

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

	More than once per week	Once per week	More than once per month	At least every three to four months	Once a year or less	Not at all
Attend Choral Evensong in a church	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Listen to BBC Radio 3's Choral Evensong programme	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Listen to recordings of Choral Evensong music	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Join live online Choral Evensong services (e.g. on Zoom)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Join other live online church services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spend time in a cathedral, chapel or churches when a service was not taking place	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Read the Evening Prayer service yourself or with your household	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7. **During the period when church services** with congregations have not been taking place, how often have you done the following (during the periods when they have each been possible):

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

	More than once per week	Once per week	More than once per month	At least every three to four months	Once a year or less	Not at all
Listened to BBC Radio 3's Choral Evensong programme	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Listened to recordings of Choral Evensong music	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Joined live online Choral Evensong services (e.g. on Zoom)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Joined other live online church services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spent time in a cathedral, chapel or churches when a service was not taking place	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Read the Evening Prayer service yourself or with your household	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>