

**REA: A Journal of Religion,
Education and the Arts**

Issue 10

‘Sacred Music: Perspectives on Performance’

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Editors: Róisín Blunnie and Orla Flanagan

General Editor: Paula Murphy

Introduction

This special issue of *REA* brings together perspectives on sacred music from diverse scholars, several of whom are active not only as writers, but also as conductors, composers, organists, and singers, and whose areas of focus here traverse centuries and disciplines. Two articles concern aspects of Renaissance music. As artistic director of leading Irish choral ensemble Resurgam, Mark Duley specialises in historically and theologically informed performance. He brings his expertise and experience to the first article in this issue, where he examines the role of context with respect to both the composition and the reception of Renaissance polyphony. Bookending the textual portion of this volume, Andrew Johnstone, an organist and early music scholar based at Trinity College in Dublin, combines a thorough, evidence-based examination of tuning and pitch in sacred music by William Byrd with insights into the composer's remarkable working environment amidst the religious and political turbulence of Renaissance England, in an article that will serve as an authoritative guide for performers, particularly SATB choirs seeking to remain close to the composer's intentions, and those with an interest in the evolving relationship of notation and pitch throughout centuries past.

Concepts of national and cultural identities in the late nineteenth century are discussed in articles by Róisín Blunnie of Dublin City University and Ryan Weber of Misericordia University Pennsylvania, the former concerning attempts to ascribe a Christian motive to British imperial expansion in an early cantata by Edward Elgar, the latter situating sacred music by Edvard Grieg in the context of Scandinavian cosmopolitanism and outlining the creative potential of disrupted ideological coherence. Moving to the turn of the twenty-first century, ethnomusicologist Thérèse Smith (University College Dublin) explores the impact of digital technology on the “performance” of religious worship, in an article informed by her extensive fieldwork in an

African American Baptist community in Mississippi over a period of great change in the life of that community and of its urban context.

From his background in philosophy, Ian Leask of Dublin City University brings a broad interpretation of sacred music, understood in relation to the nature of the cosmos and to the attunement of the soul as argued in Plato's *Timaeus*. Leask's article in a sense relates to all the contributions to this volume, and provokes fundamental questions that underpin every topic included here.

We are delighted to present two pieces of contemporary choral music by Irish composers Seán Doherty and Rhona Clarke, both of Dublin City University, together with recordings of these works by leading ensembles from Ireland and Latvia. Doherty's *Et Clamabant* sets a medieval chant fragment in a contemporary realisation of the centuries-old polyphonic tradition, performed here by the Mornington Singers and conductor Orla Flanagan, while Clarke's inspiration for her *Salve Regina* comes from the chordal textures of chamber music by Béla Bartók, with the performance here provided by the State Choir Latvija, conducted by Fergus Sheil.

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Introduction

Róisín Blunnie and Orla Flanagan

Articles

- Performing Sacred Music Today: Context and Culture 1
Mark Duley
- Performing Cosmic Music: Notes on Plato's *Timaeus* 14
Ian Leask
- Seeking the Sacred: Edward Elgar's *Caractacus* and Surpassing the Roman Empire 28
Róisín Blunnie
- Politics, Prayer, and Performance: Aspects of Harmony in Edvard Grieg's *Four Psalms*, Op. 74 47
Ryan Weber
- Mediated Worship: The Emergence of Digital Technology and its Impact on Performance and Reception in a Rural Mississippi Church 67
Thérèse Smith
- The Performing Pitch of William Byrd's Latin Liturgical Polyphony: A Guide for Historically Minded Interpreters 79
Andrew Johnstone

Compositions

Et Clamabant, by Seán Doherty
Programme note and recording; sheet music
Recording of the Mornington Singers, conducted by Orla Flanagan

Salve Regina, by Rhona Clarke
Programme note and recording; sheet music
Recording of the State Choir Latvija, conducted by Fergus Sheil
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