



Harmonising Faith and Tradition: Sacred Vocal Polyphony in Contemporary South African Christian Worship

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to shed light on the intricate relationship between sacred vocal polyphony and the changing landscape of contemporary church music in South Africa. Anchored in a postcolonial theoretical framework, it sought to unravel the historical, cultural, and theological dimensions that underlie this fusion. The research was motivated by a dual purpose: to uncover the profound cultural intersections in South African worship practices and to address the existing gaps in scholarly discourse. Four central research questions, each delving into a specific facet of sacred vocal polyphony: its historical evolution within the South African church music context, its cultural and theological significance, its role in enhancing diversity and inclusivity in worship, and the challenges and opportunities in preserving its authenticity amidst contemporary influences, guided this inquiry. Through the qualitative method under critical discourse analysis, the study unveiled a rich tapestry of themes. These encompass the synthesis of indigenous rhythms with European harmonies, the theological depth embedded in polyphonic expressions, the empowerment of congregations through vocal diversity, and nuanced negotiations required to preserve authenticity. This research not only advances the understanding of how musical traditions intersect with cultural and religious identities but also sheds light on the resilience and adaptability of sacred music in South African worship. It serves as a valuable resource for scholars and practitioners in ethnomusicology, theology, and cultural studies, offering insights into the transformative potential of sacred vocal polyphony within the diverse tapestry of contemporary South African worship.

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INTRODUCTION

Perhaps it is important to centre this article by mentioning that the convergence of faith and music holds profound significance within Christian worship, where musical expression serves as a conduit for spiritual transcendence and communal devotion. As the theologian St. Augustine famously said, "He who sings prays twice," emphasising the deep spiritual connection between music and worship.¹ Within the

¹ Guy L Beck, *Sacred Sound: Experiencing Music in World Religions* (Wilfrid Laurier Univ. Press, 2006); Jonathan Arnold, *Music and Faith: Conversations in a Post-Secular Age* (Boydell & Brewer, 2019); Sakhiseni Joseph Yende, "Gospel Music and Liturgical Hymns to the Researcher's Spiritual Healing during the Covid-19 Pandemic: An Autoethnography Biblical Perspective," *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies*, May 24, 2023, 182–93, <https://doi.org/10.38159/erats.2023953>; Melanie Wald-Fuhrmann et al., "He Who Sings,

dynamic context of contemporary South African worship, the incorporation of sacred vocal polyphony represents a unique synthesis of tradition and innovation. This musical form, characterised by the interplay of multiple melodic lines, bears witness to a rich history deeply intertwined with both indigenous rhythmic traditions and European harmonic influences.²

The importance of this research lies in its goal of unraveling the multifaceted layers that shape sacred vocal polyphony in South African worship. Numerous scholars agree that understanding this intricate musical tradition not only enriches our comprehension of religious practices but also sheds light on the broader cultural dynamics within South African society.³ This view is supported by various scholars who mention that as the country continues to navigate its postcolonial identity, exploring the role of sacred music in worship provides a lens through which the processes of cultural negotiation, preservation, and transformation can be examined.⁴

Despite its cultural and musical richness, there is a discernible gap in scholarly discourse regarding sacred vocal polyphony in South African worship. Although numerous studies on both sacred music traditions and contemporary church music in South Africa abound, the specific intersection of these elements in the context of polyphonic expression remains relatively underexplored.⁵ Previous research often focuses on singular perspectives, neglecting the holistic understanding of how faith, tradition, and musical innovation intersect within this dynamic landscape.⁶ The motivation for conducting this study comes from a twofold motivation. Firstly, it arises from a genuine passion for the interplay of music and spirituality within diverse cultural contexts. Therefore, recognising the transformative potential of sacred vocal polyphony in congregational worship, it became evident that a comprehensive exploration of this phenomenon in the South African context was both timely and imperative. Secondly, as a researcher deeply invested in the rich musical traditions of South Africa, there exists a sincere commitment to contribute to a body of knowledge that not only celebrates the cultural heritage of the nation but also provides insights that may inspire further studies in this domain.

In this article, the following four research questions were presented to guide this study in *Harmonising Faith and Tradition: Sacred Vocal Polyphony in Contemporary South African Worship*. These questions are:

- a) How has sacred vocal polyphony evolved within the contemporary South African church music context, and what historical factors have influenced its development and adaptation?
- b) What cultural and theological significance does sacred vocal polyphony have in South African worship practices, and how does it contribute to the spiritual experiences of congregants?
- c) In what ways does the integration of sacred vocal polyphony enhance the diversity and inclusivity of worship experiences in South African churches, and how does it impact congregational engagement and participation?
- d) What challenges and opportunities arise in preserving the authenticity and cultural resonance of sacred vocal polyphony within the evolving landscape of contemporary South African church music?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this article, the researcher employs Postcolonial Theory to unearth the dynamics of power and identity. Postcolonial Theory is an interdisciplinary framework that emerged in the mid-20th century to examine the enduring effects of colonialism and imperialism on societies, cultures, and individuals.⁷ At its core,

Prays Twice'? Singing in Roman Catholic Mass Leads to Spiritual and Social Experiences That Are Predicted by Religious and Musical Attitudes," *Frontiers in Psychology* 11 (September 17, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.570189>.

² Jonathan Knight, "Sing on, Ntsikana: The Story of Christian Music Among the Xhosa People of South Africa," *Musical Offerings* 1, no. 1 (2010): 21–31, <https://doi.org/10.15385/jmo.2010.1.1.3>.

³ Kloppers, Elsabé. "Performing the sacred—Aspects of singing and contextualisation in South Africa." *HTS: Theological Studies* (2020); Sandmeier, Rebekka. "Music Beyond Genre: Tunde Jegede's African Messiah." In *HÄNDEL-JAHRBUCH*, pp. 95-104. Bärenreiter, Kassel, Germany, (2022); Yende, Sakhiseni Joseph. "The importance of understanding and making sense of Zulu traditional hymns as a symbol of expressing worship: Cognitive hermeneutics and hermeneutics of hymnody theories." *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* (2021).

⁴ Elsabé C. Kloppers, "Singing and Sounding the Sacred - the Function of Religious Songs and Hymns in the Public Sphere," *Journal for the Study of Religion* 33, no. 1 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.17159/2413-3027/2020/v33n1a2>.

⁵ Femi Adedeji, "Christian Music in Contemporary Africa: A Re-Examination of Its Essentials," *Koers: Bulletin for Christian Scholarship= Koers: Bulletin Vir Christelike Wetenskap* 72, no. 1 (2007): 85–100.

⁶ Marcell Silva Steuernagel, *Church Music Through the Lens of Performance* ([1.] | New York : Routledge, 2021. | Series: Congregational music studies series: Routledge, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003080329>.

⁷ Bart J. Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics* (Verso Books, 1997).

it seeks to deconstruct the power structures and ideological narratives that emerged during the colonial period and continue to shape contemporary worldviews.

Several scholars admit that Frantz Fanon (1925–1961), a psychiatrist and philosopher from Martinique, is a foundational figure of Postcolonial Theory. His seminal works, including "The Wretched of the Earth" and "Black Skin, White Masks," explore the psychological and existential impacts of colonialism on both colonisers and the colonised.⁸ Other pivotal figures include Edward Said, who introduced the concept of Orientalism, highlighting how Western representations of the East perpetuated imperialist ideologies. Said Edward. *Orientalism*. London: Routledge. Said Edward. *Orientalism*. London: Routledge.⁹ Homi K. Bhabha's theories of hybridity and mimicry further contributed to the understanding of cultural negotiation and resistance in postcolonial contexts.¹⁰

In the context of "Harmonising Faith and Tradition: Sacred Vocal Polyphony in Contemporary South African Worship," Postcolonial Theory provides a critical lens through which to analyse the interplay of cultural, religious, and musical elements.¹¹ Postcolonial theory encourages an examination of power dynamics between the coloniser and the colonised. In the South African context, this can shed light on how colonial influences, particularly in religious practices and music, continue to shape contemporary worship.¹² It allows for a nuanced understanding of how sacred vocal polyphony may reflect negotiations of power and authority within the church. Postcolonial Theory emphasises the concept of cultural hybridity, which refers to the blending and adaptation of cultures in postcolonial settings.

Postcolonial Theory also explores the agency and resistance of marginalised groups in response to colonial legacies. In the context of South African worship, this framework could help analyse how communities engage with and reinterpret sacred vocal polyphony as a means of asserting their own cultural and religious agency. It is inevitable that by applying Postcolonial Theory, your study can uncover deeper layers of meaning and agency within the interplay of faith, tradition, and music in South African worship, enriching the understanding of sacred vocal polyphony in this unique cultural context.

METHODOLOGY

The research methodology employed as the primary analytical framework was Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA is a well-established method that is used to dissect and interpret texts, aiming to uncover the underlying discursive structures, power dynamics, and societal ideologies embedded within them.¹³

The foundation of this study is the existing academic literature, which encompasses a diverse array of sources, including journal articles, theses, and other relevant scholarly materials.¹⁴ These sources were meticulously selected for their pertinence to the research topic: "Harmonising Faith and Tradition: Sacred Vocal Polyphony in Contemporary South African Worship." To ensure the breadth and depth of the literature review, academic resources were retrieved from reputable repositories, namely Google Scholar, JSTOR, and ResearchGate. These platforms provided access to a wealth of scholarly work, thus facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.¹⁵

The collected corpus of literature was subjected to a rigorous process of analysis through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis. This method allowed the identification of recurring themes, implicit power dynamics, and nuanced cultural nuances embedded within the texts. Themes and patterns were

⁸ Frantz Fanon, "The Wretched of the Earth," *Grove Weidenfeld*, 1963.

⁹ Said Edward, *Orientalism*. (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978).

¹⁰ Nagendra Bahadur Bhandari, "Homi K. Bhabha's Third Space Theory and Cultural Identity Today: A Critical Review," *Prithvi Academic Journal*, 2022, 171–81.

¹¹ David Jefferess, "Changing the Story: Postcolonial Studies and Resistance" (2003); Nagendra Bahadur Bhandari, "Homi K. Bhabha's Third Space Theory and Cultural Identity Today: A Critical Review," *Prithvi Academic Journal* 5 (May 12, 2022): 171–81, <https://doi.org/10.3126/paj.v5i1.45049>.

¹² Jean Kayira, "(Re)Creating Spaces for *UMunthu* : Postcolonial Theory and Environmental Education in Southern Africa," *Environmental Education Research* 21, no. 1 (January 2, 2015): 106–28, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2013.860428>.

¹³ Ke Liu and Fang Guo, "A Review on Critical Discourse Analysis," *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 6, no. 5 (May 17, 2016): 1076, <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0605.23>.

¹⁴ Teun A. Van Dijk, "Critical Discourse Analysis," in *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (Wiley, 2015), 466–85, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118584194.ch22>.

¹⁵ Uchendu Eugene Chigbu, Sulaiman Olusegun Atiku, and Cherley C Du Plessis, "The Science of Literature Reviews: Searching, Identifying, Selecting, and Synthesising," *Publications* 11, no. 1 (2023): 2.

extracted with a specific focus on aligning with the purpose of this article, which is to unravel the interplay of faith, tradition, and musical expression in contemporary South African worship. To ensure the quality and reliability of the study, a triangulation approach was adopted. This involved the cross-referencing of information from multiple sources to validate the findings and strengthen the credibility of the analysis. Triangulation not only served as a methodological safeguard but also added a layer of robustness to the study's interpretations and conclusions.

Ethical Considerations and Limitations

Given the nature of this research, ethical considerations traditionally associated with primary data collection were not applicable. The study relied solely on existing scientific data, obviating the need for ethical approval or informed consent from human subjects. However, it is of paramount importance that all relevant sources are accurately acknowledged, upholding the principles of academic integrity and scholarly attribution.

By design, this article was confined to an analysis of existing scientific data. The authors leveraged previously published works, which inherently implied reliance on the quality and comprehensiveness of the selected sources. Additionally, the study's focus was distinctly directed towards Sacred Vocal Polyphony in Contemporary South African Worship, which may lead to a narrowed scope of exploration within the broader landscape of South African musical traditions.

In summary, the research methodology leveraged the strengths of Critical Discourse Analysis and a comprehensive review of existing academic literature to illuminate the intricate dynamics of sacred music in South African worship. The approach was characterised by meticulous data collection, rigorous analysis, and methodological safeguards, ensuring a robust and credible exploration of the chosen subject matter.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Contextualising the Sacred Vocal Polyphony in Contemporary South African Worship

In the vibrant tapestry of Contemporary South African Worship, Sacred Vocal Polyphony emerges as a distinctive musical form. This rich tradition, characterised by the interplay of multiple melodic lines, marries indigenous rhythms with European harmonies. Rooted in the nation's complex history, it embodies a fusion of faith, culture, and musical innovation. As congregations gather in diverse worship spaces, Sacred Vocal Polyphony serves as a potent vessel for spiritual transcendence, fostering unity and deepening religious experiences. Its contextual significance lies in its ability to harmonise faith and tradition, offering a unique expression of devotion within the dynamic landscape of South African worship practices.

Evolution of Sacred Vocal Polyphony in South African Church Music

It is prudent to foreground this section by mentioning that the fusion of indigenous musical elements with European choral techniques in South African church music is a testament to the rich tapestry of cultural influences that shape this musical tradition.¹⁶ This integration has led to the creation of a unique and vibrant style of religious vocal polyphony, which serves as a notable representation of South African identity. This opinion is confirmed by several scholars who emphasises that the rhythmic complexity of South African church music is built on indigenous musical characteristics. These features, which are characterised by complex polyrhythms and syncopated patterns, give the music a dynamic vitality that reflects the beating heartbeat of South African culture.¹⁷ This rhythmic vitality not only distinguishes the song but also shows how closely connected music and community are in South Africa. Harmonic methods deviate from the Western tonal system and are based on indigenous South African musical traditions. The tapestry of choral arrangements is enhanced by these distinctive harmonic structures, which add a

¹⁶ Madimabe Geoff Mapaya, "African Musicology: Towards Defining and Setting Parameters of the Study of the Indigenous African Music," *The Anthropologist* 18, no. 2 (September 17, 2014): 619–27, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09720073.2014.11891580>.

¹⁷ Kloppers, "Singing and Sounding the Sacred - the Function of Religious Songs and Hymns in the Public Sphere."

distinctive tonal hue. The addition of native harmonies gives the music depth and complexity while providing a striking contrast to the more well-known Western harmonic traditions.¹⁸

It is essential to state that choral arrangements accommodate the distinctive voice characteristics that are established in South African society. Through the use of methods like throat singing, ululation, and call-and-response rhythms, music may communicate not only melodies but also narratives, traditions, and a feeling of identity. These vocal expressions give the song a deep emotional resonance that makes listening to it an intense and moving experience.¹⁹ Scholars such as Ngcobo and Mapaya go on to say that instrumentation, a distinctive feature of traditional South African music, adds a percussive depth that is unusual for European choral music.²⁰ Drums, marimbas, rattles, and other indigenous instruments add complex rhythmic patterns to vocal compositions that give them life. This blending of several instruments demonstrates how many cultural influences can coexist harmoniously, creating a genuinely exceptional audio experience.²¹

The structure and form of African church music are significantly influenced by European choral techniques, claim.²² The complex harmonies and counterpoint seen in South African choral pieces are indicative of the emphasis on polyphony, a distinguishing feature of European choral traditions. The interaction of various separate melodic lines results in an aural experience that is layered and textured, showing the impact of European musical history.²³ To record and execute the complex choir pieces, Western musical notation was adopted. Although initially foreign, this notation system has been modified to include indigenous features, enabling the accurate rendition of the delicate melodic expressions that characterise South African church music.²⁴

The significant historical occasions and personalities influenced South African church music. Western musical traditions were imported to the area throughout the colonial era and with the advent of missionaries, changed the region's musical landscape.²⁵ A critical turning point in the development of South African church music was during this time of cultural exchange. Accordingly, church music was significantly impacted by the apartheid era, a terrible period in South Africa's history.²⁶ A few churches actively opposed apartheid laws, using music as a potent instrument of protest and support. The musical expression of the church was forever altered by the social and political upheaval of this time. For instance, notable figures like Enoch Sontonga, composer of the iconic hymn "Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika," and John Knox Bokwe, played instrumental roles in shaping the repertoire and style of South African church music. Their contributions serve as a testament to the enduring legacy of individuals in the evolution of this musical tradition.²⁷

Evidently, sacred vocal polyphony has continued to adapt and develop in the modern setting. The music has changed to accommodate the changing musical tastes and worship styles in modern South African churches.²⁸ Key stylistic breakthroughs and changes in expression are what define this evolution. Composers and choir leaders are pushing the envelope by combining traditional elements with Western choral practices.²⁹ South African church music is given new life by this exciting blend, ensuring its

¹⁸ Madimabe Mapaya, "Music Traditions of the African Indigenous Churches: A Northern Sotho Case Study," *Southern African Journal for Folklore Studies* 23, no. 1 (2013).

¹⁹ Kloppers, "Singing and Sounding the Sacred - the Function of Religious Songs and Hymns in the Public Sphere."

²⁰ Wendy Ngcobo, "The Significance of Sound and Music in African Culture," Wilderness, May 2022,

[https://www.wildernessdestinations.com/journal/cultures-and-communities/the-significance-of-sound-and-music-in-african-culture;](https://www.wildernessdestinations.com/journal/cultures-and-communities/the-significance-of-sound-and-music-in-african-culture)

Madimabe Mapaya, "Music Traditions of the African Indigenous Churches: A Northern Sotho Case Study," *Southern African Journal for Folklore Studies* 23 (2013): 1.

²¹ Lawrence A Hoffman and Janet R Walton, *Sacred Sound and Social Change: Liturgical Music in Jewish and Christian Experience*, vol. 3 (University of Notre Dame Press, 1993).

²² Kloppers, "Singing and Sounding the Sacred - the Function of Religious Songs and Hymns in the Public Sphere."

²³ Insook Choi, "An Introduction to Musical Interactions," *Multimodal Technologies and Interaction* 6, no. 1 (2022): 4.

²⁴ June Dickie, "Singing the Psalms: Applying Principles of African Music to Bible Translation," *Scriptura: Journal for Contextual Hermeneutics in Southern Africa* 116, no. 1 (2017): 1–16.

²⁵ Knight, "Sing on, Ntsikana: The Story of Christian Music Among the Xhosa People of South Africa."

²⁶ Siphosile S. Malembe, "South African Popular Gospel Music In the Post-Apartheid Era: Genre, Production, Mediation and Consumption." (University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2005).

²⁷ Yende, "Gospel Music and Liturgical Hymns to the Researcher's Spiritual Healing during the Covid-19 Pandemic: An Autoethnography Biblical Perspective."

²⁸ Solomon O Ademiluka, "Music in Christian Worship in Nigeria in Light of Early Missionary Attitude," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 44, no. 1 (2023): 2796.

²⁹ Michael Barrett, *The Value of Choral Singing in a Multi-Cultural South Africa* (University of Pretoria (South Africa), 2007).

relevance and vibrancy in today's varied culture. It serves as a living embodiment of history, culture, and spirituality, resonating with audiences around the world. The music continues to be a source of inspiration, connecting people across generations and celebrating the rich tapestry of South African heritage.

Cultural and Theological Significance of Sacred Vocal Polyphony

Particularly in South African contexts, sacred vocal polyphony is a distinctive musical style that combines native elements with European choral techniques. It has significant cultural and religious significance. Accordingly, South African worship customs include sacred vocal polyphony as a cultural identifier. It serves as a potent manifestation of cultural identity and history.³⁰ This music has a strong cultural foundation in the history and customs of the area, reflecting the rich and varied cultural mosaic of South Africa. Sacred vocal polyphony resonates with the cultural identities of its listeners through its complicated rhythms, harmonies, and vocal styles, producing a strong sense of connection to one's heritage.³¹ It turns into a musical representation of the oneness that connects worshipers from various backgrounds in their shared cultural experiences and traditions. Music is more than just a form of artistic expression; it embodies the soul of the community, drawing from the indigenous roots and experiences of its people.³² It is evident that by integrating these cultural elements with European choral techniques, sacred vocal polyphony creates a harmonious blend that celebrates the multifaceted cultural tapestry of South Africa.

Sacred vocal polyphony is a deeply theological phenomenon in addition to being a cultural one. Congregants' spiritual experiences are enhanced by the music's rich theological meanings and metaphors.³³ The theological foundations of the faith are reflected in the harmonies, counterpoints, and lyrical substance, which are frequently profoundly founded in Christian ideas and texts. The theological idea of unity within the Christian faith is echoed in this music by the complicated polyphonic structures and complex harmonies.³⁴ Similar to how the diverse congregation meets for worship, it reflects the idea of several voices joining together in harmony. The music draws worshipers in on a spiritual level, encouraging them to consider their beliefs and creating a closer relationship with God. Sacred voice polyphony effectively connects cultural expressiveness and religious profundity. It offers a distinctive style of worship that not only reflects South Africa's diverse cultural setting but also benefits adherents' spiritual development.³⁵ It represents the rich and intricate tapestry of South African worship rituals and speaks to the heart and spirit, resulting in a powerful worship experience that connects people with their cultural heritage and their faith.

Diversity and Inclusivity in Worship Experiences

The importance of inclusivity and diversity in worship services cannot be overstated when trying to establish a peaceful and spiritually enlightening atmosphere. In the context of holy vocal polyphony in South African churches, this is strikingly illustrated.³⁶ A potent stimulus for vocal variation and harmony in worship is the incorporation of holy vocal polyphony. This complex musical tradition allows for voices of various pitches and tones, resulting in a symphony of sound that goes beyond the limitations of any one person.³⁷ A communal act of worship is produced by the melodic interaction of voices, each of which adds a distinctive texture. Worshipers experience a sense of togetherness through this vast variety of

³⁰ Kloppers, "Singing and Sounding the Sacred - the Function of Religious Songs and Hymns in the Public Sphere."

³¹ Marinela Mahony, "An Investigation of the Polyphonic Folk Music of Albania" (UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC, 2011).

³² Ndwamato Mugovhani, "'African Renaissance, Indigenous African Music, and Globalisation: Collusion or Collision?'" 6 (January 1, 2013): 1-13.

³³ John William; V an Niekerk, E. Van de Laar, "A Theological Exploration of the Role and Use of Music for Worship in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa" (1900).

³⁴ Nissim Amzallag, "The Musical Mode of Writing of the Psalms and Its Significance," *Old Testament Essays* 27, no. 1 (2014): 17-40.

³⁵ Elsabé Kloppers, "Performing the Sacred – Aspects of Singing and Contextualisation in South Africa," *HTS: Theological Studies* 76, no. 2 (2020): 1-9, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v76i2.5477>.

³⁶ Michelle Sternthal et al., "Depression, Anxiety, and Religious Life: A Search for Mediators," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 51 (September 30, 2010): 343-59, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022146510378237>.

³⁷ Van de Laar, "A Theological Exploration of the Role and Use of Music for Worship in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa."

vocal sounds, where variations in pitch and tone come together to form a bigger whole.³⁸ Through the contribution of each person's distinctive voice to a group's spiritual journey, this unity in variety generates a profound sense of communal worship.

According to academics, the use of holy vocal polyphony broadens the demographic that South African churches can embrace.³⁹ It transcends age ranges, cultural backgrounds, and musical aptitudes, providing a welcoming environment for congregation members to worship. This multifaceted musical heritage finds a home with people of all ages and socioeconomic backgrounds, opening opportunities for intergenerational worship experiences. It takes into account South Africa's diverse cultural heritage and ensures that attendees from all walks of life may relate to the music. This openness, in turn, encourages more congregational involvement and engagement.⁴⁰ It gives worshippers the ability to actively participate in the community's communal worship experience, regardless of their level of musical ability. Congregants discover a shared language through holy vocal polyphony to convey their devotion and faith as a group.⁴¹ In essence, sacred vocal polyphony exemplifies the beauty that emerges from diversity and inclusivity in worship. It harmonises the myriads of voices, both in terms of vocal capabilities and cultural backgrounds, creating a collective symphony of worship. Through this musical tradition, South African churches offer a space where all can come together, find unity in their diversity, and actively participate in a communal spiritual journey.

Challenges and Opportunities in Preserving Authenticity

In South African church music, preserving the integrity of holy vocal polyphony is a constant endeavor characterised by a careful balance of tradition and innovation. Juggling the conflict between maintaining the integrity of sacred vocal polyphony and considering changing musical trends is one of the main issues.⁴² There is a chance that the distinctive spirit of this tradition will be lost when modern musical styles and tastes arise. It takes a careful and nuanced approach to strike a balance between conserving the rich historical foundations of religious vocal polyphony and accepting new elements. Composers and church communities approach this problem in different ways.⁴³ While preserving the fundamentals of sacred vocal polyphony, they incorporate elements of modern musical forms. This combination preserves the history of tradition while allowing for a dynamic evolution that appeals to younger generations. Collaborations between seasoned performers and emerging artists can also result in creative compositions that bridge tradition and contemporary.

Accordingly, another important difficulty is maintaining the cultural and historical value of religious vocal polyphony. Like any cultural practice, there is a chance that it will eventually become extinct.⁴⁴ It takes proactive measures to make sure that this musical form is essence and significance be transmitted to future generations. Teaching music is only one aspect of transferring the art of holy vocal polyphony; it also requires knowledge of its cultural and theological foundations.⁴⁵ This requires an all-encompassing strategy that includes formal education, mentoring, and community involvement. Embracing technology and digital platforms can also be effective documentation and distribution methods, opening this tradition to a wider audience and enhancing their understanding of it.

There are numerous opportunities to preserve and revitalise sacred vocal polyphony. An organised foundation for conserving this musical history can be provided by cooperative initiatives

³⁸ Bruce C. Coats, "Voices in Concert: Communication Ethnography of Pentecostal Worship" (Marquette University, 2012); David A Williams, "Worship Music as Spiritual Identity: An Examination Of Music In The Liturgy Among Black And White Adventists In The United States From 1840 To 1944," *Andrews University Seminary Studies (AUSS)* 56, no. 2 (2019): 15.

³⁹ Mookgo S Kgatle, "Singing as a Therapeutic Agent in Pentecostal Worship," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 40, no. 1 (2019): 1–7; Van de Laar, "A Theological Exploration of the Role and Use of Music for Worship in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa."

⁴⁰ Kloppers, "Performing the Sacred – Aspects of Singing and Contextualisation in South Africa."

⁴¹ Coenie J Calitz, "Healing Liturgy: The Role of Music and Singing," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 38, no. 1 (2017): 1–9.

⁴² Austin Chinagorom Okigbo, "Liturgy and Musical Inculturation in a Post-Apartheid South African Catholicism," *Yale Journal of Music & Religion* 7, no. 2 (February 20, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.17132/2377-231X.1190>.

⁴³ Sakhiseni Joseph Yende, "The Importance of Understanding and Making Sense of Zulu Traditional Hymns as a Symbol of Expressing Worship: Cognitive Hermeneutics and Hermeneutics of Hymnody Theories," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 77, no. 4 (December 14, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i4.7038>.

⁴⁴ SimonMary Asele Ahiokhai, "A Case for a Polyphonic Anthropology: Giving Voice to Experiences of Women of Color," *Religions* 13, no. 9 (2022): 868.

⁴⁵ Nishantha Rohan Nethsinghe, "The Notion of Authenticity in Multicultural Music: Approaching Proximal Simulation," *International Journal of Multicultural Education* 15, no. 2 (August 29, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.18251/ijme.v15i2.551>.

involving educational institutions, churches, and cultural organisations.⁴⁶ The tradition can also be revitalised by embracing multiculturalism and encouraging cross-cultural exchange, which will give it new views and ensure its relevance in a world that is constantly changing. In conclusion, it takes a complex and varied strategy to navigate the opportunities and challenges of maintaining the authenticity of sacred vocal polyphony. Inevitably, South African communities can ensure that this rich musical history thrives and resonates with future generations by carefully balancing tradition and creativity and by actively participating in cultural preservation and transmission activities.

Discussion Summary

This article on Sacred Vocal Polyphony in Contemporary South African Worship provides a deep exploration of the cultural, spiritual, and musical dimensions of this unique tradition. Through the lens of postcolonial theory, the findings underscore the profound impact of cultural exchange on South African identity.⁴⁷ The fusion of indigenous rhythms with European harmonies serves as a poignant metaphor for the nation's complex history, emphasising the adaptability and resilience of South African cultural identity in the face of colonial influence. Furthermore, the article highlights how Sacred Vocal Polyphony transcends conventional musical expression to become a conduit for spiritual elevation.⁴⁸ The interplay of multiple melodic lines mirrors the interconnectedness of faith and community, fostering a sense of unity within congregations. This collective spiritual experience goes beyond individual worship, solidifying the communal aspect of worship. Music emerges as a unifying force, exemplifying the postcolonial assertion of agency and communal identity.

The tradition also functions as a cultural marker, preserving and celebrating South African heritage. Vocal styles deeply rooted in the culture, such as throat singing and call-and-response patterns, are seamlessly integrated into choral arrangements. These elements serve as conduits for the transmission of stories, traditions, and a sense of identity. As a result, Sacred Vocal Polyphony becomes a living embodiment of the diverse cultural tapestry of South Africa, exemplifying the assertion of indigenous cultural practices in the face of colonial imposition.⁴⁹

The article further highlights the theological depth embedded within Sacred Vocal Polyphony. Through its complex harmonies and polyphonic structures, the tradition echoes the theological concept of unity within the Christian tradition. This musical form mirrors the idea of diverse voices converging in harmony, mirroring the congregation's unity in worship. It engages worshipers on a profound spiritual level, prompting reflection on faith and deepening the connection to the divine. This aspect speaks to the reclaiming of religious expression and interpretation within the postcolonial context.

Inclusivity and diversity emerge as prominent themes, with Sacred Vocal Polyphony providing an inclusive space for individuals of all ages, backgrounds, and musical abilities to actively participate in worship. The diversity of voices contributes to a collective symphony, where individual differences converge to form a greater whole. This inclusivity empowers worshippers to collectively express their devotion, bridges gaps in pitch, tone, and cultural background. It signifies the democratisation of worship and religious expression, allowing for a more inclusive and participatory experience. Preserving the authenticity of Sacred Vocal Polyphony, as discussed in the article, requires a delicate balance between tradition and innovation. The challenge lies in upholding the rich historical roots while accommodating evolving musical trends. This nuanced approach ensures that the essence and significance of this musical form are passed down to future generations, affirming the agency of South Africans in shaping their cultural and religious expressions in the postcolonial era.

⁴⁶ Victor A Grauer, "Some Notable Features of Pygmy and Bushmen Polyphonic Practice, with Special Reference to Survivals of Traditional Vocal Polyphony in Europe," in *Proceedings of the Fourth International Symposium on Traditional Polyphony*, 2008, 15–19.

⁴⁷ Kloppers, "Singing and Sounding the Sacred - the Function of Religious Songs and Hymns in the Public Sphere."

⁴⁸ Kloppers, "Singing and Sounding the Sacred - the Function of Religious Songs and Hymns in the Public Sphere."

⁴⁹ Kloppers, Elsabé C. "Singing and Sounding the Sacred-the Function of Religious Songs and Hymns in the Public Sphere." *Journal for the Study of Religion* (2020); Mapaya, Madimabe. "Music traditions of the African indigenous churches: A Northern Sotho case study." *Southern African Journal for Folklore Studies* (2013).

RECOMMENDATIONS

In this article, several recommendations are drawn from the postcolonial theory-based issues covered in the essay on Sacred Vocal Polyphony in Contemporary South African Worship: First, it was suggested that South African communities have educational programs that focus on the background, relevance, and methods of Sacred Vocal Polyphony. This teaching must cover both indigenous components and European choral methods, highlighting their synthesis as evidence of South Africa's cultural resiliency after colonialism. Second, support initiatives that foster cross-cultural knowledge of Sacred Vocal Polyphony among various South African cultures. This can promote harmony and respect amongst various communities, highlighting the importance of cultural diversity.

Thirdly, create specialised programmes for the documenting and preservation of sacred vocal polyphony. In addition to conducting practitioner interviews and gathering textual and visual resources, this should also involve capturing performances. The accessibility and durability of this cultural treasure can be greatly enhanced through digital platforms. Fourthly, give aspiring composers and choir leaders who want to innovate within the context of Sacred Vocal Polyphony a platform and funding opportunities. While maintaining the fundamentals of the form, promote the exploration of modern musical styles. This can facilitate a dynamic progression that appeals to younger generations. Fifth, it was suggested that South African churches actively promote inclusivity and diversity in their places of worship. This includes facilitating opportunities for congregants of all ages, backgrounds, and musical abilities to participate in Sacred Vocal Polyphony.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the exploration of Sacred Vocal Polyphony in contemporary South African Christian worship highlights its deep cultural, spiritual, and musical importance. This unique musical form, which blends African rhythms with European harmonies, represents South Africa's postcolonial identity and its history of cultural exchange. Sacred Vocal Polyphony goes beyond musical complexity by creating shared spiritual experiences, strengthening the connection between faith and community. It is evident from the findings of this article that harmonising multiple voices symbolises the congregation's unity, where diverse individuals come together in worship. The interplay of different melodies creates a powerful collective experience, emphasising the communal nature of Christian worship in South Africa. Theologically, the intricate harmonies reflect the Christian ideal of unity in diversity, symbolising the congregation's shared faith journey. This inclusive tradition allows worshippers of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities to participate, fostering a sense of belonging. As both a cultural and spiritual practice, Sacred Vocal Polyphony embodies South Africa's evolving identity, encouraging the preservation of its heritage while guiding future generations in their spiritual path.

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