IMPROVISATORY MUSICAL PRACTICES IN THE WESLEYAN METHODIST TRADITION

Graeme Pender

There was a continuity of improvisatory musical practices in early Wesleyan Methodist churches in Victoria from 1835 to 1914. This article attempts to show a continuum of two watersheds of improvisatory practice, namely "lowbrow" and "highbrow" that drew upon a variety of less "orthodox" performance methods, as well as some of the more formal nineteenth century liturgical and performance contexts.

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The term *improvisatory* found in the title of this paper must be understood in broad terms if any attempt to trace the history of improvisation in Australian church music is to be undertaken. The word used in both colonial and contemporary Australia certainly reflects several meanings. One school of thought advocated the memorisation of predetermined rudimentary accompaniments, in order to present presumably spontaneous improvisatory performances. Another argued that the "spur-of-the-moment" creation and performance of music involving all the possibilities of sudden inspiration, surprise, experimentation and personal discovery was improvisation. Melbourne historian and academic, John Whiteoak, defined improvisation as a genre that:

> ...ranges from, say, liberties taken in the interpretation of a conventional score to the most spontaneous or indeterminate forms of music-making imaginable. It takes a very wide variety of improvisatory genres and musical practices within genres. At a less significant level, it embraces the action of "freezing" musical spontaneity into notation (e.g. the writing of fantasias, ragtime or jazz).[1]

This fluid definition provides the vehicle for the musician who spontaneously creates new forms of music independent of an existing framework, the spontaneous elaboration or variation of an existing framework; or a combination of predetermined musical elements (such as memorized accompaniment patterns). Whiteoak

[1] J. Whiteoak, "The Improvisatory Process", *Sounds Australian* 14:48 (1996,): 2.

maintained that "all live performance of music is to some degree improvisatory" since musicians make personal choices that affect a musical performance, whilst still faithfully following a score.

I agree with Whiteoak and support the view that the term "improvisation" needs to be evaluated in a way that allows for a much broader and open-ended approach to musical performance. Rather than relying on a perceived set of criterion that focuses on the performance practice of a musician, improvisatory practice needs to include factors such as natural and learned abilities, as well as intuitiveness, experimentation and creative insight. Thus, for the purpose of this article, the term "improvisation" is used in a liberal context, regardless of whether the performance was a highly skilled, spontaneous invention or not. Improvisation includes a selection of a pastiche of musical "fills," the inspired rendition of a detailed musical score, or simply the embellishment of a melodic or harmonic line. The rudimentary or complex embellishment or ornamentation of the melody or harmonic structure likewise falls under the definition of improvisation.

Approaches to the performance of Wesleyan Methodist Church music in colonial Melbourne followed two streams of musical activity: "lowbrow" and "highbrow." "Highbrow" approaches to music making emerged from the systematic European conservatorium tradition associated with oratorios, organ concerts, and orchestral performances of sacred music as well as impressive choir recitals. Within the "highbrow" genre of music making came sacred oratorio and church organ accompaniment. Even though this genre embraced systematisation, tradition, conservatism and at times, a rigid orthodoxy, there was, nonetheless, the presence of improvisation seen particularly in embellishment and variation techniques.

The "lowbrow" context surfaced as an ostensibly more practical approach to musical practice during the formative years of colonial Melbourne and was performed by various "unorthodox" ensembles sometimes performing in fairly informal contexts. Both approaches to the performance of church music became unified in the sense that each stream applied common improvisatory and accompaniment techniques. Conventional musical training gave church musicians the opportunity to become skilled at fundamental improvisatory practice.

For the purposes of this article, the term "Wesleyan" is used in a global sense, that not only includes the Wesleyan tradition but also embraces the many groups that detached themselves from the

mother Wesleyan body. These include the Methodist New Connexion, Bible Christians, Protestant Methodists, Bakerites, Wesleyan Reformers and the Primitive Methodists. Whilst points of theology differed from tradition to tradition, some groups approached hymn-singing and public prayer with more gusto and enthusiasm than others.

Australia's "tyranny of distance" effected the periodic visitation of celebrated musicians from Europe for much of the first half of the 19th century. Even when musicians such as William Vincent Wallace (violin) and Isaac Nathan (organ) travelled to Australia and performed on the concert platform, their performances tended to feature improvisations based either on a single theme or on a potpourri of popular tunes of the time. Similarly, the more informal local town bands and street entertainers catered for colonial musical taste by improvising well-known melodies of the day, probably in a style that resembled, if not copied, the improvisatory Anglo-Celtic folk tradition of England, Ireland, Wales and Scotland. In a like manner, the performance of church music in Australia before the 1850s especially seemed to reflect these general colonial musical trends.

From the 1850s onwards, the musical life of Melbourne began to develop following the founding of the Philharmonic Society in 1853 and the visits of overseas musicians such as Sara Flower, Catherine Hayes, Anna Bishop, Miska Hauser, Jenny Claus, Arabella Goddard and Charles Horsley. Likewise, many skillful musicians came to Australia with the intention of becoming residents. These people contributed to the progress of music in Australia up to and beyond the 19th century and their performances of sacred music altered the status of church music in Melbourne. No longer was "traditional" Christian church music being performed at a "grassroots" level. Rather, sacred music was becoming elevated to a more "highbrow" position in Melbourne, linking it to a more orthodox musical convention, very much in line with
secular musical performances.

Even though the emergence of the Wesleyan tradition in colonial Melbourne maintained its own traditional musical identity, the Wesleyan Methodist model contained a greater sense of overlapping or "blurring" of the "lowbrow" and "highbrow" genres for much of the 19th century, compared to the Roman Catholic and Anglican traditions which seemed more clear cut in their approaches to sacred music. The Wesleyan tradition was musically "lowbrow" for much of the 19th century, even though the emergence of sporadic

sacred concerts and organ recitals from as early as 1843 embraced aspects of "highbrow" improvisatory musical practices.

Congregational Hymn Singing

Edmund Finn wrote that the Rev. Joseph Orton celebrated the "first Wesleyan service in the [Melbourne] colony...in the tent of Dr. Thomson by the banks of the Yarra."[2] Whilst Orton led the liturgy, Thomson led the singing.[3] In the afternoon, Orton presided at another service. On this occasion, most of the congregation "consisted of natives – about fifty – who sat very quietly, and seemed particularly interested by the singing."[4] Even though there is no explicit mention of what was sung at these services, the hymn singing was probably unaccompanied and sung with great enthusiasm. Joan Mansfield quoted one writer in *The Methodist* from 1887 thus: "The strength of Methodism consists in a simple form of service, good and hearty congregational singing and in the power of the pulpit."[5] Even Sydney's Anglican Minister, Samuel Marsden, was pleased with the Wesleyan's reputation as a singing people, "envying the comparative freedom and variety of their music."[6]

Finn wrote that soon after Orton's service, "class-meetings were held by some religiously disposed laymen."[7] Among the names of those who attended these prayer meetings were William Witton and John Peers. Witton was a local preacher from Tasmania who conducted meetings on Sundays and during the week. Peers was described as "an ardent Wesleyan" and musician who worked as a "philharmonic contractor." Peers also secured land at the corner of Swanston and Little Flinders Streets and built "free *gratis*" a brick

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[2] E. Finn, ("Garryowen"), *The Chronicles of Early Melbourne, 1835-1852: Historical, Anecdotal and Personal* (Melbourne: Heritage Publications, undated (facsimile ed. Melbourne, Fergusson & Mitchell, 1888), 153.
[3] K. E. Eckersall, *Eltham Inhabitants: For Most the Serious Part* (Eltham-Montmorency Uniting Church, 2000), 24.
[4] Eckersall, 24.
[5] http://www.westgallerymusic.co.uk/articles/Mansfield/Mansfield4.html, accessed 20/6/2005.
[6] J. Mansfield, "Music – A Window on Australian Christian Life", *Re-Visioning Australian Colonial Christianity: New Essays in the Australian Christian Experience 1788-1900*, (ed.) E. Campion and M. Hutchinson (Sydney: Centre for the Study of Australian Christianity, 1994), 134; also refer to A. T. Yarwood, *Samuel Marsden: The Great Survivor* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1977), 161.
[7] Finn, 153.

chapel that could hold 150 people.[8] Peers, also a "gifted singer", formed a choir of local people who were accompanied by a clarinet and flute that "gave a charm to the evening meetings which led to the rapid increase in attendance."[9]

Following the discovery of gold in Victoria during the 1850s, the Methodists were the first to erect a chapel for public worship on the goldfields with a resident minister.[10] Many Cornish and Irish miners proclaimed the Gospel all over the goldfields through song and prayer, worshipping in tents and "many a gully and on many a creek side."[11] It was common to hear Cornish Methodists singing Wesleyan hymns during the evening, either accompanied or unaccompanied. Albeit "tongue-in-cheek", Benson described their spirituality thus:

> [Cornish miners] were very zealous, and would not object to a minister killing himself with hard labour, but would rather praise him for it, and then, gathering devoutly about his corpse, they would lustily sing – "Rejoice for a brother deceased."[12]

Since there was either no accompaniment, or else the accompaniment was rudimentary, the miners' approach to hymn singing would have been largely improvisational in approach. If any spur-of-the-moment part singing occurred at these services, their harmonisations would have been fundamentally aurally orientated. In 1865, a group of Cornish miners began an ongoing tradition singing Christmas carols in Moonta, South Australia on Christmas Eve. These carols were associated with the great revival brought to Cornwall by John Wesley and were largely improvisational, characterised by the spontaneous singing of "florid airs, a rolling bass, and frequent points of imitation."[13] Earlier accounts of unaccompanied Wesleyan prayer services on the Victorian goldfields provide examples of "grassroots" improvisational musical practice:

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[8] C. I. Benson, *A Century of Victorian Methodism* (Melbourne: Spectator Publications, 1935), 34; see also Finn, 153.
[9] Benson, 34.
[10] Benson, 97.
[11] Benson, 99.
[12] Benson, 104.
[13] O. Pryor, *Australia's Little Cornwall* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1962); cited in J. Whiteoak, & A. Scott-Maxwell, (eds.), J. Whiteoak, "Christmas Music", *Currency Companion to Music and Dance in Australia* (Sydney: Currency House Inc., 2003), 139.

> It is pleasing to see public worship conducted by an open-air congregation, among the wild trees and stoney [sic] ranges of the forest...and hear the melodious strain pour forth the gratitude of their hearts to Him who made and redeemed man.[14]

When reflecting on the miners' approach to sacred song, two important questions to consider are: 1) what hymns did they sing and, 2) how were they sung? In an attempt to answer the first question, one should consider perhaps the earliest Australian hymnbook printed in Port Jackson in 1821. This book entitled, *An abridgment of the Wesleyan hymns, selected from the larger hymn book, published in England, for the use of the people called Methodists*, was compiled by Rev. John Wesley. It contained 560 hymns and one anthem and emerged in Australia because of "the great scarcity of hymn books in this colony, particularly in the interior towns and districts."[15] Although the text contained 130 pages of Wesleyan Methodist hymns, a publication that attested to the primary place of hymn singing in their tradition, this hymnal contained no musical notation.

It was not until 1843 that a hymnal containing both words and music was first published in Australia.[16] Since many people who migrated to Australia during the first half of the 19th century were often illiterate, there would have been a greater reliance on one's memory for recalling the melody of these hymns. Accordingly, if the originally intended melodic, rhythmic or harmonic line or structure became modified or adjusted slightly or significantly, the performance would enter the context of improvisation. Many of these early choirs would have entered the realm of "problem-solving experimentation": congregations who were not formally trained musicians, who relied on fostering an aural tradition.

The second question is more difficult to answer since the technology of sound recordings did not exist during this early period. In attempting to determine the "sound" of colonial hymn singing, improvisational practice within the Australian Wesleyan Methodist tradition was active, experimental and dynamic. At a

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[14] *Argus*, 4 March 1853, 4.
[15] John Wesley, "Preface", *An Abridgment of the Wesleyan Hymns, Selected from the Larger Hymn Book, Published in England, for the Use of the People called Methodists* (Sydney: George Howe, Port Jackson, 1821).
[16] *A Collection of Psalms and Tunes for the Morning and Evening Service of Each Sunday in the Year and Each Day in the Month, Arranged for the Use of St. George's Church, Hobart Town*, (c.1843), cited in D. Gome, "Australian Hymnody, 1821-1901: An Annotated Checklist of Sources in Australian Libraries", *Continuo* 24 (1995): 20.

public tea meeting in Eltham, Victoria, the Rev. Henry Baker described the disadvantages to the "success of gospel ministrations, arising from defective architecture [and] lack of taste in church choirs."[17] This "lack of taste" was probably suggesting either the experimental approach to singing by church choirs, or else their poor musicianship. Likewise, the following reference points to the improvisational character of an unorthodox ensemble gathered at a Wesleyan service on the goldfields, suggestive of a band of questionable musicianship:

> I remember a service in a small goldfields' chapel where the musical instruments consisted of flute and cornet, violin and bass viol and ophoclyde [sic]. How the ophoclyde player blew and blew and made more noise than melody![18]

Perhaps some approaches to hymn singing in local Victorian parishes took the form of grandiose speech. If this were the case, then clearly the original melodic and harmonic structures of the hymn would have been altered substantially. Whether choristers supplied harmonic lines spontaneously or ornamented the melody either considerably or slightly, or whether they delivered hymns with grandiose speech or were plainly poor musicians, Wesleyan Methodist hymn singing was to a large degree improvisatory.

Ecstatic Worship

For the purpose of this discussion, the etymological root of the word "ecstasy" comes from the Greek word *ekstasis* meaning "being outside of one's self".[19] Worship within the Wesleyan Methodist tradition emphasised simplicity. This became apparent by their unadorned churches and services. Prayer was always personal, impulsive and unconstrained rather than following any set form.[20]

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[17] Eckersall, 54-55.
[18] "An Old Man's Thoughts IV: Methodist Psalmody," *Methodist* (22 October 1910): 2.
[19] The Christianised religious ecstasy of the New Testament, commonly referred to as "ecstatic utterances," or "speaking in tongues" referred to in 1 Corinthians 12-14, had a pronounced effect on the internal and external religious Christian ceremony. Much of this form of "prayer" evolved into a style of expressive prayer and worship known as "jubilation" or "jubilus" which means, "loud shouting, or whooping." Jubilation, or "ecstatic" worship was a form of improvised song-prayer practiced during the Patristic period when the Roman churches had a considerable degree of spontaneity in their worship, including the collective improvisation of psalm singing and hymns.
[20] T. Van Sommers, *Religion in Australia* (Adelaide: Rigby Court, 1966), 133.

Personal worship in particular was reflected in one's approach to congregational singing. Their singing was "typically from the heart, fervent, loud and very slow, as was the custom of the time."[21] This description highlighted the passion, devotion and enthusiasm expected amongst worshippers. Possibly Mansfield's previous reference was hinting at some kind of ecstatic experience that caused one to feel literally "beside oneself" by reason of some intense spiritual encounter.

The presence of ecstatic worship became a familiar characteristic in many early Wesleyan prayer meetings. During many of these meetings congregations moved by the power of the Holy Spirit generally supported their preachers by spontaneously shouting "Amen" or "Glory be," although by 1888 the Rev. J. H. Fletcher lamented "the silence which has crept into our worship, instead of the soul-stirring responses of earlier days."[22] Early colonial Methodist prayer meetings usually witnessed accounts of ecstasy, described as "lively meetings" that produced "passionate expressions of feelings and aspirations in song as well as prayer." The following description attested to the ecstatic atmosphere that could be generated during Wesleyan prayer meetings:

> [Samuel Hewitt] set a whole houseful of people in commotion. I fancy I can hear him giving out that glorious old hymn "O God Our Help in Ages Past." With his eyes lit by the light of God's Holy Spirit, he would suddenly shout out, before the singing started, "Yes, friends, our God HAS been our help in the past, and is here to help us tonight. He is our only Hope, our shelter from the storms of sin and persecution around us, but the best of all is, He is our eternal home. At this stage, many would cry out, "Glory to God, Hallelujah!" By the time the hymn and first prayer were through, members could be heard weeping or shouting Glory![23]

From a musical perspective, the result of ecstasy, generated in this case by enthusiastic and spirited prayer, can have a profound effect on one's approach to improvisational practice either vocally or instrumentally. The ecstatic nature of "praising the Lord" in song becomes apparent in this following extract, an occasion that allowed

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[21] Mansfield, 134-135.
[22] Don Wright and Eric Clancy, *The Methodists: A History of Methodism in NSW* (St. Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1993), 73.
[23] H. Barker and R. Hawkins, *Early Wesleyans of Pennant Hills* (Hornsby: 1983), 37; also cited in Mansfield, 135.

for spontaneous intuitive group interaction even during the obvious reactions caused by the singing:

> One night in 1841, as a band of Wesleyan missionaries marched along George Street singing hymns and praising the Lord, a Romanist mob pushed an empty dray at them, one man hurled a dead cat into the midst and others threw crackers.[24]

Jazz musicians who perform gospel music can experience "ecstasy" during their attempts at improvisation. Gospel songs, spirituals sung or performed in gospel style, or sacred works inspired by church music often include ecstatic experiences that affect the rhythmic, physical, inclusive and improvisatory aspects of the style and induce a feeling of spiritual freedom. American jazz saxophonist John Coltrane wrote a composition called "A Love Supreme" which acknowledged his belief in God. Coltrane said that 90 percent of his playing was prayer and the prayers he attempted to play were closer to the uninterpreted tongues of angels than the *Book of Common Prayer*. His improvisations also attempted to transfigure the lives of those who heard him play, whilst his own goal was "to live the truly religious life and express it" through his music. Moreover, Coltrane said that his music "is the spiritual expression of what I am – my faith, my knowledge, my being."[25] Perhaps the famous saying: *Qui cantat, bis orat* [he who sings prays twice] is appropriate regarding Coltrane's intimate relationship with God.

Improvisation can become a "prayer," especially if one focuses on praise and thanksgiving during this time of self-expression. For myself, improvisation is prayer because it heightens my own personal relationship with God through the symbolic activity of performing music, either in a religious or jazz context. Within both musical worlds, I can experience moments of deep ecstasy, which heightens my own prayer experience and allows a more penetrating improvisation to emerge.

These personal recollections seem to mirror, to a point, similar ecstatic responses by some vocalists and instrumentalists during their own improvisational practices within the Wesleyan Methodist tradition. It is quite likely that these informal settings enabled

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[24] A. M. Grocott, *Convicts, Clergymen and Churches* (Sydney: University Press, 1980), 96.

[25] A .M. Gallegos, "Spiritual Improvisation", *Sojourners* 28 (July-August, 1999), 57-58.

musicians the chance to explore, embellish and interact with congregations in a much freer and experimental way than perhaps some of the more orthodox (or even unorthodox) contexts of Anglicanism or Roman Catholicism allowed.

Because congregational participation in the music was fundamental to Wesleyan Methodist worship, the spontaneity of ecstatic worship was usual and to be expected. Not only were colonial prayer meetings noisy and wild, preachers moved by the Holy Spirit were usually uninhibited in their sharing of the Gospel message, whilst congregational prayer was usually fervent and enthusiastic.[26] There is no reason to suggest that musicians were not as extroverted as the preacher or congregations were during prayer services. In fact, these situations would have promoted a context for much more informal and unrestrained music making and musical experimentation.

Episodes of spontaneous ecstatic responses during Wesleyan prayer services occurred in America during the mid-19th century, possibly because, like Australians, Americans were also encouraged to express their faith with fervent emotion and bold testimony.[27] Not only would these ecstatic responses occur in spoken prayer, they would have emerged within the context of congregational singing. Likewise, during British prayer meetings, some preachers encouraged uncensored testimonials by the congregation. These included a public sharing of private ecstasies with an overt physical display, as well as loud spontaneous responses to the preaching.[28] Accounts of worshippers shouting, groaning, falling and so forth were descriptions of people praising and glorifying God. The *Methodist*, reported that a woman "given up entirely to prayer" was found in her room "groaning and struggling...and upon her face was a heavenly glow."[29] Similarly, on another occasion, a man who prayed "nearly all the time, day and night" would "lie prostrate on the floor, and groan and pray."[30]

It is quite likely that these "spontaneous responses" uttered during the spoken or sung words were unconstrained examples of "speaking in tongues" or *glossolalia* brought on by the power of the

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[26] Mansfield, 135.
[27] D. T. Konig, *Devising Liberty: Preserving and Creating Freedom in the New American Republic* (California: Stanford University Press, 1995), 262-263.
[28] Konig, 262.
[29] *Methodist*, 17 November 1893, 2.
[30] *Methodist*, 9 February 1894, 2.

Holy Spirit.[31] A person speaking in tongues was typically in a state of religious ecstasy and was often unable to understand the words that he or she was saying. It seemed that most Christians who spoke in tongues believed they were speaking in an existing language. Some people considered it was a heavenly dialect, perhaps a language spoken by angels or by God. Whatever the theory, it becomes clear that accounts of uncontrollable weeping or laughing, or even barking like a dog and shouting, were quite spontaneous and unpremeditated and found their way into Wesleyan worship.[32] These experiences encouraged one to regard the actions of worshippers as a communal experience rather than the action of individual people. There was clearly an interconnectedness emerging in these prayer groups that focused on collective improvisation found in ecstatic shouts, groans and singing.

The Origin of the Gospel Hymn

In this part of the article, I will briefly trace the development of gospel hymns in America prior to their emergence in the Wesleyan tradition. This background information will attempt to provide both a necessary link to understanding the impact of this music in the Australian context, especially from an improvisational perspective.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the Methodist church reconsidered its attitudes towards the question of converting slaves to Christianity. Even though Methodism began to address itself directly to the slaves, it "ended up not converting the Africans to a Christian ritual but...convert[ed] itself into an African ritual."[33] From 1790 to 1883, the bulk of white spirituals such as ring shouts, revival chants, camp-meeting songs and funeral marches emerged in America. Aspects of African ritual music became integrated into the Christian liturgy. The ring shout, for instance, was a spontaneously improvised dance that was completely African in origin, yet managed to procure a Christian justification within the Anglo-

[31] The etymological root of "glossolalia" comes from the Greek *glossa*, "tongue" or "language" and *lalein*, "to speak".
[32] For more information on the topic of "glossolalia" please refer to P. K. Conkin, *American Originals: Homemade Varieties of Christianity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), and , T. A. Campbell, *Christian Confessions: A Historical Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996).
[33] E. Borneman, "The Roots of Jazz," in *Jazz: New Perspectives on the History of Jazz by Twelve of the World's Foremost Jazz Critics and Scholars*, N. Hentoff and A. J. McCarthy, eds. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1959), 14.

American community because it resembled biblical descriptions of angels "shouting" in heaven. An 1867 newspaper review described it thus:

> The true "shout" takes place on Sundays or on "praise nights" through the week...The foot is hardly taken from the floor, and the progression is mainly due to a jerking, hitching motion which agitates the entire shoulder and soon brings out streams of perspiration. Sometimes they dance silently, sometimes, as they shuffle, they sing the chorus of the spiritual, and sometimes the song itself is also sung by the dancers...Song and dance alike are extremely energetic and often, when the shout lasts into the middle of the night, the monotonous thud of the feet prevents sleep itself within half a mile of the praise house.[34]

At these church meetings, ecstatic and unconstrained shouts from the congregation and the preacher produced new words and melodies. Timothy Beougher wrote that there were many examples of unusual physical manifestations such as "fainting, rolling, laughing, running, singing, dancing and jerking – a spasmodic twitching of the entire body, where they hopped with head, limbs, and trunk shaking 'as if they must...fly asunder' at these early camp meetings."[35]

At the Cane Ridge (Kentucky) revival camp meeting in 1801, for example, it was reported that up to 20,000 people "swirled about the grounds – watching, praying, preaching, weeping, groaning, falling...most left marveling at the wondrous hand of God."[36] Furthermore, within the African-American community, variations on European ecclesiastical music began to emerge as the slaves of America turned to Christianity. Ernest Borneman wrote that "as the Negroes infused their masters' religion with meanings of their own, so they infused their masters' religious music with African structural alterations."[37]

These "structural alterations" consisted of unconstrained improvisatory practices that covered the use of rhythmic devices and voice inflection. These effects included the use of call-and-response, syncopation, polyrhythms, shifted accents and multiple bar

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[34] *Nation*, 30 May 1867; cited in Hentoff and McCarthy, 15.
[35] T. K. Beougher, "Did you Know? Little-known and Remarkable Facts about Camp Meetings and Circuit Riders," *Christian History: Camp Meetings & Circuit Riders*, Issue 45 14:1 (1993), 2.
[36] M. Galli, "Revival at Cane Ridge," *Christian History: Camp Meetings & Circuit Riders*, Issue 45 (1993), 10.
[37] Borneman, in Hentoff and McCarthy, 17.

divisions, as well as constantly changing vibrato, tremolo and overtone effects. According to Borneman, Wesleyan hymns became a significant model for the African-American to improvise upon:

> The accent was shifted from the strong to the weak beat; only one or two lines out of the total length of the tune were accepted and these were varied in repetition by shifted beats, glissando and vibrato effects, and finally by the introduction of mobile thirds and sevenths.[38]

It becomes clear that early African-American congregations did not simply sing hymns, slavishly adhering to the written note or harmonic structure. Rather, under the effects of ecstatic religious fervour, church gatherings tended to improvise spontaneously the musical elements of an entire religious ceremony. Because many of the early hymnbooks printed only the words, the use of improvisation in the performance of song was encouraged. According to G. G. Johnson, "Camp meeting leaders abandoned the usual church hymns and composed, sometimes extemporaneously, songs which more nearly suited the spirit of the meeting."[39]

Again, examples of intense ecstatic religious fervour relating to the singing of hymns were reported at the Cane Ridge camp meeting of 1801. It seems that much of the music was unstructured, impulsive, unconstrained and highly improvisatory, sung under the influence of the Holy Spirit:

> Hymn singing, which affected people most deeply, became even louder. Unrestrained exercises resumed. Preachers could hardly be heard. Confusion reigned...Some singing, some shouting, clapping their hands, hugging and even kissing, laughing; others talking to the distressed, to one another, or to opposers of the work, and all this at once.[40]

The purpose of Gospel music was to evangelise and convey the Gospel message to the dispossessed and outcast of society with an emphasis on singing about peace. The emergence of Gospel music during the 19th century had a profound effect on the Wesleyan tradition. The emergence of this style of worship began to appear in Australia from the 1870s onwards and appeared in evangelistic work

[38] Borneman, in Hentoff and McCarthy, 18.
[39] G. G. Johnson, *Ante-Bellum North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1937), 395.
[40] Galli, 14.

and rural churches as choral and solo items. Gospel songs gave singers the opportunity to feature as soloists during church services, something previously frowned on by Wesleyan traditionalists since they seemed to draw unwanted attention to the soloist, as well as not fulfilling the requirements of corporate worship. Consequently, a degree of polarity emerged between those who advocated the "high culture" and those who fostered aesthetic and utilitarian values.[41]

Following the visit by Mr. Philip Phillips in 1875, it appears the full impact of gospel hymns began to be felt in the Australian Wesleyan Methodist church.[42] His 1875 *Colonial Singer by Philip Phillips* contained 430 hymns scored for SATB and was designed for assorted religious contexts, including prayer and revival meetings.[43] Likewise, *Some of Messrs. Moody & Sankey's New Revival Hymns and Spiritual Songs* was published as a "words only" edition in 1875 and contained 24 hymns and two doxologies.[44] Other publications such as *Sixty-seven Revival Hymns and Forty-six Temperance Melodies* (1871) was a "words only" edition containing 113 hymns by various English hymn writers including Wesley,[45] whilst the *Revival and Sabbath school tune book* (1870) contained a close harmonised score of 146 hymns.[46]

Two significant people who became closely associated with gospel hymns were Dwight L. Moody and Ira D. Sankey who drew on a long tradition of American revivalism.[47] When they toured England during 1872-75 they developed their style of sacred music by attempting to make gospel hymns comparable to popular tunes of

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[41] K. J. Hastie, "Music-Making in the Wesleyan Churches of New South Wales, 1855-1902: Origins, Attitudes and Practices," unpublished M.Mus. thesis, University of Sydney, June 1991, 231.
[42] Hastie, 213-214.
[43] P. Phillips, ed. *Colonial Singer by Philip Phillips*, (Melbourne, 1875); refer to D. Gome, "Australian Hymnody, 1821-1901", 21.
[44] P. Campbell, ed. *Some of Messrs. Moody & Sankey's New Revival Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (Sydney: Edward Turner, 1875); refer to Gome, "Australian Hymnody, 1821-1901," 15.
[45] M. Burnett, ed. *Sixty-seven Revival Hymns and Forty-six Temperance Melodies* (Melbourne: Mason, Firth & McCutcheon, 1871); refer to Gome, "Australian Hymnody, 1821-1901", 13.
[46] *Revival and Sabbath School Tune Book* (Melbourne: Clarson, Massina & Co. 1870-90); refer to Gome, 21.
[47] S. S. Sizer, *Gospel Hymns and Social Religion: The Rhetoric of Nineteenth-Century Revivalism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), 3-4.

the day.[48] One 1876 American newspaper depicted the gospel hymn in terms of a potpourri of contemporary song styles. It reported thus:

> Determine the pleasure that you get from a circus quick-step, a Negro-minstrel sentimental ballad, a college chorus, and a hymn all in one, and you have some gauge of the variety and contrast that may be perceived in one of these songs.[49]

The gospel hymn-tune was described in terms of being "jaunty in rhythm and rudimentary in harmony...because that kind of music was "simple" for the people to whom the revivalist ministered."[50] Harmonically, gospel hymns relied on the tonic (I) sub-dominant (IV) and dominant (V) chords, whilst the form tended to use the common verse-chorus structure. A plain melodic line above a repetitious bass line that moved homophonically and by step frequently enhanced the simplicity of these hymns and allowed room for vocal elaboration and instrumental experimentation. Because many bass lines of the gospel hymn model could be rhythmically monotonous, accompanists had the opportunity to vary substantially the original written line. Furthermore, many of these gospel tunes contained melodies that were easy to sing and spontaneously harmonise either vocally or instrumentally. Generally, Moody/Sankey hymns relied mainly on tonic – dominant harmony, with the occasional II, VI or secondary dominant chord being added for harmonic interest. Moody believed that singing played a fundamental role in evangelism, saying that:

> If you have singing that reaches the heart, it will fill the church every time...Music and song have not only accompanied all scriptural revivals, but are essential in deepening the spiritual life. Singing does at least as much as preaching to impress the Word of God upon people's minds. Ever since God first called me, the importance of praise expressed in song has grown upon me.[51]

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[48] E. Routley, *The Church and Music: An Enquiry into the History, the Nature, and the Scope of Christian Judgement on Music* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1967), 188.
[49] *Nation* 22 (9 March 1876); quoted in J. F. Findlay, *Dwight L. Moody: American Evangelist, 1837-1899* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 211.
[50] Routley, 188-189.
[51] S. Miller, *The Contemporary Christian Music Debate* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1993), 130.

Improvisatory Practices in Colonial Gospel Hymns

The gospel hymn became especially important in the Australian Wesleyan Methodist tradition during the latter part of the 19th century becoming fixed in contemporary language and focusing on human experience. The gospel song had "a direct message set to simple melodies" and became a staple for missionary churches and small or isolated choirs.[52] Because of their spontaneity in performance and their simplicity in rhythmic, melodic and harmonic elements, gospel hymns provided much scope for spontaneous inventiveness vocally or instrumentally. They gave mission churches and small or isolated choirs a staple repertoire that could be freely embellished over repeated chords from an already existing accompaniment. Kelvin Hastie wrote of an accompanist's freedom to improvise during the singing of a Gospel song thus: "One can imagine a typical harmonium or American organ puffing out the repeated chords, while a pianist uses the basic chordal material to scatter notes into more distant parts of the piano compass."[53]

The gospel hymn appealed to local Wesleyans as a tool for outdoor preaching, especially in contexts where hymns were firmly entrenched within the more formal church settings of the time. The performance of gospel hymns emerged as a contemporary way of showing degrees of spontaneity both musically and prayerfully. One Methodist minister described a presumably impromptu service lead by the Rev. Alexander Somerville in a shearing shed with the Moody and Sankey hymnbook in 1906. He wrote: "I had hymnbooks to hand around and we sang. I say 'we' for I have never found yet a gathering that could not sing some of the best known of Sankey's hymns. The concertina very ably led."[54]

Likewise, the lack of constraint present in gospel singing was again emphasised during a 1909 Australian prayer meeting led by Charles Alexander. When he appeared on stage, members of the congregation greeted him with ecstatic shouts of "The Glory Song" or "Pray Through." During the prayer meeting Alexander taught new

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[52] K. Cole, *Robert Harkness: The Bendigo Hymnwriter* (Bendigo: Keith Cole Publications, 1988), 45; K. Hastie, "Church Music," in J. Whiteoak and A. Scott-Maxwell, eds. *Currency Companion to Music and Dance in Australia*, (Sydney: Currency House, 2003), 142.

[53] Hastie, 219.

[54] J. Mansfield, "Evangelists and Music," located at: http://www.westgallerymusic.co.uk/articles/Mansfield/Mansfield5.html, accessed 20 June 2005.

hymns and inspired everybody to sing as a congregation with interpolated vocal solos. Indeed gospel songs were used to attract large numbers to church and according to the ecstatic nature of his prayer meetings, it appears they were successful.

> [Alexander] is like a living musical box, rendered vocal at will. With mind aglow, brain alert, eyes that hold command and appeal, a thorough knowledge of his audience, Charles Alexander, like a trained expert, sways the people till the right note is struck and men and women are sung into the Kingdom.[55]

Both the "vigorous rendering" and spontaneous character of gospel hymns upon large congregations was again demonstrated in an article from the *Methodist*. "The singing of well known gospel hymns by over 2000 people, the vigorous rendering of one or two masterpieces by the choir, the thorough going enthusiasm of the whole service was something not to be forgotten."[56]

Robert Harkness (1880-1961)

In this part of the discussion, I will examine the playing style of the "Bendigo hymnist", Robert Harkness, who created his own improvisatory gospel style of piano playing by improvising his accompaniments. By the turn of the century Robert Harkness had written over 2500 gospel songs. According to his biographer, the Rev. Keith Cole, his hymns were "simple in structure, popular in form and easy to sing [and] designed for greatest effect when sung at large meetings with an enthusiastic song-leader."[57] His accompaniment style was improvisatory, enabling him the freedom to include harmonic backing underneath the melodic line, as well as cadenzas within the overall composition. According to Cole, Harkness developed a "new method" of accompaniment that was later used by other pianists in evangelistic gatherings. Cole wrote that "Robert excelled as an accompanist on the piano, especially at large meetings. He played entirely from memory. As soon as a hymn was announced, he would strike the opening chords, adding harmonies and cadenzas to the simple melody."[58]

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[55] J. Mansfield, "Evangelists and Music."
[56] *Methodist* (25 June 1898), 9.
[57] Cole, 44.
[58] Cole, 45.

Harkness took the Moody and Sankey gospel hymns and developed a "revolutionary new style of accompaniment" for large prayer meetings.[59] This "new style" was probably based upon similar accompaniment methods published in Melbourne during the latter part of the 19th century. Methods such as *Harmony Simplified for Popular Use: An Original Method of Applying the First Principles of Harmony to the Object of Accompanying the Voice on the Pianoforte*,[60] or *W. M. Perrier's Harmonizer or, Instructions in the Art of Vamping, or Extemporizing on the Piano or Organ* focused on the internalisation of exercises and accompaniment patterns in various keys.[61] Harkness wrote his own series of method books called the *Beginner's Hymn Playing Course, Evangelistic Hymn Playing* and *The Art of Sacred Accompaniment*. These books were similar to Patton's and Perrier's in the sense that they included practical discussion and exercises on rhythm, preludes, interludes, improvisation, practical harmony and memory work.[62]

Harkness was the accompanist at the Gold Square Methodist Church, Bendigo from 1901 to 1902. During the 1902 visit of the touring evangelists, Dr. Rueben A. Torry and Charles Alexander, Harkness described in some detail his approach to gospel accompaniment, which included a spontaneous "elaborate improvisation" with "a full octave accompaniment quite distinct from the melody."[63] Because much of his improvisational style relied on memorisation, he was able to incorporate spontaneous melodic and harmonic embellishment based on his ability to analyse and extend the harmonic structure of each tune, thus providing a fresh and inventive sound.[64] Because he was "unacquainted with the melody" and due to the "simplicity" of the song *Old Time Religion*, Harkness felt "the need for an improvised accompaniment." In the same way the popular song, *The Glory Song* allowed scope for complex improvisations, most likely because of its simple harmonic and melodic composition.[65]

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[59] Cole, 45.
[60] E. Patton, *Harmony Simplified for Popular Use: An Original Method of Applying the First Principles of Harmony to the Object of Accompanying the Voice on the Pianoforte* (London: Novello, Ewer & Co. and Melbourne: Allan & Co. 1880).
[61] W. M. Perrier, *W. M. Perrier's Harmonizer or, Instructions in the Art of Vamping, or Extemporizing on the Piano or Organ* (Melbourne: Spectator Publishing, c. 1890).
[62] Cited in J. Whiteoak, *Playing Ad Lib* (Sydney: Currency Press, 1999), and it appears these books have a copyright date of 1930.
[63] Cole, 18.
[64] Cole, 52-3.
[65] Cole, 18.

Harkness' accompaniments represented a crossover of two streams of improvisatory genres, namely "lowbrow" and "highbrow" approaches to music making. He was able to elaborate his knowledge of harmony and keyboard technique and apply it to his hymn accompaniments. Likewise, his method books provided a practical source for amateur musicians attempting to learn systems of improvisation. Whilst his early piano gospel-style technique was tied in part to orthodox musical convention, his accompaniments represented a more "grassroots" performance context.

In the next part of this discussion I will explore aspects of "unorthodox accompaniment," which could be described as being perhaps the most common form of choral accompaniment to emerge during these early services. Clearly, the extent of improvised musical practice was largely experimental and performed in a comparatively informal context of the kind that was most favourable to musical interaction, embellishment and extroversion. Moreover, this particular approach to improvisation falls into the genre of "lowbrow" performance practices. Again, there will be limited discussion about Wesleyan Methodist approaches to improvisation in Sydney regarding this "lowbrow" genre. Although it is outside the limitations of this discussion, it becomes necessary to show a comparison of musical styles.

Unorthodox Accompaniment

The use of unorthodox ensembles to accompany hymns featured prominently in early colonial Wesleyan prayer services. These early ensembles were made up of whatever instruments were available at the time and highlighted the diverse variety of accompaniment practice in each parish. As organ accompaniment in churches moved to the forefront of Wesleyan services from the mid-19th century, instrumental accompaniment tended to decline except in some rural locations. During the late 1880s, however, there was a re-emergence of instrumental music performed in the early Wesleyan tradition. This renaissance of multi-instrumental ensembles seemed to parallel the emergence of similar unorthodox instrumental groups in the Australian Salvation Army around the same time.

The singing and accompaniments provided by many of the Wesleyan emigrants from England varied considerably in early Australian churches. Musicians' approaches to hymn accompaniment, for example, were tailored to suit the broad diversity of local musicianship and worshippers. Sometimes special

services at the Eltham Sunday school in 1892 included the Alphington-Fairfield church-preaching band, comprising six men and four boys. The instrumentation contained a mix of cornets, wind instruments and a drum – clearly an "unorthodox" ensemble. Contemporaneous memoirs indicated that this ensemble "took services at the country churches of the circuit – Greensborough, Templestowe, Research, Eltham. They used to drive a horse and wagon."[66] The instrumentation suggests it was either a band comprising ear-playing musicians attempting to sound like a reading band, or it was an ensemble that relied on specially written arrangements, suitable only for their group. Because of the wide range of ages and its frequent performance circuit, the band probably relied on a combination of intuitive musical interaction and a reliance on the memorisation of parts. Since the group's repertoire was probably repeated each week, there would have been further opportunities for instrumentalists to embellish and vary already memorised or written out parts. Spontaneous variation of constantly repeated hymn-tunes would have made the musicians' ministry more exciting as performers, as well as introducing new and imaginative obbligato or harmonic lines to simple hymns.

In cases where churches relied on their own local musician or musicians, the singing and accompaniment of hymns would have been diverse within each parish, more so because early Wesleyan music was played with limited reference to notation. In order to suit the vocal range of congregations, for instance, it would have been necessary for musicians to transpose and modulate accordingly. To a large extent, accompaniments would have been relatively simple, being based on either notated or previously memorised melodies. Furthermore, depending on the experience of the accompanying musician or musicians, a wide range of improvisatory techniques would have been employed.

At an early Wesleyan service in Sydney in 1828, local musician John Onions used a violin or bass viol and a bassoon "for the purpose of raising the tunes."[67] It seems that Onions played a dual role when accompanying the congregation. As a violin player, he probably played his version of the melody to lead the congregation. If the melodic line were well known by the congregation, it would not have been unusual for Onions to embellish the melody, thereby

[66] Memoirs of Elsie W. Poppins [monograph], cited in Eckersall.
[67] G. D. Rushworth, *Historic Organs of New South Wales: The Instruments, Their Makers and Players, 1791-1940*, (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1988).

giving the hymn a more flexible sounding style. As a bass viol or bassoon player, Onions would have either performed an already written bass line or played a spontaneously improvised accompaniment above a figured bass. In England, for example, the bass viol usually doubled the bass voices or else read and improvised a bass line from a figured bass part, a practice adopted by other denominations in congregational hymnody for many years.[68] If a figured bass line was not available, it is likely that the player worked out a rudimentary bass accompaniment from the melody.[69]

Earlier in this discussion I mentioned the formation of a choir by Mr. John Peers, accompanied by either a clarinet or flute at a newly erected "brick-built" Wesleyan chapel in Melbourne during the late 1830s. Similar examples from country Victoria during the late 19th century include "Mr. Hallum", who led the singing with his flute at the Mooroopna North Methodist Church.[70] Again, in 1894, the Kyabram Methodist church relied on an organ and two violins to accompany the hymn singing. At the same church in 1901, another unconventional ensemble was used to accompany the hymn singing. The *Kyabram Free Press* wrote that "an instrumental selection 'Diadem' was given by Messrs Ising and Humphris (cornets), T. Edis (flute), J. McLean (euphonium), and J. Edis (organ)."[71]

Since many of these church ensembles comprised a range of instrumentalists of varying musical skill, it is likely that a considerable proportion of musical accompaniment was played without reference to published notation. If notation were used, such as piano music, it would have been adapted to suit the ensemble. "Ear playing" was common but would have varied from parish to parish, thus providing a range of informal contexts allowing for musicians to freely embellish accompaniment material. Within performance contexts, varying degrees of unrestrained and impromptu improvisatory practice would have transpired focusing on shifts in tempo, syncopation, ornamentation and melodic variation, as well as rhythmic inflection. In 1888, for example, it was reported that a Sydney Wesleyan church used "fiddles, flute and cornet" to augment the choir and organ at weeknight meetings.[72]

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[68] Hastie, 98.
[69] I. Nathan, *Theory and Practice of Music* (Sydney: Isaac Nathan), 7, 12, 13, 24, 33, 41 and 45.
[70] W. H. Bossence, *Kyabram* (Melbourne: The Hawthorn Press, 1963), 196; __. *Kyabram Methodism* (Melbourne, The Hawthorn Press, 1974), 29.
[71] *Kyabram Free Press*, 23 August 1901, cited in Bossence, *Kyabram Methodism*, 56.
[72] *News of the Churches* (2 June 1888): 107, cited in Hastie, 331.

Once again, a reliance on "ear playing" as well as musical intuitiveness would have been the focus of these makeshift ensembles.

In his examination of Methodism in the Kyabram circuit, William Bossence wrote that hymn singing as a medium of praise appealed to congregations' "natural instincts." Furthermore, he emphasised that "hymn-singing around the piano at home was as indispensable a part of their lives as singing in the church choir on Sundays."[73] Plainly, Bossence was emphasising the importance of social informality within this religious tradition. This lack of formality allowed for contexts that encouraged musicians to explore and interact musically with each other. In situations that saw the same hymns being regularly repeated, intuitive group interplay within an ensemble would have allowed for a variance in musical forms to emerge, varying from parish to parish.

Organs and Oratorio

Earlier in the article I indicated that a "blurring" of improvisatory models occurred in Victoria's Wesleyan Methodist tradition. Whilst obvious "lowbrow" approaches to improvisatory practices continued within this tradition for much of the 19th century, a more "highbrow" approach to music making, which focused on organ accompaniment and the sacred oratorio began to emerge from 1843 onwards. The following section provides discussion about early Wesleyan activities that embraced some of these more "highbrow" musical activities, providing churchgoers with some kind of cultural bonus. I will provide some limited discussion from British musicologist John Spencer Curwen in relation to general observations of contemporary approaches to pipe and reed organ performance in English Wesleyan Methodist churches and supports a transplanted Australian musical language.

Kelvin Hastie's comprehensive study on music making in the Wesleyan Churches of colonial New South Wales provides almost no information about organ performance practice during Methodist services. Although Hastie stated that "virtually nothing has been found to describe performance practices...in respect of hymn accompaniments and organ voluntaries...the great majority of players...were generally amateurs with little or no training."[74]

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[73] Bossence, *Kyabram Methodism*, 111.
[74] Hastie, 307.

Similarly, I have been unable to locate much information in relation to a consistently "highbrow" approach to music making in the Wesleyan Methodist tradition in colonial Australia. It seems that during much of the 19th century, performances were "lowbrow" and drew on whatever musical resources were available at the time. Most congregations from Melbourne and country Victorian Methodist churches worshipped for many years without organ accompaniment. Similarly, like in other traditions, many Methodist churches did not use organs (either reed or pipe) for accompaniment purposes in the first few years of opening, possibly due to the initial lack of funds.[75]

Given that accompanists were generally "amateurs with little or no training", I suggest that the presence of improvisatory practice within the context of church services became widespread, within the "lowbrow" and "highbrow" genres. Because the standard of musicianship varied from parish to parish, there was no consistency in playing style. In many cases, musicians were self-taught and relied on approaches to accompaniment outlined in some of the contemporaneous method books described earlier.

Hastie cited British musicologist John Spencer Curwen's *Studies in Worship Music* of 1880 and provided general observations of contemporary approaches to pipe and reed organ performance.[76] It is important to note that although these observations related to British musicians in the Wesleyan-Methodist tradition, Hastie asserted that many of Curwen's comments were appropriate and relevant to a transplanted Australian musical language. According to Curwen, only a minority of Methodist organists received any formal training, whilst the majority was either unwilling or unable to seek "improvement" with their musical technique. In relation to extemporised performances, Curwen wrote that many accompanists provided rambling harmonies, drawn-out cadences and an over-manipulation of the swell pedal to produce expression. The latter technique combined with altering stops and modifying timbrel colours during accompaniments was considered by Curwen to be "vulgar" in sound.[77] The use of ornaments had largely died out by the latter half of the 19th century, although the "suspending of the fourth in the closing tonic chord" and "simultaneously putting down the left foot on the tonic and the semitone below it in a *fortissimo*

[75] The Melbourne congregations of Box Hill, Brighton and Brunswick, for example, waited an average of 44 years before an organ was installed in their churches.
[76] Not only was John Curwen a musicologist, he was primarily a music educator and publisher.
[77] Hastie, 308.

close" was still practiced. More importantly, the varying of harmonic progressions, as well as the insertion of melodic passing notes was common amongst organists.[78] In relation to the playing of the harmonium, Curwen noted that many accompanists were particularly bad.

> He jerks irregularly at the beginning, the middle or the end of each note of a hymn-tune, varying these musical spasms with staccato, which always comes so as to break a musical or verbal phrase...The effect reminds one of a child playing with a squeaking doll, or of an infant trying to play a concertina, and unable to control it.[79]

Although Hastie acknowledged a majority of amateur organists performing in the Wesleyan Methodist tradition throughout colonial Australia, there were some musicians of a high musical standard who acted as accompanists. These musicians also acted as accompanists in other religious traditions of the same period in Melbourne. My research has shown there to be a considerable cross-fertilization of musicians performing as accompanists in the different Christian traditions. Likewise, solo singers moved regularly between the different denominations as featured artists. In addition to teaching and secular concerts, church performances would have helped to supplement these musicians' income, as well as providing them with an added public exposure. William Clarke, for example, presided at the organ in the Wesleyan Chapel in Collins Street, Melbourne during the performance of a "Grand Oratorio" of sacred music.[80] The same advertisement described Clarke as the "Professor of Music, Swanston Street". He also led the choir of St. Francis' Roman Catholic Church on the seraphine[81] and the organ at the Congregationalist Church, Prahran.[82] Clarke's organ performance of the Pastoral Symphony from *Messiah* at the Wesleyan Chapel "was admirably played" and "delighted the whole audience."[83] Combined with Clarke's accompaniment of this Oratorio as well his accompanying of the unorthodox ensemble at St. Francis', Clarke

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[78] Hastie, 307-310.
[79] J. S. Curwen, *Studies in Worship Music*, 110; cited in Hastie, 309.
[80] *The Port Phillip Gazette*, 24/12/1842, 3.
[81] Finn, E. ("Garryowen"), *The Chronicles of Early Melbourne, 1835-1852*, 140.
[82] Matthews, E. N. *Colonial Organs and Organ Builders*, (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1969), 144.
[83] *The Port Phillip Gazette*, 11/1/1843, 2.

had the skill and experience to indulge in both legitimate and improvisational practice on the organ.

Improvisatory practices in the performance of vocal works from the Baroque, Classical and Romantic periods were virtually mandatory. There was an expectation that singers (especially soloists), elaborate songs during colonial performances, including sacred hymns sung in the church context. John Whiteoak reminds the reader that "Australian opera retained a degree of improvisational freedom throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century...but it should be noted that it was one of the least decontextualised of all nineteenth-century Australian musical activities."

Not only was he an expert improviser who accompanied choirs in the Roman Catholic and Anglican traditions, Charles E. Horsley also presided at the organ in the Wesleyan tradition. At a special concert celebrating the inauguration of the new organ, Horsley performed "five solos well calculated to test [the organ's] powers" at the Wesleyan Church in South Yarra.[84] The organist and musical director from St. Francis' Roman Catholic Church, G. R. G. Pringle performed a series of organ solos at a special concert of sacred music held in the Wesleyan Church at Emerald-Hill, Melbourne. Like Horsley, Pringle also presided as the organist in the Anglican tradition and was a complete musician. The following reference alludes to Pringle's organ technique – probably his use of the console - to provide a multitude of timbral sounds for personal expression. "In Batiste's Andante in G, and in the Grand Offertoire in D Major by the same master, Mr. Pringle was very successful in developing the fine qualities of the instrument over which he presided."[85]

All three organists were able to adapt to the wide range of musical abilities and instrumental ensembles that existed in colonial Melbourne, especially within the Wesleyan tradition, which was predominantly "lowbrow". Apart from accompanying choirs and congregational singing, they performed diverse organ solos independent of the choirs at these sacred concerts. It was in this context that they excelled in displaying their technique, one that would have included various levels of improvisatory practice.

Generally speaking, apart from these periodic performances by Clarke, Horsley and Pringle, it seems the Wesleyan Methodists

[84] *The Argus*, 3/12/1870, 5.
[85] *The Argus*, 21/7/1869, 5

focused largely on more "grassroots" performances of sacred music played by musicians strictly from the tradition. Because most musicians from this tradition were generally self-taught and lacked formalised training during most of the 19th century, music was usually mediocre in comparison to the more "highbrow" sounds that could be heard in major Roman Catholic and Anglican churches in Melbourne during the same period.

Conclusion

In this article I have attempted to show that although the Wesleyan Methodist tradition favoured both the "lowbrow" and the "highbrow" approach to improvised musical practices, for much of the 19th century, however, the Wesleyan tradition was musically "lowbrow." It focused on a more "grassroots" musical approach to sacred song. This model concentrated on congregational hymn singing, ecstatic worship, gospel singing and "unorthodox" ensembles. It was in this model that varying degrees of improvisational practice emerged. Many of the unorthodox ensembles, which sometimes comprised trios or duos, for example, relied on group interaction as well as individual experimentation. Because prayer services were relatively informal, especially in comparison to other Christian traditions of the same time, musicians had more of a chance to explore other methods of musical performance. In the context of congregational singing, accompanying musicians were in a position to modify harmonic and melodic material, especially when these hymns were being repeated week after week.

I also attempted to show that some aspects of a "highbrow" musical culture existed in the Wesleyan tradition, although it appears these large-scale sacred concerts and organ recitals were sporadic. In effect, the Wesleyan Methodist tradition experienced an overlapping of performance genres. There were occasions when musicians who accompanied other Christian faiths also directed and performed at some of these Wesleyan sacred concerts; however, this appears to be in the minority of cases. As a rule, musicians from the Wesleyan faith accompanied their own prayer services. It was in these contexts, that visiting musicians were able to display their musical technique both as soloists and as accompanists. As accompanists, they would have adjusted their technique in order to "fit in" with the musical standard of the amateur choir. As soloists, however, they were in a position to demonstrate their skills of

extemporisation either overtly, or perhaps in a more surreptitious way.