The Lord's Prayer as Song: Performance, Gesture and Meaning

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Abstract

The Lord's Prayer is a central text in Christian liturgy, generally recited rather than sung, often as a communal act of worship. The text has also provided inspiration for many musical settings, a process of ‘musicking’ [musikierung] which takes the text out of its traditional worship environment. The internet – and specifically video-streaming sites such as YouTube – are now providing a medium for the dissemination of stage, screen, studio and audio performances of the Lord’s Prayer as song, and these are now reaching – and speaking to – new audiences up to eighty years after they were made; the fact that individuals continue to post video and audio content of the Lord’s Prayer as song reflects their desire to share something which has moved them, whether musically or spiritually, with a worldwide audience.

In liberating the text from its liturgical context and releasing it as song into classical, jazz, rock, and pop performance arenas, many questions are raised about the transformation of textual meaning and ritual significance. The aim of this study is to examine the meaningfulness of the musico-textual setting for the receiver, firstly through the question of ownership of the text as a communal prayer, and secondly in arguing that perception and reception of the performer are contributory factors in the relative positivity or negativity of the receiver’s response. The research was carried out by examining a selection of the legion twentieth- and twenty-first-century musical settings of the Lord’s Prayer readily accessible through YouTube, using ethnographic data from on-line comments and from the author’s on-line survey of Christian worshippers to explore the issues raised by these musical settings. These include the perceived right of an individual to ‘perform’ a mutually-owned prayer; the loss of ritual functionality engendered by the ‘musicking’ of the text and its release into the popular domain; and the additional layers of meaning afforded to the text by gestures in performance, which can in turn lead to a transformation and renewal of ritual significance for the receiver. The inclusion of hyperlinks to YouTube video content throughout the article encourages the reader to engage with the performances themselves, from which it is hoped that a fruitful discussion of the issues will emerge.

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Introduction

The Lord’s Prayer is a central text in Western Christian liturgy. As a prayer, it is generally recited rather than sung, often as a communal act of worship, but the text has also provided inspiration for many musical settings. While some people sing the Lord’s Prayer during the course of their traditional worship in physical churches, an increasing number of individuals are experiencing the Lord’s Prayer as song through concerts, CDs or through video-streaming sites such as YouTube, either as part of their on-line worship or outside a conscious act of worship. This passive reception in a non-liturgical environment raises many questions about the transformation of textual meaning and ritual significance through the receiver’s perception of the performer and of their performance.¹

In taking this particular text out of a ritual worship environment and allowing it to become a public performance piece, does this result in a loss of respect and a consequent negation of religious function? In other words, when the Lord’s Prayer constitutes a recognised element of the Eucharist its ritual function is clearly stated in the words of the liturgy which exhort the congregation ‘to pray’ [together] ‘as our Saviour has taught us’, and this ritual function is evident for those Christians who routinely sing the Lord’s Prayer as an integral part of their worship ritual. However, when the text is experienced as song outside a traditional worship environment does this constitute a redrawing of the boundaries within the contemporary shift towards a new entertainment-based ‘worship mall’ culture (Taylor 2008 and Spinks 2010)?

The aim of this study is to examine the meaningfulness of the musico-textual setting for the receiver, firstly through the question of ownership of the text as a communal prayer, and secondly in arguing that perception and reception of the performer are contributory factors in the relative positivity or negativity of the
receiver’s response. Throughout my argument I will be drawing on quantitative and qualitative ethnographic data from YouTube user comments and from my own survey of traditional worshippers in the Christian tradition (Haste 2012). Finally, I will explore the role of performative gestures in bestowing additional meaning to the text, before concluding with some thoughts on the renewal of its ritual significance through such performances.

**Methodology**

The empirical base for this analysis consists of data drawn from on-line comments by YouTube users in response to video content of the Lord’s Prayer as song and my own on-line questionnaire (Haste 2012) targeting worshippers in the Christian tradition. These have been supplemented by reference to blogs and by correspondence with composers of some musical settings. YouTube users represent a broad spectrum of religious, social and cultural outlooks whose spontaneous, largely unedited comments offer valuable evidence of sociocultural attitudes. The fifty-eight individuals who responded to my survey, on the other hand, were churchgoers and priests canvassed through churches and social networking sites; they were advised of the socio-musicological purpose of the survey and that anonymity was assured. Survey respondents therefore represent a limited demographic (mostly middle-aged churchgoers) whose carefully considered responses were addressed to a specific individual (the author) and offered a specifically Christian perspective. As this study aims to explore the evaluative criteria employed by both self-identified ‘believers’ and ‘non-believers’ both data sources have been given equal weighting in my discussion.

In the first instance, thirty YouTube recordings of the Lord’s Prayer were studied, but due to the ever-increasing number of recordings several criteria were then
used for selection of the versions to be included in the preliminary discussion, specifically musical genre, availability and popularity. **Musical genre.** A variety of musical genres (classical, pop, gospel, jazz) were selected, as were the performance settings (film, TV studio, concert hall, stadium). As the Malotte setting features in a high proportion of YouTube videos by performers, variously in classical, jazz and popular genres, this is reflected in its repeated appearances throughout this paper.

**Availability.** As on-line sources are notoriously ephemeral, performances were chosen on the basis of their availability on YouTube. The selected video performances have multiple on-line existences, each having been uploaded by more than one source; they have also been online for some time, reducing the likelihood of their being removed due to copyright infringement or originator request.

**Popularity.** By considering the number of YouTube hits for each YouTube version, I made a selection of high-profile artists considered most likely to have been seen or heard, citing these in the online survey. Four of the twelve were then selected for in-depth discussion and analysis, taking into account the number of YouTube comments and the completed survey statistics, although other factors were taken into consideration. For instance, Charlotte Church had been seen by more survey respondents than Il Divo, but while much of Church’s appeal as a performer is due to her erstwhile role as a child prodigy, the YouTube comments on Il Divo’s performance provided a more interesting exploration of the issues of religious authority and performative gestures; Il Divo therefore became the preferred option.
The Lord’s Prayer appears in two versions in the New Testament (Matthew 6: 9-13 and Luke 11: 2-4) and is regularly read or recited as a prayer by millions of Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Protestants and Eastern Orthodox Christians in hundreds of languages. Many writers have suggested that this is because the Lord’s Prayer is effectively a synopsis of the entire gospel – Tertullian’s ‘breviarium totius evangelii’ (cited in French 2002, 20) – while Bosch believes that ‘the Lord's Prayer provides us with a kaleidoscopic view of Jesus' entire message and ministry. It is, for the New Testament, as central as the Ten Commandments are for the Old’ (Bosch 2011, 5).

Despite theological differences between denominations the basic content and structure of the prayer are always the same which, as Clayton Schmit says, leads to ‘a sense of solidarity in knowing that Christians around the world are praying together’ and that ‘these words always unite us’ (Kang 2007, n.p.). In setting the text to music this sense of solidarity and unity can be intensified, the ambiguous power of music serving to ‘give the individual a sense of empathetic connection with other people’s experience’ (Wren 2000, 66).

The many translations from Greek or Latin have been updated in succeeding versions of the Bible and the liturgy with minor textual differences, but it is the ‘traditional’ version given in the 1662 King James’ Bible which forms the basis of all the ‘musicked’ versions discussed here.

Our Father, which art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy Name.
Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive them that trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,

The power, and the glory, 
For ever and ever. 
Amen.

**Literature Review**

The theological implications of the Lord’s Prayer are frequently discussed in both academic and popular literature – a search of Amazon turns up around 35,000 hits for the Lord’s Prayer – with commentators literally too numerous to mention, and ranging from Rudolf Steiner (1907) and Emmet Fox (2006) to journalists such as Connie Kang (2007). However, we are concerned here not with the theology of the actual text but rather with the possibilities for transformation when the text is set to music. This paper sits alongside the extensive body of literature on the sacramental implications of musico-textual settings in Christian worship, such as Begbie (2007), Wren (2000) and Saliers (2005), and my exploration of the processes involved when this text is released from its ritual function and resonates with the question of ritual context as discussed by authors such as Barrett and Lawson (2001), McCauley and Lawson (2002), Köpping, Leistle and Rudolph (2006) and Turley (2010).

A primary criterion for an activity being accepted as ritual is that it should provide a transformative experience, and this paper examines the ways in which listening to the Lord’s Prayer as song on YouTube represents for some recipients a transformative experience, efficacious in ‘symbolizing theological ideas or social relations’ (Legare and Souza 2012; Sax et al 2010). For others, the ‘song’ remains a performance from the world of entertainment and is manifestly inefficacious, so my discussion of such ritual efficacy is theorised through Schechner’s seminal work in performance studies (1994, 1995, 2003), and particularly his concept of the ‘efficacy–entertainment braid’. Schechner distinguishes between efficacy (ritual) and
entertainment (theater) using the following criteria: entertainment should be ‘fun’, ‘only for those here’, and with an audience watching and appreciating; efficacy, on the other hand, demands ‘results’, a ‘link to an absent Other’, and an audience which not only participates but believes. His efficacy-entertainment braid theorises the way in which efficacy and entertainment are not so much opposed to each other [but rather] form the poles of a continuum, a two-way process by which ritual can become entertainment, and can just as readily transmute into ritual again (Schechner 1994, 120).

In my exploration of the possible effect of performative gestures on these varying degrees of efficacy I draw on the role of performativity in popular music (Schleifer 2011), which appears as a leitmotiv throughout my discussion. The contribution of this paper to the literature therefore lies in its synthesis of these disciplines to examine the decoupling of the Lord’s Prayer from its traditional locus, and its subsequent new role in twenty-first-century culture.

**Recordings**

Musical settings of The Lord’s Prayer in classical, folk, gospel, jazz, rock and pop genres have been performed and recorded by solo artists and groups over the last seventy years, and this trend shows little sign of abating. Many of these are available on video-streaming sites such as YouTube, including such diverse artists as Mario Lanza (1952b), Mahalia Jackson (1958b), Doris Day (1962b), Perry Como (1969b), Elvis Presley (1971), Marvin Gaye (1981b), Aretha Franklin (1987b) and Charlotte Church (1998). A high proportion of these performances feature the classical setting by Albert Hay Malotte, but other settings include those of jazz icon Duke Ellington (1965) for his first Sacred Concert, and of ethnomusicologist and composer David Fanshawe as part of his 1972 African Sanctus. A 1973 ‘rock musical’ setting performed by
Australian nun Sister Janet Mead was a worldwide hit in 1974, and American musician and comedian David Zasloff has also recorded an effective setting for voice and guitar dating from 2002.

The Irish trio of Roman Catholic priests who call themselves – not surprisingly – The Priests, and French trio Les Prêtres, modelled on The Priests, have also recorded versions to great acclaim (The Priests 2009b; Les Prêtres 2010b). Settings of the Lord’s Prayer have often been released to coincide with the lucrative Christmas market: the Beach Boys (1963b) used it as the ‘B’ Side of their Little Saint Nick single (1963a), and Barbra Streisand (1967b) (despite being Jewish) recorded it for A Christmas Album (1967a). Engelbert Humperdinck (1995a) recorded the Malotte setting on two Christmas albums (Humperdinck 1980; 1995b), and in 1999 British singer Cliff Richard (1999b) recorded a version, set to the tune of ‘Auld Lang Syne’, which he called Millennium Prayer (1999c); the Malotte setting also features on the Christmas Collection (2005) of the multinational operatic boy band Il Divo (2009).

Musical genre and text manipulation

Although there are numerous settings of the prayer, many people will only be familiar with one version, and those who sing it in the course of their worship often assume that theirs is ‘the tune’. Those who feel moved to set the text will choose a musical genre with which they are culturally familiar and which will carry meaning for them, but the music should also satisfactorily mimic the ‘emotional progressions’ of the receiver, with the result that the effect of this ‘emotional mimicry’ can be ‘pleasing or irritating, uplifting or annoying, fulfilling or disturbing’ and can ‘arouse visceral emotional responses’ which can be positive or negative (Wren 2000, 67). Responses are therefore highly subjective and, whereas a musical style which engenders a positive response can
be a force for inclusivity and an increased sense of Christian unity, conversely a setting with which a receiver is uncomfortable can become an agent for exclusion. One survey respondent reported that they had adopted a non-participatory role when the Lord’s Prayer was sung at their place of worship ‘because the musical setting in question was off-putting to me in some way and I was torn on whether I could participate’. On the other hand, there are those for whom singing the text is a bonus: an anonymous blogger says: ‘I feel completely disconnected when the Lord's Prayer isn't sung or chanted. Music has always been prayer for me and there are certain prayers that just feel lacking somehow without it’ (Sister Mary Martha 2011, under ‘Our Hands, Our Father’).¹⁰

Musical settings usually require some manipulation of the text, and in the case of the Lord’s Prayer any reconfiguration of this familiar sacred text can be disturbing. I cite as an example dialogue from the same blog about singing the Lord’s Prayer during Catholic Mass (Sister Mary Martha 2011):

Blog visitor 1: ‘The part that really, really bothers me, however is that they have actually changed the words to the prayer so that it is sung: “Give us this day, our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, father hear our prayer. And lead us not, into temptation but deliver us, deliver us, from all that is evil, hear our prayer.”[…] But changing the words isn't acceptable, is it?’

Sr Mary Martha: ‘Well, yes and no. When you sing something sometimes you have to make a couple of changes to fit the words to the music. The changes of which you speak don’t change the meaning in any way as far as I can see. Although I have heard plenty o’ versions of the “Our Father” sung that don’t change anything. They are all ghastly, in my opinion. There is no cadence to the “Our Father”, it’s not a poem and it can only be shoehorned into music. But that's just me. My heart goes out to you. Singing the “Our Father” never works out very well.’

Blog Visitor 2: ‘Now, at my church we sing the Our Father and it just drives me nuts. But we don’t even change the words. Just the act of singing it bothers me. But that’s just me, I guess . . .’

Sr Mary Martha: ‘No, it really, really isn’t just you.’
So singing the Lord’s Prayer can be problematical on several fronts: the resistance of many to singing this prayer at all; the affect of musical genre when it is sung; and the alteration of a text which (when unchanged) offers uniformity and solidarity.

Ownership and the right to perform the text

The sense of solidarity when Christians recite the Lord’s Prayer together is based on its iconic status within the Christian tradition, so how do Christians feel about others singing it? When survey respondents were asked to evaluate the ‘right’ of various groups to sing the Lord’s Prayer, their responses showed evidence of generosity and tolerance such as ‘Jesus gave it to everybody’ and ‘Why would anyone NOT have the right to sing it?’ However, while 97% felt that Christians (specifically Roman Catholic, Anglican and Nonconformists) were ‘definitely’ entitled to sing the Lord’s Prayer, they were far less sure about other faiths, with only 34.5% thinking that Jews ‘definitely’ had the right and rating other faiths (or none) still lower: polytheists including Hindu 23%, Buddhists 21%, and agnostics and atheists 20% (Appendix B).11

Despite one respondent’s assumption that, because ‘Jews do not believe that Jesus was the Messiah [they] would not want to sing it’, the Lord’s Prayer has certainly been recorded by Jewish performers. Richard Tucker, celebrated tenor and formerly a professional cantor in Brooklyn, New York, remained a devout Jew all his life but recorded the Lord’s Prayer in 1967: as he used the Malotte setting, which admirably showcases a singer’s technical and emotional range, this may have been prompted by musical rather than religious motives. Likewise, while Barbra Streisand’s decision to sing it on her 1967 Christmas Album may have been primarily a commercial decision – and one which aroused an ongoing polemic12 – Jewish musician-comedian David Zasloff has felt moved by his own affinity with the text to record his own through-composed setting (2002). Zasloff says that ‘most Jews don’t like The Lord’s Prayer. I think it’s brilliant’ and that he uses the prayer and has read Emmet Fox’s Sermon on the Mount which explores the textual meaning (email to the author, 7 February 2012). Zasloff sets the text in its entirety, the final ‘Amen’ extended to form a melismatic section of almost half the total running time, and describes his compositional process thus:

‘Once the words and meaning sank into my being the music came spontaneously. I started hearing the music which felt appropriate to the words. After letting that process continue for a few days I felt it was time to play what I’d been hearing. I sat at the piano and all the music came out effortlessly in one pass.’ (Email to the author, 7 February 2012).
If the rationale for setting a sacred text to music is to increase the meaningfulness for the recipient, this is a successful setting, judging from comments on his website such as ‘[It is] different . . . but still wonderful for the words are the Lords’ [sic]. I think everyone should put melody to this song . . . to make it their own . . . and more meaningful!’ (posted by mamamialove, 2008) (Zasloff 2002). Any doubts among respondents are indicative of the misconception that Christianity is incompatible with Judaism, but it can be argued that, if these are the words of Jesus, and Jesus was also a Jew, Jewish musicians should be entitled to use the Lord’s Prayer. After all, the words are a paean to the god of both Jews and Christians, and make no mention of Jesus himself, much less proclaim him as the Messiah which would indeed go against traditional Jewish belief.

Members of the comparatively new Messianic Jewish movement also argue along these lines: one comment on a YouTube video of Jewish singer Richard Tucker singing the Lord’s Prayer (Tucker 1968) reads: ‘I am a Messianic Jew, and don’t think, - a Jewish Chazzan (cantor) sings the “Avinu shebashamayim” (Our Father) would do a Christian thing, rather does a very Jewish one! What would be more Jewish, than using the Words of the Jewish Messiah? G-d bless You!’ (posted by andrasesorsi, August 2011). Messianic Jewish theologian David H. Stern takes this a step further, asserting that ‘the New Testament is a Jewish book’ (Stern 1998, xxxvi), written by and for Jews, and that ‘the main issue in the early Messianic Community – that is, the “Church” – was not whether a Jew could believe in Jeshua [Jesus], but whether a Gentile could become a Christian without converting to Judaism!’ (Stern 1998, xxxvi).

Despite misgivings regarding non-Christians, Christian survey respondents frequently stressed that they felt it important that the performer, of whatever persuasion, should show respect for the text – ‘I have no problem with anyone singing the Lord’s
prayer so long as it is with due reverence and respect for those that do believe in one
god’ – and that this would involve a devotional approach. The iconic nature of the text
itself is demonstrated by a tendency of on-line commentators to feel protective over it,
and a negative comment on a YouTube video of cliff richard’s much-criticized
millennium prayer (richard 1999b) produced this response:

‘... this is the Lord’s prayer. If [you have] something bad to say [. . .] there are millions
and millions of other videos on YouTube that you can share your views, but please not on
here. just show some respect.’ (posted by BruceLee335, December 2011).

appropriateness and sincerity

while survey respondents were keen to emphasise that, although they were for the most
part favourable to others singing the Lord’s Prayer, they also said that ‘having the
“right” is different from saying it is appropriate’. the term ‘appropriate’ was used
frequently, both in the sense of being suitable or fitting for a particular purpose and also,
despite protestations of inclusivity, in the proprietorial sense of belonging to or peculiar
to someone, as in this thoughtful response:

“We Christians do not “own the words”, but we can probably say what we believe is their
“appropriate” use in singing. [If] I knew the singer despised and thus disowned the words,
say, it would no doubt negatively influence my reaction, but that is all. in the setting of an
opera or musical, however, I would probably have no real problem with anyone singing
them reverently (appropriately), the words having come to belong, in a secondary sense, to
the wider world. however, because of the original context of the words, their use as part of
an act of Buddhist (etc.) worship, I would in all likelihood find less appropriate.’

This respondent exposes the conundrum of using the Lord’s Prayer as song: if it is not
to be used in its original context of Christian worship the (Christian) receiver requires at
least that the performance be appropriately reverent, and would like to think that the
performer sincerely believes in the words. The problem with the use of the text for
worship by other faith groups seems to lie in the fact that there is not even a pretence
that they share a Christian belief system. however, if the performance involves the
suspension of disbelief, as in opera or musical theatre, the receiver is content with the appearance of reverence, accepting the use of the text in a fictional scenario regardless of the implausibility of the narrative and of the performer’s faith credentials.

As far as real performances are concerned, many commentators testify that a convincing performance is proof of the performer’s sincere belief in the words they are singing, while others recognize that what they are witnessing can equally be the artist performing belief for the benefit of the receiver. Recognition of this may be more forthcoming when the artist is an actor as well as a singer: a posting on a Doris Day tribute site opines that ‘The Lord’s Prayer [is] amongst tracks which give power for contemplation. It’s not difficult to accept that Doris believed every word’ (Pollock 2008).

Sincerity – or the faking of it – and a claim to religious credentials are evidently key to the success of a performance of the Lord’s Prayer, and the film and music industries have gone to great lengths to promote these qualities. Tenor Mario Lanza and crooner Perry Como both had their roots in Roman Catholic Italian immigrant families to the USA, a fact which was put to good use by both men’s publicity machines. Lanza’s rendition of the Lord’s Prayer in the film Because You’re Mine (1952b) is set in a small church (albeit one notably lacking in Catholic images), ostensibly with a simple harmonium accompaniment but swelled with an invisible choir as the music builds to its climax; the song, which is used in this musical comedy to evoke the sincerity and moral values of the character, represents an emotional turning-point in the film.

For Perry Como’s audio recording of the Lord’s Prayer (1969b), the record company RCA Victor went to great lengths to ensure ‘an authentic aura of religious solemnity’ of his performance, cutting the disc in a Manhattan Episcopal church with organ accompaniment and an interdenominational backing choir of 36 mixed Catholic,
Jewish and Protestant voices, even though this was to be an audio recording with no visuals. The message from both the visual backdrop in the Lanza film, and the well-publicized interdenominationality of the Como choir and recording location are reminders of the image of ‘tri-faith America,’ specifically Protestant, Catholic and Jewish (Schultz 2011).

Although all these film and audio recordings clearly fall into the category of entertainment, the performance environment is manipulated to emulate conventional worship space and practice, thus situating the performance at the centre of the pseudo-liturgical action. The singers are seen to create – or re-create – the role of a pray-er but, whereas this prayer is normally said privately or communally, here the singer-pray-er takes centre stage and demands the continued attention of the receiver, in other words almost imitating the role of a minister leading a quasi-religious ceremony. One could therefore ask that, if the receiver’s judgement of a performance of the Lord’s Prayer is swayed by the perception of a secular artist as a performer with ‘religious’ credentials, often promoted in order to justify their choice of a sacred text, how much more authority would a performer have were he to be a bona fide priest?

‘The Priests’, a trio of Irish Roman Catholic priests, and ‘Les Prêtres’, a similar trio from France, have both included the Lord’s Prayer in repertoires aimed mainly at the Catholic market. The Priests are just that – a classical trio of practising Catholic priests from Northern Ireland. The success of their eponymous first album (The Priests 2008) led to other recordings and concert tours, with their simple, prayerful a capella Lord’s Prayer appearing on their Harmony album (The Priests 2009a). As the trio prepared to release their first CD, their publicity stated that ‘as The Priests, their music will be religious and spiritually-inspired classics including Ave Maria and Panis Angelicus’ (Amazon 2008). Subsequent reviews focus on the qualities to be expected...
from men of the cloth, such as one for Catholic.net which says that their voices are ‘not remarkable in a technical sense [but for] ‘the purity, warmth and authenticity they convey’ (Bailey 2008). The same Catholic reviewer shows a willingness to forgive any technical weaknesses and instead defers to their priestly role, noting that ‘these three priests are not here to show off how well they sing, but to instead convey their prayerful love of God and their combined ministries as priests and music ministers’ (Bailey 2008). One has to ask, though, whether any such meaning would be derived from their music were the reviewer not writing for a Catholic audience, and in the knowledge that these were genuine priests.

Les Prêtres are a French trio brought together specifically by the Bishop of Gap to emulate the success of The Priests. Their musical style is even more eclectic than that of The Priests, mixing easy classics with rock backings and secular songs among the religious texts; their polished delivery and slick video presentation have enjoyed considerable success in France. On their Spiritus Dei album (Les Prêtres 2010) they use the Lord’s Prayer as the opening of ‘Spiritus Dei: Sarabande’, in which the Lord’s Prayer (or more properly the Pater Noster) is recited in Latin by Monsignor Di Falco Leandri – the camera-work lending an almost menacingly dramatic ambience to the text – and with this senior cleric adding yet another layer of priestly authority to the text (Les Prêtres 2010b). Other sacred texts in Latin and French follow, all set against Handel’s majestic Sarabande from the Suite in D minor which gives much scope for dramatic filmography. Like The Priests, Les Prêtres’ selling point is their billing as priest-musicians but, although this was the original intention this is not strictly true. While two are indeed priests, the third was originally a seminarian who has since abandoned his priestly vocation (although not the Catholic Church) to train as a sound engineer. This inconvenient fact is often glossed over in the many press articles such as
‘Les voix du Seigneur’ (Chatrier 2010) and ‘Les prêtres font toujours des miracles’ (Pigozzi 2011) which praise the group, offering more evidence that a religious vocation is taken as proof of the sincerity and respect for the text demanded by the receiver.

From ritual to performance

While the Lord’s Prayer can be prayed, unseen, by an individual, its role in the liturgy also defines it as a ritual element, a role that is to be played out communally. This sense is emphasized from the opening words, the congregation praying as one, not to ‘My Father’ but to ‘Our Father’, and referring to themselves as ‘we’ and ‘us’ throughout. In a way, the action of reciting the text together is the opposite of a performance scenario, in which a few ‘players’ (such as a troupe of actors playing to a theatre full of people) direct their offering at many; here, the many (worshippers) are addressing their offering to an audience of one (God). However, even though the audience of one is listening to this offering, there are very few who would think of it as a performance *per se* rather than as a ritualistic act.

There is nevertheless a sense in which all ritual is performed, whether directed solely at a god (or gods) or in the presence of an ‘audience’ of worshippers: in “From Ritual to Theater and Back: The Efficacy – Entertainment Braid” Richard Schechner argues that ritual – that is, ‘an efficacious event on which participants depend’ – emerges, through a process of transformation, into ‘theater’, which is ‘an event which depends on its participants’ (Schechner 2003, 138). My argument here is that this is never truer than when a sacred text (even one so firmly embedded in the ritual of the liturgy as the Lord’s Prayer) is set to music and sung by one performer to an audience of many.
Performance and performative gestures

In *The Magic of Ritual* Tom Driver defines ‘performance’ as a ‘particular kind of doing in which the observation of the deed is an essential part of its doing’ (Driver 1991, 81), and in the examples I will be using here the ‘doing’ has not only been observed in live performance but continues to be observed by thousands of people through the medium of the internet. Of the many singers and groups who have presented settings of the Lord’s Prayer to the wider world beyond Christian churches, I should like to concentrate on a small selection: the multinational operatic ‘boy band’ Il Divo, the American gospel singer Mahalia Jackson, the Irish trio The Priests and the British pop singer Cliff Richard, examining their interpretations in terms of the performative gestures which add layers of meaning to the original text.

Il Divo comprises four male singers and was created by Simon Cowell in 2004. The Lord’s Prayer (Malotte setting) features on their 2005 *Christmas Collection* and their live performance at the Hammersmith Apollo, London, can be seen on YouTube ([Il Divo 2009](#)). For the four singers, ranged along the front of the stage in front of an on-stage orchestra, the text is welded to, yet somehow seems subordinate to, Malotte’s sublime musical setting. The composer has set the words freely, interpreting each phrase independently, and through masterful use of tension and release he builds to a consummate musical climax; the expanding vocal range is a gift for any performer, acting as a showcase for their talent, and all these qualities have ensured its lasting popularity among musicians of all persuasions.

In the absence of any religious pretensions, Il Divo’s performance is essentially dramaturgical. Eyes raised to heaven at the start, each band member holds a microphone in one hand, the other hand raised from time to time in conventionally operatic performative gestures, which could be just as easily applied to a love song as a prayer.
Despite the sacred nature of the text, this is primarily a musical rather than a religious experience. Despite this, there are still some efforts by receivers to justify the use of the text by endowing Il Divo with a religious affiliation, as in this posting on a YouTube video: ‘Il Divo are all catholic [sic] . . . they're awesome..’ (posted by tonganfoilo69, October 2011) – even though there is no publically-available evidence that this is true – and another saying ‘I would love it if at least one of them was Catholic’ (posted by AlegreFe, 19 January 2007). Such attributions seem to express a wish for solidarity, for Il Divo to be expressing a religious message through the same faith prism as the receiver, although such postings also admit that the voices are still paramount to the religious affiliation of the singers.

Mahalia Jackson (1911–72) was a gospel singer whose interpretation of the Malotte setting of the Lord’s Prayer was a highlight of the 1958 Newport Jazz Festival, featuring in the 1960 film Jazz on a Summer’s Day [Jackson 1958b]. She can also be seen on YouTube (Jackson [1963]) in a powerful television studio performance which is intense yet subtle in its portrayal. Musically, she separates Malotte’s phrases, allowing time for contemplation of – and on – the text. Her performative gestures represent a sincere religiosity and, whatever the performing environment (TV studio or live concert), her actions suggest a distance between herself and external factors such as the audience. In front of a live audience, she prepares to sing the Lord’s Prayer by deliberately calming her enthusiastic audience and intimating that she needs to be in an appropriate space before starting to sing. When she does begin, it is with eyes closed, or lifted heavenwards; she never makes eye contact with her audience, and her body language is expressive yet contained.

While Jackson’s gestures suggest an emotional and spiritual interiorization, they are also in effect culturally-recognized symbols which convey spiritual engagement.
with the text in the act of praying. The gestures such as closing the eyes, raising them to heaven, raising hands in prayer, are all communicating the performer’s intentions to an audience and are thus performative. As Schechner asks rhetorically, ‘What is performance? Behaviour heightened, if ever so slightly, and publicly displayed. Twice-behaved behaviour’ (Schechner 1995, 1). At the end of Jackson’s performance, she acknowledges her audience, humbly accepting their rapturous applause. It seems unthinkable that one would applaud a prayer recited in church, so the audience’s response also recognizes that this is a performative rather than a ritual act.

While Jackson is enacting the role of a pray-er, and while she undoubtedly has considerable presence and authority as a singer, she is not assuming the religious authority of a priestess. As I have already suggested, the question of priestly authority can be a powerful force for the receiver, and one which has been utilized by The Priests. In their appearance on the long-running British religious programme Songs of Praise (The Priests 2009b) they sing the text *a cappella* in three-part homophony, that is to say that all the words are sung by each singer at the same time, much as in a hymn or a chorale, so that the textual meaning remains crystal clear. Their interpretation is notably free of overtly performative gestures, as they stand still in the midst of a ‘church-space’ environment. They have said that ‘When we sing, we don’t simply sing, we pray’ (The Priests 2011), a statement which their very stillness, added to the visual cue of black priestly ‘uniform’, can only endorse. Susan Bailey notes in her review that The Priests’ performances are often ‘blissfully understated, missing the histrionics of dramatic high notes and other theatrics’ (Bailey 2008). While one could construe this as a sign that their priestly authority provides enough authenticity to their performance, it could equally be due to their natural style; in any case, there is a pronounced contrast between their performances and the artful poses and dramatic videos of *Les Prêtres*. 
The final artist to be considered is Cliff Richard (b. 1940), who was a rock’n’roll singer before his conversion to Christianity in 1964; at that point he rejected his previous ‘bad boy’ persona in favour of an overtly ‘Christian’ one, pursuing a more middle-of-the-road style and enjoying an enduring career of over fifty years. In 1999 he recorded a *Millennium Prayer*, a medley of the Lord’s Prayer and a supplementary secular religious text, both to the traditional Scottish tune of ‘Auld Lang Syne’ (traditionally sung on New Year’s Eve), and released it as a charity record in November 1999 in time for the millennium celebrations. It topped the UK charts for two weeks, but was panned by critics and later earned the title of ‘worst No.1 of all time’ (*Daily Mail* 2004).

The *Millennium Prayer* consists of the Lord’s Prayer sung twice, with no textual alterations, followed by a complementary text ‘Let all the people say Amen’ which calls for participation in global action.

Let all the people say Amen  
In every tribe and tongue.  
Let every heart’s desire be joined,  
To see the Kingdom come.  
Let every hope and every dream,  
Be born in love again.  
Let all the world sing with one voice,  
Let the people say Amen.

While not sacred, this text has clear religious connotations, echoing the phraseology of the Lord’s Prayer and being framed with an ‘Amen’ which is repeated to close down the musical performance. Clearly, the popularity of this combination of the familiar sacred text of the Lord’s Prayer to an equally familiar secular melody provided Richard with a sure-fire number for his live concerts, and the resultant tightly-choreographed production is replicated in many recorded performances. However, while a very public Christian, Richard has tempered this with the need for his music to have wide appeal, and this has led him to tailor his performances to the audience. While the musical and

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textual content remains identical, his performative gestures are modified to subtly alter his communication of the text – what one might call the ‘message’. For instance, in his stadium performance at the Countdown concert (Richard 1999a) he starts by singing the Lord’s Prayer as a solo, his eyes at first closed as if in prayer, then downcast, and then raised but averted from the audience. His backing singers process around the stage, their choreographed gestures including bowed heads and hands joined as if in prayer, and employing minimal bodily movement. Richard then raises his arms to invite the audience to join him for the reprise of the Lord’s Prayer, the communality of which is reinforced by the backing singers’ movement to the edges of the stage to encourage the audience to sing along.

So far, so conventional in the idiom of pop performance: these gestures raise the text to anthemic status, although its textual message could be said to be confused with the musical message as the melody of ‘Auld Lang Syne’ has such strong associations with the traditional British New Year’s Eve. In fact, many of the audience have crossed their arms and linked hands with their neighbours, moving together in time with the music just as one does at midnight to celebrate the New Year, and it could be argued that the sacred status of the text wrestles with the secular associations of the melody. This is reinforced by the fact that many of the audience are clapping in time with the music from the very start, signifying that for the majority this represents a pop concert environment rather than a time of prayer. For some, however, an acknowledgment of the sacred prayerfulness of the text is evident through hands raised heavenwards in an orant gesture of faith.

As the performative temperature rises, the Lord’s Prayer gives way to the second, secular text, at which point any reservations about singing a prayer are resolved, and the majority of the audience are clapping rather than linking arms. Richard chooses
to stress the unequivocally religious ‘Amen’ by assuming the same attitude of bodily stillness as he has at the beginning of the number while the singers melt away into the background, leaving him centre stage. Having finished, he receives rapturous applause. One should note that Richard is a consummate performer, who has been described as ‘never a particularly soulful or emotional singer, but [with] an impeccable pop sensibility (McKormick 2008). In the official *Millennium Prayer* video (Richard 1999b) the song was originally recorded in front of a green screen (on which a variety of images would later be projected). In this intimate environment Richard is constrained by the need to stay as still as possible for the camera: his performative gestures are therefore necessarily on a smaller scale, and the vocabulary modified, leaving him in an interstitial space between the theatrical conventions of live stage performance and a more intimate need to communicate textual meaning to an invisible audience beyond the camera.

In contrast with the stadium performance, in the official video Richard (1999b) does adopt other overt gestures of faith, such as raising his hands to heaven in an *orant* gesture, or with his hands outstretched in the shape of a cross. Such gestures can be considered dualistic in nature, employed either as a ‘learned technique’ (Mauss 1973) or as a sign which communicates meaning, but for which the interpretation of meaning depends on the cultural background and religious stance of the receiver. The plentiful YouTube comments on the official video show a wide range of interpretations, from those for whom the text remains paramount, such as ‘I love this song. It is simply a prayer – the Lord’s prayer. The Lord is good’ (posted by nanzyteeforchrist, August 2011), to those for whom the performative gestures distract from the text rather than add meaning, such as ‘What’s with the cringeworthy hand movements?’ (posted by cupcakefairy87, August 2011).
Clearly, while some gestures can carry a wealth of socially-constructed meaning the reception may not be that intended – liminally or subliminally – by the performer. For instance, stretching the arms so that the body forms a cross can be interpreted as a gesture of faith, or as a convention of stage performance, but a 2010 posting by BigStankingThang says: ‘Look how Cliff sanctimoniously extends his arms. You’re not the second coming of The Messiah, you are Sir Cliff [ . . . ] Richard’ (Richard 1999b). For BigStankingThang, this arm-extending gesture carries the idea that it is reserved for someone with religious authority, and they evidently feel that Cliff Richard has exceeded his authority as a ‘mere’ performer in assuming a priestly, even messianic, role. One wonders whether BigStankingThing would have made the same association had Cliff been performing a purely secular text, or whether they would have reinterpreted the ‘cross’ gesture as simply that of a pop singer ‘being’ a pop singer.

The evidence suggests that performing a sacred text such as the Lord’s Prayer brings with it responsibilities, that is, to treat the text with due reverence, and not to exceed one’s authority, and that much of this depends on the receiver’s perception of the performer’s sincerity . . . or at least the illusion of sincerity. One posting (Richard 1999b) reminds us of this essential element: ‘The fact that he doesn’t clap properly destroys the illusion that he is lost in song and ruins the conviction of his performance’ (posted by HeartNotArt, 2010). This contributor has acknowledged that the sincerity of the performer is all too often an illusion, and they are disappointed that, for them, the spell has been broken. The implication is that, without this simulation of reality there is no reality of meaning. As Taylor writes in *Entertainment Theology*, ‘This simulation of the real found in popular culture has become the new real, more real than the real’ (Taylor 2008, 105).
From entertainment to efficacy

So where, in this illusory world of entertainment, does this leave the sacred text around which these performances have been constructed? The efficacy of the Lord’s Prayer lies, as we have seen, in its provenance as the words of Jesus, its intended use as communal liturgy or as private prayer, and thus the impression of solidarity with the Church worldwide. In transforming it into a performance piece, has the Lord’s Prayer been deprived of the sense of awe and respect demanded by a sacred text and which is an important element in its efficacy? I would argue that, while this metamorphosis may have denied the text much of its conventional ritual function, its efficacy has not so much been lost as reconfigured. As Schechner says, ‘efficacy and entertainment are not so much opposed to each other [but rather] form the poles of a continuum’ describing a two-way process by which ritual can become entertainment, and can just as readily transmute into ritual again (Schechner 1994, 120). His criteria for entertainment are that it should be ‘fun’, ‘only for those here’, and with an audience watching and appreciating, while efficacy demands ‘results’, a ‘link to an absent Other’, and an audience which not only participates but believes.

It is clear from Schechner’s description of the efficacy–entertainment braid that the role of the audience is crucial. In our recorded performances of the Lord’s Prayer, the ‘audience’ exists in several forms:

1) the audience present at a live performance who become an integral part of the process;
2) the ‘staged’ audience in a film whose reaction to the performance is scripted and choreographed rather than spontaneous;
3) the receiver listening and/or watching remotely and alone, for instance listening to an audio recording or watching an internet video.

The audience at a live performance is there through choice, and expects to participate in some way. This type of ‘accidental’ audience (Schechner 1994, 194) has parallels with
those who willingly attend a religious service and who also expect to be involved in the ritual performance of the liturgy: whereas the concert audience may sing along, move to the music, or simply show their appreciation of the performance through applause, the participation of a church ‘audience’ (usually referred to as a congregation in recognition of their ‘gathering together’ to worship) will usually mean singing hymns and reciting communal ritual elements such as the Lord’s Prayer.

The second type of audience can be seen in film performances such as that of Mario Lanza (1952) which use a staged audience. This ‘audience’ pays rapt attention to the performance, demonstrating in no uncertain terms its transformative effect on those present. This ‘integral’ audience becomes ‘part of the show’ (Schechner 1994, 194) for the receiver watching this on a cinema screen, a television, or on the internet, and is functioning as a single actor in the drama rather than as autonomous individual receivers of the performance.

The third type of audience is comprised of the individuals who receive a performance alone and, in the case of the internet users whose comments have provided ethnographic data for this paper, may have happened upon a performance by chance while surfing the net. As such, Schechner (1994, 194) would describe these as an ‘accidental-aesthetic’ audience, but one in which the individuals function autonomously rather than en masse and who are therefore resistant to the effects of crowd behaviour; this type of receiver uses subjective reflexivity to interpret the performance according to their own agenda.

In my 2012 survey respondents were asked to rate selected video performances of the Lord’s Prayer on a continuum from ‘wholly prayer’ to ‘only entertainment’, and the results (Appendix C) demonstrate a marked difference between reception of performers known primarily as public entertainers and those with faith credentials.
Performances of the Lord’s Prayer by Streisand, Il Divo and Lanza were considered to be either ‘only entertainment’ or ‘more entertainment than prayer’ by the majority of people who had heard them (Streisand 100%, Il Divo 90%, Lanza 80%), while most people thought that performances by those with faith credentials were ‘more prayer than entertainment’ or ‘wholly prayer’ (Jackson 80%, The Priests 85%, Les Pretres 72%). Evaluations of Cliff Richard, however, resulted in a far more even ~60/40 percentage split: of the 34 respondents who had watched at least one of Richard’s performances, twenty (59%) considered them to be ‘more prayer than entertainment’ while thirteen (38%) thought they were ‘more entertainment than prayer’; none of the survey respondents thought the performance was ‘only entertainment’ and only one thought it was ‘wholly prayer’, citing as their reason ‘because he’s a Christian’. These findings reflect Richard’s dual role as pop singer and public Christian, meaning he cannot be easily categorized in the same way as truly ‘religious’ performers such as gospel singers or priests or entertainers or as those who are manifestly professional entertainers.

Comments on YouTube and from my own ethnographic survey as well as record reviews show that receivers take what they want from these recordings, resonating with Spinks’ premise that in postmodern worship culture we are shopping around for faith (Spinks 2010). This spiritual surfing has distinct parallels with the accessibility, repeatability and participatory role of the YouTube experience, in that internet users are offered not only access to ever-increasing viewing options but also an option to participate in a global dialogue by posting comments. Video content is mainly uploaded by private individuals for whom the viewing experience has proved transformative – whether they have been amused, moved or appalled – and which they want to share, creating effectively a virtual community of real but unseen and usually anonymous individuals connected by their shared, albeit asynchronous, experience.15
Video clips are short, consisting of individual scenes from films, highlights from concert programmes or individual items from TV programmes, facilitating repetition of the most affective part of a performance at the click of a mouse, and the fact that so many people are evidently listening avidly – and repeatedly – to such performances suggests that they are seeking some emotional or spiritual affect from them. This is often borne out in YouTube comments, many receivers specifying that they are not churchgoers but that the recording has affected them deeply, leading them to examine their own spirituality or to think about the text in a different way. While YouTube itself does not provide a transformation of the text, it is acting as a forum, allowing internet users to use uploaded recordings with entertainment value for this purpose and facilitating the type of ‘entertainment theology’ outlined by Barry Taylor (2008). In his chapter ‘Entertainment Theology: Religion Goes Pop’ Taylor suggests that ‘Entertainment theology is simply ideas about God that emerge out of previously legitimised environments and structures of mediation . . . it is [among other aspects] the emergency of spiritually aware art forms; [. . .] it is the new philosophical site, the new cultural imaginary.’ (Taylor 2008, 104-5). The responses to performances of a ‘musicked’ Lord’s Prayer which I have discussed here support Taylor’s idea that contemporary theology is based on a ‘worship mall’ cultural experience in which the individual browses the options, selecting and staying with the media which speak to them in the moment. In this way, the receiver can absorb and assimilate textual meaning in an apparently non-ritualized environment, even though this ‘non-ritual’ performance has conformed to ritual expectations in proving to be efficacious in engendering a transformation in the receiver.
Conclusion

In conclusion, I would suggest that The Lord’s Prayer is a text which is so deeply embedded in the Christian consciousness, and whose meaning speaks even to those who have not been brought up in a Christian culture, that it seems remarkably resistant to losing its status as a sacred text. It would appear that a performer’s faith credentials, and especially priestly authority, are consciously rationalized into an expectation of prayerfulness, while performative gestures are subjectively interpreted as either indicators of faith or stagecraft based on the receiver’s own cultural and religious agenda.

Expectations of devotional or ritual functionality may be confounded through its metamorphosis into a performance piece, which in turn stalls the efficacy of the ritual process by emphasizing the theatrical qualities of performance. However, the evident desire to believe in the performer as someone with real or imagined religious authority, who can convey the spirit of the text, demonstrates a willingness to experience the performance as a transcendental process which is expected from efficacious ritual. Thus the text retains its efficacy, albeit in a renewed form, its textual meaning and ritual significance re-imagined within the context of a democratized spirituality.
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APPENDIX B  Survey data: The right to sing the Lord’s Prayer
APPENDIX C  Survey data: Prayer or entertainment?

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APPENDIX A: Survey demographic (Haste 2012).

![Survey demographic table](image)

APPENDIX B: Survey data: The right to sing the Lord’s Prayer.

![Survey data table](image)
### APPENDIX C Survey data: Prayer or entertainment?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artist</th>
<th>Wholly prayer</th>
<th>More prayer than entertainment</th>
<th>More entertainment than prayer</th>
<th>Only entertainment</th>
<th>Never seen/heard</th>
<th>Moi ènne de classement</th>
<th>Nombre de réponses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cliff Richard</td>
<td>1.9% (1)</td>
<td>35.1% (20)</td>
<td>22.8% (13)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>40.4% (23)</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte Church</td>
<td>1.8% (1)</td>
<td>3.6% (2)</td>
<td>21.6% (12)</td>
<td>0.1% (0)</td>
<td>63.6% (36)</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-II Divo</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>3.6% (2)</td>
<td>10.7% (6)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>80.0% (44)</td>
<td>4.62</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahalia Jackson</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>7.4% (4)</td>
<td>1.3% (1)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>90.7% (49)</td>
<td>4.74</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara Streisand</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>12.7% (7)</td>
<td>5.6% (3)</td>
<td>61.8% (45)</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister Janet Mead</td>
<td>1.9% (1)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>1.9% (1)</td>
<td>98.3% (53)</td>
<td>4.91</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Priests</td>
<td>5.5% (3)</td>
<td>25.5% (14)</td>
<td>5.5% (3)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>63.6% (35)</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Les Frères</td>
<td>3.6% (2)</td>
<td>5.5% (3)</td>
<td>3.6% (2)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>87.3% (48)</td>
<td>4.62</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mario Lanza</td>
<td>1.8% (1)</td>
<td>5.5% (3)</td>
<td>20.0% (11)</td>
<td>9.1% (5)</td>
<td>63.6% (35)</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gracie Fields</td>
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<td>5.5% (3)</td>
<td>5.5% (3)</td>
<td>3.5% (2)</td>
<td>85.5% (47)</td>
<td>4.69</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marvin Gaye</td>
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<td>0.0% (0)</td>
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<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>98.1% (53)</td>
<td>4.96</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temptations</td>
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<td>1.9% (1)</td>
<td>1.9% (1)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>94.3% (52)</td>
<td>4.91</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The term ‘receiver’ denotes both listeners and observers. It should be noted that this paper discusses only audio recordings and videos of performances; video content consisting of images added to an audio soundtrack are therefore disregarded.

Fifty-eight worshippers in the Christian tradition responded to the survey in which they were asked to evaluate their personal responses to the Lord’s Prayer. A detailed breakdown by age and gender is given in Appendix A, with quantitative data related to this discussion appearing in subsequent appendices.

These were reached through church and diocesan websites, through church music institution the Royal School of Church Music (RSCM) and through networking sites Facebook, Academia and LinkedIn.

While the survey demographic (Appendix A) may seem limited, this group is still highly relevant in the light of figures from 2006 which show that (at least in the USA) the 35-65 age group ‘represent the largest YouTube user group’ (Hallerman 2006).

Recording date. Hyperlink is to video performance (Church 1999).

Malotte’s melodic setting has proved particularly popular and is frequently uploaded onto Youtube. The music lends itself to effective arrangements in many genres and has been sung successfully by singers in classical, pop and gospel traditions: starting quietly in the low register, each phrase builds on the last to culminate in a passionate climax, with scope for improvisation on the final ‘Amen’.

Recording date. Hyperlink is to a recent performance (Ellington 2009).

Hyperlink is to a recent performance (Fanshawe 2006).

Hyperlink is to a video of Sr Janet Mead incorporating footage of her performing informally (Mead 1973b).

‘Sr Mary Martha’ describes herself as a nun from a teaching order in Marina del Rey, California. Although I have not as yet been able to positively identify her as a genuine religious, she is evidently a real person with rational views on religious matters; I am therefore treating the comments of her (genuine) blog visitors – and her replies – as valid ethnographic data.

Percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.

An review of Streisand’s Christmas Album posted in 2002 recalls that ‘The closing track, “The Lord's Prayer,” is an amazing vocal feat; the song was a bit controversial way back when because Barbra is Jewish and she sang a Christian prayer, which had the Catholic clergy upset because no one is to ever sing a prayer and the Jewish felt it was a contradiction’. [“A Christmas Standard” (sic), December 30, 2002].

A recent article ‘May All Your Hanukkahs Be White’by James C. McKinley (New York Times, 18 November 2012) also cites one Jewish record producer’s comment: ‘Yentl herself, and it’s a Christmas recording!’.

An interesting discussion on individualism can be found on Theology in Pencil (Parkins, 2012).

Cliff Richard (b. Harry Rodger Webb) received a knighthood in 1995 for services to the music industry.

Both the ‘shared’ experience of seeing a video clip and the ensuing dialogue are asynchronous, comments being posted as part of an apparently real-time conversation which may be months or even...
years old. This is a good example of the way in which ‘notions of time have been transformed by computer-mediated communication’ (Jacobs 2007, 8).

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Biographical Note

Amanda Haste (b. 1957) is an Anglo-American musicologist and musician whose research interests include music in contemporary religious life; identity; authenticity; and the intersection between spirituality and music. She holds teaching and performance diplomas from London conservatoires and an MA in historical musicology from the University of Exeter; in 2009 she was awarded a PhD from the University of Bristol for her research into the role of music in twenty-first-century monasticism. An independent researcher and academic translator based in France, Dr Haste is an active member of All Saints’ Anglican chaplaincy in Marseille and serves on the committee of the Royal School of Church Music (France). She has recently been transcribing and translating archival material for the two-volume series English Convents in Exile 1600–1800 (Pickering & Chatto, 2012-2013), and has also written a chapter for a Canadian book on authenticity, currently under publisher’s review. Other forthcoming publications include ‘A Third Gender?: Expression of Gender Identity in Celibate Monasticism through Words and Music’ (Contemporary Identities [paperback], Ars Identitatis/Sorbonne, 2013/14) and ‘Prayerful Silence and Creative Response in Twenty-First-Century Monasticism’ (Culture & Religion, 2013).

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