

## The Extravagance of Music

“In this timely and fascinating book, Brown and Hopps argue persuasively that music—both in its form and in the event of listening, in wordless and ‘secular’ works as well as those with deliberate religious associations, and through popular genres just as much as high art—can ‘lead us to the edge of the infinite,’ providing a place not only of religious encounter but also divine revelation. Essential reading for anyone interested in the relationship between theology and the meaning-making possibilities of music.”

—Maggi Dawn, *Associate Professor of Theology and Literature,  
Yale Divinity School, USA*

“When I read this book, I was reminded of Faber’s fine hymn ‘There’s wideness in God’s mercy.’ In the face of literature that would limit the revelation of the Divine in music to a few musical works of a particular style with an approved theology, it widens the scope of the spiritual in music to include the musicker as well as the sound of the music itself. It opens up the possibility that a variety of musics can generate a transcendent experience, depending on the musical experience and preferences of the musicker. In this book God is seen as extravagantly generous with grace which cannot be limited in its scope. I recommend it heartily for anyone interested in music and the spiritual; it will challenge and intrigue them.”

—June Boyce-Tillman, *MBE, Professor of Applied Music,  
University of Winchester, UK*

“David Brown and Gavin Hopps have given us a wise, well informed, and wide-ranging treatment of the possibilities of music as a mediator of the divine. Opposing the reductionism of both ‘catechetical’ religious approaches and secularist exclusions of the sacred, they provide cogent arguments for the positive significance of music for awareness of God. A major contribution of the book is the richness of examples from both classical and popular genres. The authors place their topics within the large context of theological and especially musical aesthetics, but they are not content with the general observations that frequently characterize theological treatments of music. Both musicologists and theologians should appreciate their detailed descriptions of exactly how various kinds of music can achieve spiritual effects. They invite us to recognize the possibility of musical experiences of different kinds and levels of depth that can reveal varied but complementary aspects of divine encounter. Avoiding simplistic positions, the authors explicitly take into account the inevitable social and individual

contexts that condition all experiences. But they argue effectively that within such contexts, for those disposed, truly revelatory moments through music are possible and real.”

—Richard Viladesau, *Professor Emeritus, Fordham University, New York, USA*

“As a music therapist one of the most common things people say to me is ‘music takes me somewhere else’ or ‘music is spiritual for me.’ Such music may be Bach, The Grateful Dead, or a spontaneous improvisation. The relationship between music and spirituality is a very contemporary concern, and this timely and important book addresses a key imbalance in the growing interdisciplinary literature. To date studies of the relationship between spirituality and music have tended to focus exclusively on high art music as the paradigm case of music as a transcendent experience. Brown and Hopps re-balance this outdated picture with a more ‘horizontal’ and hospitable perspective—thinking across the classical and popular traditions, and presenting a view of how music conceived within everyday experience and action can better help us explore the links between immanence and transcendence. This book is a must-read for anyone interested in these key contemporary concerns.”

—Gary Ansdell, *Research Associate, Nordoff Robbins, UK*

David Brown · Gavin Hopps

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## FOREWORD

Overall, no art has a higher reputation for spiritual expression and religious resonance than music has, even in a notably secular age. That high reputation of music's gifts—reflected, for example, in the annual White Light festival at New York City's Lincoln Center, which is promoted as an exploration of the spiritual in music—is consistent with the title of this book's Introduction. Here music is characterized as an art 'open to the divine.' Indeed, in the chapters that follow, one finds eloquent and persuasive support for that claim—which is all the more important because of the resistance the idea can meet, not only from secular philosophers of music (which is understandable) but also from certain influential theologians. Moreover, the scope of this book, tapping the theological and cultural wisdom of not just one leading British theologian but two, is impressive in not being confined to classical traditions but in also comprising a wide-ranging interpretation of popular music.

This is not, it must be said, a book that is naïve in its affirmations about music and religion. Indeed, David Brown and Gavin Hopps both engage extensively with music that many would see as thoroughly secular, whether that be classical symphonic music or popular song. And they acknowledge, in different ways, how prone music is to being 'extravagant'—and extravagant partly in the medieval Latin root meaning of wayward, wandering, and straying outside limits.

To be sure, the authors insist that extravagance can turn out to be an advantage, musically and theologically. Indeed, they emphasize that there is a sense in which God can likewise be said to be extravagant—prodigal,

excessive, venturing beyond limits, and even self-emptying although sacramentally present. As the authors also make clear, however, there is no denying that music can be wayward and extravagant in ways that are often perceived to be problematical even from a religious perspective.

Regarding the latter, one should not neglect the fact that music, in the eyes of theology, is forever getting itself into trouble. When its purpose is to provide a setting for religious words, music often obscures the text (or even insinuates new texts). If offered in the service of prayer, music can get carried away by calling forth emotions beyond anything necessarily implied by the prayerful words themselves. If intended to be congregational and communal, music has undeniable power to unite many people with one voice yet lends itself to expressing subjective freedom—and to playing with creative invention and improvisation (as in jazz and in much organ music). Where a hymn of harmonious beauty would supposedly be more than enough to create an air of holiness, music sometimes dares to indulge in melismatic ornamentation or many-voiced complexity, possibly even rapture or ecstasy. Even when the tone is expected to be modest and chaste, music finds subtle ways to engage the body or even to court something erotic, possibly by borrowing secular melodies or rhythms to mix with ostensibly religious themes. Then there is the fact that some of the best composers of religious music, including church music, are admittedly agnostics or atheists. It has commonly been a concern from the earliest times, moreover, that the best singers of religious music haven't always been of the best reputation, personally.

We are not to forget, of course, that music is welcomed and honoured biblically. Yet, despite the abundance of music that must have been used for singing the Psalms, for example, and for canticles and hymns, what survives as normative isn't the sound of the music itself but only the words of Scripture, or in some communities the very act of Psalm singing. There is no doubt that—as the present book reminds us—the specific sounds of music would have made a religious difference to the so-called Psalms of David and to worship in the temple. But, in the absence of a developed system of musical notation and a truly continuous oral tradition, those sounds are now a matter mostly of speculation and did not become part of the Bible, whether Jewish or Christian.

Many centuries later, John Calvin, who was intent on making the most of the biblical Psalms in Reformed worship, celebrated the capacity of the Psalms to express the whole range of human emotions. Calvin regarded these biblical words, even in metrical paraphrase, as

unsurpassable because God-given. The music was a different matter. The strictly unaccompanied, unison singing that Calvin approved for Psalms in public worship (which shaped Reformed worship long after) could scarcely be said to encompass fully the heights and depths of human emotion, however beautiful and memorable the tunes of the *Genevan Psalter*. Although struck by the power of music, Calvin was deeply impressed by the worries of Plato, and then Augustine, about how music, when given free rein, can do far more harm than good.<sup>1</sup>

A musician today, looking back to the beginning of the Common Era, and to those Christian practices privileged by Calvin, could be forgiven for lamenting the relatively constrained forms of music that Christians adopted—akin to musical practices found in Jewish synagogues, declared by the rabbis to be in mourning after the destruction of the Jewish temple in 70 CE. The avoidance, in those synagogues, of choirs and of the instruments formerly associated with the temple, along with the additional Christian rejection elsewhere of instruments used in pagan worship, entailed a severe reduction of musical resources, even though enhancing certain kinds of aesthetic and spiritual benefits. In due course, a small minority of churches gave up singing hymns altogether. By the end of the Patristic period, moreover, women were generally prohibited from singing in church when in the presence of men—a prohibition that continued for centuries. Along with that, under the influence of Hellenistic forms of philosophical asceticism, there developed a pronounced and persistent theological bias against indulging the ears with music that appealed fervently to the senses and emotions.<sup>2</sup>

Our typical modern musician would likely feel more encouraged by how Patristic and Medieval theologians of a philosophical inclination adopted the ancient Greek idea of ‘the music of the spheres.’ That was in addition to the willingness of some to envision Jesus as the new Orpheus

<sup>1</sup>See John Calvin, ‘Foreword to the Psalter,’ trans. Charles Garside, *John Calvin: Writings on Pastoral Piety*, ed. Elsie Anne McKee (New York: Paulist Press, 2001), 91–7.

<sup>2</sup>The present discussion is necessarily compressed and simplified. For more details, see *Antiquity and the Middle Ages: From Ancient Greece to the 15th Century*, ed. James McKinnon (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1991); Johannes Quasten, *Music and Worship in Pagan and Christian Antiquity*, trans. Boniface Ramsey (Washington: National Association of Pastoral Musicians, 1983); and *Sacred Sound and Social Change: Liturgical Music in Jewish and Christian Experience*, ed. Lawrence A. Hoffman and Janet R. Walton (Indianapolis: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992).

and to attribute morally therapeutic benefits to music. Yet the scholarly study of music, which eventually was undertaken in the Medieval university quadrivium as one of the seven liberal arts, was not focused primarily on music that human beings can create or hear in its pure form. Music in higher education was studied as a branch of mathematics and astronomy. Theologically speaking, furthermore, the higher music of cosmic harmony was understood to be essentially intellectual and mathematical—and not, for human beings, what we would think of as fundamentally an art of sensory sound, which requires space and time, among other things. If God is conceived of as pure intellect (in classical theism), then God would not be listening to anything sensuous, but only to its transcendent equivalent—even if that does have an earthly correspondence in the joys of everyday music (something implied in Sir Thomas Browne’s memorable words on the subject cited in this book). For these reasons, among others, the audible realm of music in performance tended to occupy a relatively minor role in pre-modern theological reflection over the centuries.

The book in hand is more concerned, in any case, with music in the modern era. And, even with increasing secularization, the possibilities for musical aspiration and inspiration, and for theologies of music as well, change dramatically in modernity, with the proliferation of music and the development of endless varieties and uses of music in and out of church. Modern theology has thus confronted distinctive problems and prospects when facing newly expressive, probing, and pervasive powers of music.

In fact, in modernity, what soon becomes especially perplexing from a theological standpoint is how often music that is ostensibly secular—even instrumental music without words, or secular operas and popular songs—can somehow be experienced as at least quasi-religious or (in present-day terminology) spiritual. The making and appreciation of music becomes a core matter of the heart, not to mention the soul. Even when listening to church music, some modern church-goers confess that sometimes it isn’t the sermon but the music that moves them to tears or that provides something like a foretaste of heaven. Whether in the form of a Bach cantata preceding the sermon in Bach’s own era, or in the form of a song lifted up collectively in a Sacred Harp singing convention in North America today, the music itself is tempting enough to become the main attraction. Accordingly, especially from the Romantic era on, when support for music and musicians comes increasingly from the

secular sphere, clergy and theologians often suspect that music is becoming a substitute for religion—or ‘spilt religion’—rather than something divinely given or liturgically motivated.

In the chapters that follow, David Brown and Gavin Hopps never deny that some of these ways of questioning the ‘extravagance’ of music have legitimacy. But both proceed in the conviction that such questions are often partial at best, and increasingly questionable, themselves, given changes in our sense of bodies and selves, of emotions and imagination, and of language and (dare we say?) revelation. Which is to take seriously that the very premises for doing theology and for thinking about music, too, have shifted in important respects.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, it has become more imperative than ever for theology to expand its scope to consider culture, arts, and specifically music not as somehow illustrational, or as providing helpful analogies outside theology’s intrinsic modes of thought, but, rather, as a means of reshaping (and in turn being shaped by) that very thought—if, indeed, ‘thought’ is the best word for what is called for.

The repeated emphasis of our authors on embodiment and physicality, on emotion, on imagination and metaphor, and on tradition as being open to innovation—such concerns are not products of nostalgia for past Romanticism, which they apparently agree was prone to promote an inflated view of Art and of Genius. Rather, those themes are prominent here because Brown and Hopps are aware that unresolved tensions and biases from long ago continue to make themselves felt today, albeit sometimes in new ways. Although they do not say so explicitly, it seems they would concur that, within theological education, and in education overall, there is still widespread confusion over the role of music and the other aesthetic arts in the very formation and transformation of minds, selves, and traditions. That is especially true when it comes to envisioning faith’s search for understanding, or for imagining justice freshly, or for receiving and inviting an art ‘open to the divine,’ which moves toward mystery that is beyond conceptualization, and that is not reducible to norms susceptible to definite indoctrination.

<sup>3</sup>Regarding the developments in music aesthetics from antiquity to the present, one invaluable resource is Enrico Fubini, *A History of Music Aesthetics*, trans. Michael Hatwell, 3rd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1990). For specifically theological considerations, the reader is referred to the book in hand.

Taking the liberty that I may be allowed in writing this Foreword, I suggest that, in much of Christianity, we still bear the wounds and scars of a history of painful (albeit contextually understandable) diminutions of everything closely connected with the body, and with emotion, with feeling, and with poetic and musical imagination (even after reactions against Enlightenment models of rationality). Indeed, we who are striving to be Christian are still living with the lamentable results of an exaggerated historical fixation within Christianity itself on verbal formulations of theology and doctrine, beyond anything seen in the other major religious traditions.

To this very day, the (arguably) best known exponent of theology and music in the English-language world insists that the divine norms accessible to us are all essentially verbal and God-given as such—even if music can suggest to theology some creative ways of conceptualizing such doctrines as the Trinity (which could sound different if ‘heard’ as the imposition of three non-conflicting tones within the total chordal harmony of the musically inhabited space). The foremost hidden partner and substantial opponent in dialogue throughout the present book is in fact a perceptive and even brilliant analyst of music in musicological terms, namely Jeremy Begbie. Yet Begbie constantly and consistently declines to acknowledge that music and its interpreters could ever augment, correct, or genuinely make new the classic Christian doctrines or the teachings of Scripture—which he somehow imagines to be sufficiently uniform to fit, all of them, under the same tent.<sup>4</sup>

Repeatedly, Begbie tiptoes up to the point of giving music room for genuine theological innovation, only to back away. Sometimes he discusses musical elements of what some would term a natural theology, especially in relation to time. But nothing deeply different is allowed to come into view with regard to imagining how the Kingdom might come on earth as it is in heaven. Thus, Begbie’s strong insistence that everything Christian must take time and history seriously can cause him

<sup>4</sup>Begbie’s most nuanced discussion of the matter, to date, is contained in his two chapters on music and God-talk in his book *Music, Modernity, and God: Essays in Listening* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), especially 194–216. Although going so far as to concede, in response to theological criticism, that music can be ‘transparent to its eternal ground,’ and even that music can ‘reveal the grace of the creator directly’—a rare statement in Begbie’s oeuvre—he insists that any such claim about music can be justified only by having recourse to prior ‘language and conceptuality regarded as normative,’ 215–6.

to question the music of Olivier Messiaen, with its audacious evocations of eternity in works such as *Quartet for the End of Time* (1941).<sup>5</sup> And that's despite the fact that Messiaen is widely acknowledged to be the foremost Roman Catholic composer within the avant-garde of the twentieth century.

In the end, Begbie circumscribes the sphere of trustworthy norms within bounds he sees as pre-determined exclusively by Scripture and by classic Christian doctrine (accepted as divinely given, albeit accommodated to human capacities). At the same time, Begbie makes only passing references to popular music, such as the music of U2, and he treats classical music as, in effect, the main music worth serious discussion—including secular classical music (such as Chopin) but, again, only if it meets pre-established criteria. Thus, even aside from the promising secular music he passes over (such as Mahler's symphonies), Begbie ignores vast traditions of Christian music—almost the entire sphere of popular music, as well as Gospel, Eastern Orthodox, and 'spiritual minimalist' music (such as the music of Arvo Pärt, who for several years has been reported to be the most frequently performed living composer of classical music). On occasion, Begbie acknowledges, in a virtual whisper, that music can potentially mediate the divine. Begbie permits himself to become somewhat unguarded when in the company of major Reformation theologians. There he can allow for music as an art 'open to God' (not his phrase), but even then he does so most noticeably either when discussing Bach (a Lutheran) or when warming up to Calvin's musical rendition of Eucharistic theology or to Luther's own sense of music as, next to theology, the greatest of God's gifts to humanity.<sup>6</sup> In truth, he generally makes little or no connection with one possibility explored in this book: the possibility that spiritual realities can come to awareness in and through music in ways unavailable to verbal formulation, often in nominally secular contexts, and in modes that could sometimes require Christian theology to reconsider its primary terms, even its sense of possible ways of encountering God. It seems that Begbie's

<sup>5</sup> See Jeremy Begbie, *Theology, Music, and Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 139–41. Begbie is even more critical here of the music of the late John Tavener, who aspired to create music that would correspond to 'icons,' and so reflect mystical (or sacramental) elements of Eastern Orthodoxy.

<sup>6</sup> See Begbie, *Music, Modernity, and God*, 10–15.

approach, in contrast to the approaches of David Brown and Gavin Hopps, is so intent on avoiding idolatry that it fails, in effect, to recognize how very generous is the gracious reality of God, not least in the realm of music.<sup>7</sup>

I welcome the present book on music and theology with open arms. Others may have technical musicology at their disposal. But here there is a much more expansive and generous way of approaching music theologically. And that is what is most needed at present.

The generosity extends, it must be said, to the mode of treating things pertaining to theological aesthetics. And that brings me to a final cluster of observations I would mention in commending *The Extravagance of Music*. These all have to do in one way or another with aesthetics in relation to theology.

Speaking of Brown for the moment, since he is the author of Part I: most readers will be aware that this is far from being the first book in which he has discussed music and theology together. The notes in the following chapters will help identify others. Yet I'm not aware of his having previously addressed at length certain aesthetic questions. One such question is posed by the theoretical problem of how music without words can be meaningful and, indeed, 'an art open to God.' Here, for very good reasons, Brown quite intentionally chooses classical music for discussion. That is because, broadly speaking, classical music in the predominantly European tradition makes more extensive use of purely instrumental music—symphonies, sonatas, chamber music, tone poems, and the like—than any other music on the globe.

<sup>7</sup> Begbie has recently given some credence to Maeve Heaney's view that 'there are things which God may only be saying through music'—which means that it is 'incumbent upon the theologian to listen.' See his Foreword to Maeve Louise Heaney, *Music as Theology: What Music Says About the World*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick, 2012), ix. If this signals a new turn in Begbie's thinking, however, that remains ambiguous. In his recent contribution to a journal issue entitled *Music as a Portal to the Sacred*, Begbie warns against idolatry that lurks in ways in which music has often been 'robed in theological garb.' Begbie cites an instance in which a church musician declared that, for him, 'the Real Presence is in the notes' (13). Begbie dismisses that assertion without pausing to consider some possible kernel of truth in a sacramental view of the music. Moving on to a discussion of how music can serve the purposes of peace-building, Begbie never returns explicitly to the larger topic of music as a portal to the sacred. *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 71: 1 (2017), 13–24.

It is not irrelevant, however, that even a large part of classical or classically-influenced instrumental music has served additional purposes: dancing and dining, for instance, and, in the modern era, the soundtracks for movies. Furthermore, the greater part of music-making, historically, is not purely instrumental but music that is joined with drama, for example, or made into songs. The undeniable fact that the sounds of music can so readily lend themselves to lyrics and to bodily movements or to ‘setting the mood’—all of this suggests strongly that even purely instrumental music without words has multi-dimensional appeal and possibly hidden connections. That hypothesis fits with modern neuropsychology when it tells us that the part of the brain that can be affected by music is, in fact, everything above the neck. Borrowing from another sphere of psychology, we could justifiably conclude that the primary organ of musical enjoyment is the brain—or the mind-body whole, or the embodied sentient self.

It is quite understandable, therefore, that Brown refuses a reductive approach when he addresses questions about purely instrumental music and its emotions and meanings—questions that are raised, for example, by the American philosopher Peter Kivy and by the British philosopher Roger Scruton.<sup>8</sup> The former, in book after book published in the previous century, poses perplexing but powerful objections to the admittedly appealing notion that music even without words can express the feelings we experience in ‘real life,’ such as sadness or hope. Even Scruton, while much more open to the idea of such expression, is extremely circumspect in what he understands to be the possible relation between music and religion. And that’s despite identifying himself as an Anglican. Such questions ask for reconsiderations of what music does, and the role of emotion, and music’s relation to language.

For his part, Brown sees music even without words as a cultural phenomenon and, however distinctive, as evidently related to many of the same imaginative processes that verbal language both taps and helps construct. Thus, while music extends beyond language and thought as normally conceived, it is never completely free of animated interaction with our minds and selves as a whole—or embodied souls, some would say.

<sup>8</sup>From this point, everything I allude to is discussed in more detail by the authors. The reader should consult the footnotes in the body of the text for references and documentation.

And if we are indeed restless until we rest in God—to use one classic expression from Augustine—then our music may discover and construct metaphors or symbols that likewise reflect and shape that kind of yearning and hope.

Brown never suggests that the ‘surplus’ of meaning generated musically (which Hopps likewise is committed to contemplating) is ever simply reducible to verbal expression, however new its formulation. In possibly transporting us onto a plane that is closer to the divine, or indeed open to God, music is thus never so saturated in language that it simply replicates or generates in sonic terms certain truths or feelings that can fully be contained in words—even words of the Bible or of the creeds. Nor is this merely an additive process in which musical feeling is simply added to religious ideas. Instead, a transformation takes place. That means that verbal theology, when listening closely to music, can hear something not previously heard. But theology cannot absorb the effects of music to so great an extent that it can go on to render music superfluous. Neither can music simply stand permanently on its own, however, and somehow, unaided, deliver up a religion, or open up to God in a conscious way, without any accompanying culture of words or ritual acts.

Discussing numerous works of mostly classical music (which these days are easily accessible online), Brown leads us toward insights into how music and theology meet, and sometimes conflict. But it is a strength of his position that he never pretends he can explain such phenomena fully. If he could use words to do so, there might not be a need for music. Nor does Brown pretend, of course, to exhaust the intrinsic mystery of the divine, or to explain God’s ways to us—even when experienced, musically, as immanent. That Brown, with his remarkable knowledge of both music and theology, can carry us so far into the mystery is a cause for immense gratitude.

Gavin Hopps, in Part II, is in some ways even more daring, in the sense that he must first ‘face the music’ of a long tradition of academic resistance to taking seriously the very kinds of music he wants to examine. He considers a wide array of popular music, examples of which he offers for consideration as, variously, ‘religious,’ ‘post-secular,’ and ‘secular,’ yet all capable, in his view, of engendering epiphanic experience.

Having set himself such an ambitious agenda, Hopps finds he can move forward only after answering the daunting challenge of academic critics and philosophers such as Roger Scruton: thinkers who marshal a plethora

of rhetorical tools intended to expose the triviality and superficiality (and possibly even corrupting influence) of popular music in our day.

In support of Hopps, by the way, no one today supposes one can ‘prove’ that something is beautiful—as Kant established long ago in a way few try to refute. By the same token, neither can one ‘prove’ that something artistic is a base form of expression, perhaps superficial or degrading or badly performed. Aware that the case needs to be made some other way, Scruton is strongly inclined to fall back on hurling insults, crafty or crude, in the hope that they will ring true enough to expose popular music as meretricious in a variety of ways.

Hopps has the courage and sagacity to question those tactics. Music has a strongly subjective element, and it also is deeply conditioned by habits of making and listening to music, and thus by becoming acquainted with, and living into, a given style. As David Hume argued (without seeing all the implications), valid judgments of taste require informed expertise. Unfortunately, Hume and Scruton depend too much on elitist assumptions about who can be duly informed in artistic matters.

For related reasons, Hopps objects to the way in which Jeremy Begbie is inclined either to treat popular music as ‘sentimental’ or else, for the most part, simply to ignore popular music altogether. Hopps is not about to deny that various kinds and instances of music really don’t fulfill their potential compared with others. He is not against concluding that a given piece of music may not be very good, compared with other music of its kind. But he is intent on avoiding sweeping generalizations and condemnations, and—more important—intent on cultivating a greater receptivity and openness to a wide range of musical artistry that has popular appeal. Thus, arguing for a version of what I’ve termed ‘ecumenical taste,’ Hopps wants to take popular music on its own terms. That seems especially important in the realm of music that has religious import, since much music of that sort needs to be relatively accessible, if not outright popular in style.

Although Hopps doesn’t point this out in so many words, it is pertinent to his discussion that critics have established a notoriously spotty record when making sweepingly critical pronouncements on one kind of music or another. Sadly, there is a strong tendency in comparative criticism of all sorts to follow the negative example of endeavors in comparative religion, when comparing one’s ‘home’ religion to the religions of others. Unless extremely disciplined, one often takes the worst characteristics of a different and relatively unfamiliar religion and treats those as

somehow typical of that religion. At the same time, one almost instinctively selects out the most virtuous and easily admired traits of one's own religion for comparison. Unfortunately, what has often been true of religious comparisons has also characterized musical comparisons. One result is that, if the judgments of various intellectually esteemed critics were to be followed in the realm of classical music alone, no one would be listening to Mahler, let alone Schoenberg. And pianists Yuja Wang and Lang Lang would be jeered off the stage, despite being among the most popular classical pianists now on the scene. The list could go on indefinitely.

The openness that Hopps invites in relation to music per se carries over into his sensitivity to varieties of religious experience and to an almost infinite number of gradations and intersections between secular and sacred. This brings us back to the extravagance of music and of ways in which music may be open to God—even sometimes when that openness is darkened or doubted. Hopps, like Brown before him, wants to raise the possibility, even the likelihood, that we human beings often need to be surprised and taken off guard, or at the least approached in fresh ways, to be awakened to new senses of possibility in life and to previously muted epiphanies (musical as well as verbal or visual). After all, though metaphor can wear down through use and become a mere repetition of the obvious, it remains true that metaphoric energy comes from an awakened discovery of something more, or of something that defies common sense. If I read Hopps correctly, he joins David Brown in his own way by making the point (among many others) that even Christians can be awakened and stirred to new kinds of experience and insight precisely by music that is assumed to be secular. For one thing, such music often gives expression to experiences that Christians have trained themselves to neglect or minimize in church: the interaction of various kinds of loves, for example, both divine and human; the experience of the mundane transformed by a sudden blow, a sadness unforeseen; or by a sudden illumination of playful anticipation or memory. This helps explain why Leonard Cohen's ostensibly secular song 'Hallelujah' was able (to his amazement) to become a favourite choice for countless movies and for celebrating memorable occasions when everyday loves and trials take on an almost sacred quality—even as this very song can, though it employs mostly everyday chords and progressions, but opens up in just such a way.

Gavin Hopps knows more popular music with sacred potential than most of us have heard in our lives. He has found revealing ways to talk about it.

I wonder at this book. It is full of wonders.

Indianapolis, USA

Frank Burch Brown

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## ABBREVIATIONS

- ‘BSA’ Jeremy Begbie, ‘Beauty, Sentimentality and the Arts,’ in *The Beauty of God: Theology and the Arts*, ed. Daniel Treier, Mark Husbands, and Roger Lundin (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007)
- DGHC David Brown, *Divine Generosity and Human Creativity: Theology Through Symbol, Art and Architecture*, ed. Christopher R. Brewer and Robert MacSwain (London: Routledge, 2017)
- GTBT Frank Burch Brown, *Good Taste, Bad Taste, and Christian Taste: Aesthetics in Religious Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)
- MMG Jeremy Begbie, *Music, Modernity, and God: Essays in Listening* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)
- RT Jeremy Begbie, *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music* (London: SPCK, 2008)
- TMT Jeremy Begbie, *Theology, Music, and Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000)