

Peter Kivy, sacred music, and affective response: knowing God through music

1. Introduction

Knowing someone personally involves not just propositional knowledge, but also centrally entails certain patterns of affective response. The more we know someone, the more marked these patterns of response will be. Moreover, it seems that such responses are not simply an extrinsic addition to our knowledge of a person, as though the knowledge itself were completely non-affective; rather, the responses seem to be constitutive of knowing someone personally. For instance, if I am meeting an old friend whom I haven't seen in a while, my experience of knowing him will involve excitement at the prospect of seeing him, gladness when we finally meet, and satisfaction – or perhaps frustration at how quickly the time went – when we part.

Inasmuch as humans can know God personally, this basic insight about the relationship between personal knowledge and affective response also applies to God: knowing God involves responding to him, and to the world, in various affectively toned ways. In light of this insight, I want to explore how one particular practice might contribute to human knowledge of God: namely, engaging with sacred music – in particular, sacred music in the Western, classical tradition. The emotional power of such music is evident. Moreover, it seems clear that it can arouse emotions specifically about God or the sacred. For instance, it seems clear that Purcell's *Hear My Prayer, O Lord* can arouse a desire that in desperate times God be present, or that Mozart's 'Laudate Dominum' can arouse joyful praise for God, or that the 'In Paradisum' of Fauré's Requiem can elicit a feeling of peace in the hope of eternal paradise.

However, the philosopher Peter Kivy argued in his influential work that music, or more precisely 'music alone', can only arouse emotions about itself. In what follows, I'll use Kivy's view as a springboard for reflecting on sacred music's arousal of specifically religious emotions – which I

stipulatively define here as emotions with religious objects¹ – and will reflect on some implications for sacred music’s ability to contribute to our knowledge of God. I’ll suggest that Kivy’s view has an important and overlooked consequence. If he were right, then we would be forced to accept that when music is paired with religious factors, such as text, only those other factors can elicit emotions with religious objects: the music would play no part. This of course would be highly counterintuitive, since many people, and whole traditions, have used music in religious settings and have taken it to be profoundly evocative in religious terms.² However, counterintuitive claims can be correct: in order to uphold the deliverances of intuition when they are challenged, we must argue for them. Here I’ll offer an account of how the intuitive view is correct: of how music can *combine* with religious aspects of one’s experience, and with text in particular, to arouse emotions with religious objects.

I’ll argue, against Kivy, that music in its own right can arouse objectless versions of everyday emotions.³ I’ll then propose and develop an account of how these can acquire objects, and further affective content, from non-musical factors. My argument here will focus on the phenomenological content of musical and extra-musical emotions. Equipped with this general account of how musically aroused, objectless affects can acquire extra-musical content, I’ll turn to sacred music and religious emotion. I’ll apply my account to the question of how musically aroused affects can be imbued with specifically religious content, using Mozart’s ‘Laudate Dominum’ as an example. I’ll conclude with two consequences of these arguments for an issue that has received attention in recent literature: the relationship between sacred music and non-belief. The first consequence concerns the existence of continuity, at an affective level, between religious and non-religious outlooks. The second consequence

¹ The reader might wonder what counts as a ‘religious object’ of emotion. I don’t propose to answer this here, since that would require defining ‘religious’, which would take us too far afield. But even with ‘religious object’ left undefined, there will at least be emotional objects that are uncontroversially religious, such as God, or one’s own eternal salvation.

² I thank Mark Wynn for putting the point to me in this way, which brings out in full force the counterintuitive nature of this consequence of Kivy’s view.

³ Another term for objectless affects is ‘moods’, distinguishing them from fully fledged, object-directed emotions. However, here I’ll continue to refer to them explicitly as objectless, in order to highlight their relationship to object-directed emotions that are aroused by non-musical aspects of one’s experience.

concerns the capacity of non-believers to respond religiously to sacred music. The upshot of all this, I'll suggest, is that by expanding the listener's religious-emotional landscape, sacred music can enrich her knowledge of God – and that this is possible whether or not the listener subscribes propositionally to God's reality or to other religious doctrines. For the sake of focus, I'll limit my investigations to Christian sacred music. However, the general framework I develop could in principle be applied to music in other theistic traditions.

2. Kivy's view and a counterintuitive consequence

Music, claimed Kivy, cannot arouse ordinary emotions – only a special aesthetic emotion directed at the music itself. One might be moved by the music's emotionally expressive qualities: 'aroused to ecstasy by the beauty [...] of a particularly anguished passage [...] or impressed to the extent of being moved by the masterful way an aria is contrived to be expressive of [...] anger or joy'.⁴ But Kivy denies that the listener's response mirrors the emotions she hears in the music.⁵ He sums up his view as follows: 'great music in the Western, absolute music canon, moves us to a kind of enthusiasm, or excitement, or ecstasy directed at the music as its intentional object'.⁶

Kivy specifies that he is referring to *absolute* music – 'music unaccompanied by text, title, subject, program, or plot [...] music alone'.⁷ Now the notion of absolute music is controversial: one might doubt whether we ever experience music in isolation.⁸ But regardless of whether there is such a

⁴ Peter Kivy, *Music Alone: Philosophical Reflections on the Purely Musical Experience* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 171.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁶ Peter Kivy, 'Mood and Music: Some Reflections for Noël Carroll', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64 (2006), 271–281, at 280. Quoted in James O. Young, *Critique of Pure Music* (Oxford: OUP, 2014), 57.

⁷ Kivy, *Music Alone*, ix.

⁸ See Jeremy S. Begbie, 'Faithful Feelings: Music and Emotion in Worship', in Jeremy S. Begbie and Steven R. Guthrie (eds), *Resonant Witness: Conversations between Music and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2011),

thing, I suggest that Kivy's view has consequences for 'non-absolute' music, or music combined with other factors. If music in itself could arouse only Kivy's 'aesthetic' emotion, then it would follow that when we experience music combined with *non*-musical thoughts and experiences, any emotion directed at something *other* than the music is aroused simply by those non-musical factors – not by the music.⁹ For Kivy's purely aesthetic emotion is given its identity by its object (the music or features thereof) and its phenomenology (the affective state of enthusiasm, excitement, ecstasy). Introduce an object and phenomenology that go beyond the music, and we are talking about a different (perhaps additional) emotion, not the one elicited by the music. Thus, it seems that the music itself would have no part to play in eliciting that other emotion.

Now it might be objected that if we introduce an emotional object and phenomenology that go beyond the music, we do not necessarily get a *numerically* different emotion from the musically elicited, aesthetic emotion, such that the music plays no part in eliciting the new emotion. Perhaps music independently arouses the aesthetic emotion, which then becomes associated with extra-musical factors? Couldn't the aesthetic emotion thereby come to have a complex object, made up of both the music and something non-musical that is provided by other aspects of the listener's experience? The upshot would be that the music *does* contribute to the new emotion.¹⁰ However, it is hard to see how one and the same emotion could have two such different objects. Although emotions with complex objects no doubt exist (I can feel love for my family as a whole as well as for each member individually), such an emotion will have a single phenomenology, which involves representing its complex object in a particular way (for instance, as a set of deeply valuable persons). But this is not possible in the type of musical case under consideration, where the emotional objects include both a piece of music and something provided by extra-musical aspects of one's experience. If I feel enthusiasm or excitement towards the music because of the music's features, then the emotion's phenomenology and object-

323–354, at 339; also Nicholas Cook, *Analysing Musical Multimedia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 86–92, whom Begbie cites.

⁹ Young, *Critique of Pure Music*, 8, 137.

¹⁰ I thank an anonymous reviewer for making this objection.

representation will be different from those involved in, say, joyful praise of God because of what I take God to have done, or a desire that God be present because of who I take God to be. To be sure, I might have both the aesthetic emotion and the extra-musical emotion at once. But they cannot be the same emotion. The general upshot is that if Kivy were right, and music in itself could elicit only the aesthetic emotion, then it would play no role in eliciting any other, extra-musical emotion. And this, of course, would have the counterintuitive consequence that music plays no part in arousing explicitly *religious* emotions when it is combined with religious factors in the listener's experience.

In what follows, I want to show how just the opposite is in fact true: music can *combine* with religious aspects of the listener's experience to arouse emotions with religious objects. As mentioned above, I'll first argue against Kivy that *without* extra-musical factors, music can arouse affects other than a purely 'aesthetic' emotion: namely, objectless versions of everyday emotions such as joy or sadness. Kivy's arguments against this view are well known, and the issue is a familiar one, so I won't dwell too long on it. But the view I defend here will provide an important component of the view I ultimately wish to defend. If music can elicit objectless affects, then the identities of those affects are not fixed by being directed at the music, or by representing the music in a certain way. Such affects, then, *can* acquire objects from extra-musical aspects of the listener's experience – including religious aspects. Here there is no musical object or object-representation in the affect, and thus no music-specific phenomenology; therefore, there is nothing to distinguish numerically the musically elicited affect from an affect with an *extra-musical* object and phenomenology. Rather, a musically elicited, objectless affect can provide some of the affective material for an extra-musical emotion that one feels when listening.

I'll briefly address Kivy's arguments that music cannot in principle arouse objectless versions of everyday emotions. I'll then present, by way of illustration, just one example of experimental evidence for the claim that music does arouse these kinds of affective state.

3. Music can arouse objectless versions of everyday emotions: neutralizing Kivy's arguments

To understand why Kivy claims that absolute music only arouses emotions about itself, and not objectless, everyday affects, we must look at another of his views about musical emotion: music's arousal of emotion must have a *common-sense, non-technical* explanation. His argument for this view seems to contain three premises. First, most instances of emotional arousal have common-sense explanations: we can usually explain why we feel angry, sad, or happy without technical psychology.¹¹ Second, the only exceptions are unnatural emotional responses, such as pathological emotion. But – and this is the third premise – music's arousal of emotion is natural and common. Therefore, it must have a common-sense, non-technical explanation. This kind of explanation, Kivy claims, is lacking for music's arousal of ordinary, everyday emotions. Music, he maintains, cannot elicit the thoughts that, on his cognitive account, ordinary emotions require. We therefore cannot say how it might elicit such emotions in an ordinary, non-technical way, and it is thus implausible to claim that music arouses such emotions. But, he claims, there is a common-sense explanation for his aesthetic emotion: simply put, we are 'moved by the beauty or perfection of the music'.¹² Kivy's account also respects what he takes to be the nature of musically elicited emotions: object-directed and based on beliefs about their objects. On his account, the objects of musical emotion are the music or features thereof, and the accompanying beliefs are beliefs that the music has the features that elicit the emotion.¹³

¹¹ Kivy's example is of Uncle Charlie, who arouses Kivy's anger by continually and untruthfully blaming Aunt Bella for his failure in business. Kivy describes the facts about the Uncle Charlie situation that can be used in a common-sense explanation for his anger as *why* and *how* Uncle Charlie makes him angry, and who he is angry *at*. See Kivy, *Music Alone*, 148.

¹² *Ibid.*, 161.

¹³ The arguments in this paragraph are reconstructed from *ibid.*, 148–152, 157, 159–161. The general thrust of Kivy's view can be traced back to Eduard Hanslick. Hanslick famously argued that when someone listening to music comes to feel emotions with extra-musical objects, this emotional arousal depends only on factors external to the music, and can therefore tell us nothing about the character of the music itself. Like Kivy's view, Hanslick's stems from a cognitive theory of emotions: emotions necessarily involve thoughts or beliefs; but since music cannot be expressive of the thoughts or beliefs that ordinary emotions require, it cannot be expressive of those emotions. Music therefore cannot *elicit* ordinary emotions in virtue of any of its intrinsic features: any eliciting of such emotion as one listens occurs simply because the listening is the *occasion* for the

Must there be a common-sense explanation for music's arousal of emotions? Kivy's argument is valid, but is it sound? Are all the premises true? The first and third are uncontroversial: in ordinary life, we *can* usually explain emotions non-technically; and most musical arousal of emotion *is* natural and common. The second premise is the contentious one: why think the only affective states that lack common-sense explanations are unnatural states? Kivy gives no reason for thinking this. Granted, unnatural affects, such as pathological affects, lack common-sense explanations; but that does not mean these are the *only* affects lacking such explanations. In particular, common, musically elicited affects may also lack common-sense explanations. This becomes only more plausible when we consider other examples of perfectly natural affective states that lack common-sense explanations. Depression, anxiety, or plain-old bad moods are not always about anything in particular, and so cannot always be explained in the non-technical way Kivy has in mind. Yet we would hardly call these states 'unnatural' or 'unexpected'; on the contrary, they are relatively common. There is nothing absurd about the idea of an affective state that is *both* natural, such that anyone could plausibly imagine themselves in it, *and* only explicable in technical terms. Thus, musically elicited affects, though natural and common, need not have a common-sense explanation. Therefore, if there is no such explanation for music's arousal of everyday emotions in objectless form, this does not count against the view that music arouses those emotions.¹⁴

formation of that emotion. See Eduard Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful: A Contribution towards the Revision of the Aesthetics of Music*, reproduced in John Andrew Fisher, *Reflecting on Art* (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Pub. Co., 1993), 284, referenced in turn in Mark Wynn, 'Musical Affects and the Life of Faith: Some Reflections on the Religious Potency of Music', *Faith and Philosophy* 21 (2004), 25–44, at 26.

¹⁴ As an example of a technical (psychological and neuroscientific) explanation for music's arousal of everyday emotions in objectless form, consider 'emotional contagion'. We often find ourselves adopting the emotions expressed by those around us; moreover, we can catch emotions from items that are expressive of them as well as from the expressive behaviour of others: think of cheerful shades of yellow or dreary shades of grey. These items plausibly include musical works. One explanation of our 'catching' emotion from music is that music induces changes in facial expression and posture; these lead to physiological changes, the proprioception of which leads to emotion. See Young, *Critique of Pure Music*, 61–62.

4. Music can arouse objectless versions of everyday emotions: the positive evidence

I've briefly addressed Kivy's arguments that music cannot, in its own right, arouse objectless analogues of ordinary emotions. Thus, his arguments need not stop us taking at face value evidence that this can indeed happen. The notion that music *can* arouse objectless analogues of ordinary emotions, and not just Kivy's aesthetic emotion, is a prima-facie plausible one. But let me briefly describe just one study that provides additional, empirical support for the claim.¹⁵

In a psychological experiment reported by C. L. Krumhansl,¹⁶ pieces *expressive of* particular affects were likelier than other pieces to elicit in subjects two indications of those same affects as a felt response. The first indication consisted in subjects' *reports* that they felt the affects of which the music was expressive;¹⁷ the second indication was the eliciting of distinctive *physiological* states that were associated with those affects, since they bore similarities to non-musical physiological states associated with those affects.¹⁸ Hence, the affective responses tended to mirror what the subjects heard in the music, and thus seemed to be elicited by the music itself. This conclusion is strengthened by the following facts about the experiment, which strongly suggest that it was not extra-musical factors arousing affects in the subjects.¹⁹ First, the music was instrumental: adagios by Albinoni and Barber, 'Mars' from Holst's *Planets*, Mussorgsky's *Night on Bare Mountain*, a movement from Vivaldi's *Spring* concerto, and Hugo Alfvén's *Midsommarvaka*. Second, titles do not seem to have played any part in the affects aroused: pieces lacking descriptive titles seemed just as conclusively to arouse affects; and of the descriptively titled pieces, most of the titles were unknown by most of the subjects. And third, cultural associations are unlikely to have played any part in the subjects' affective responses, since most pieces were unrecognized by most of the subjects.

¹⁵ See *ibid.*, 48–58.

¹⁶ C. L. Krumhansl, 'An Exploratory Study of Musical Emotions and Psychophysiology', *Canadian Journal of Experimental Psychology* 51 (1997), 336–353. Cited in Young, *Critique of Pure Music*, 48.

¹⁷ Young, *Critique of Pure Music*, 49–50.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 54–56.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 55–56.

Now someone might object that this study does not tell us that the musically aroused affects were *objectless*. Even if such a study were to check whether or not the listeners' emotions were about something, it would be very hard to establish that their emotions were objectless, since the listeners could be privately directing their emotions at all kinds of things, perhaps even unconsciously.²⁰ This is an important point, and we must distinguish what the experiment itself suggests from what we can conclude on philosophical grounds. The experiment itself suggests that music arouses the affects of which it is expressive. The objector would be right that we cannot know whether the actual affect that the listener feels is objectless. We can, however, infer a theoretical claim from the study: music taken in isolation *would* be able to arouse objectless affects – even if, in fact, any musically aroused affect acquires an object from non-musical sources. The musically aroused affects, which mirrored those that the listeners heard in the music, were not Kivy's aesthetic emotion: music in its own right is not limited to arousing an emotion that takes the music itself as an object. And, plausibly, an affect aroused by music-in-isolation cannot be directed at a *non*-musical object: as has often been pointed out, music itself cannot elicit thoughts that are specific enough to provide emotions with non-musical objects.²¹ This, then, is the lesson we can take away from the empirical study: music would, in its own right, be able to arouse objectless versions of ordinary emotions; it is not limited to arousing an emotion about the music itself.

5. Music and extra-musical factors: combined affective response

I am ultimately offering an account of how, when a work of sacred music arouses an emotion with a religious object (such as God), the music itself plays an important role in eliciting that emotion. This is

²⁰ I thank an anonymous reviewer for making this point.

²¹ See, for instance, Aaron Ridley, *Music, Value and the Passions* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 110–113, 168; Stephen Davies, *Musical Meaning and Expression* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 227, 271. See also Wynn, 'Musical Affects and the Life of Faith', 27–28, 30, 32.

a subset of a more general claim: that music can be one of the factors in the listener's experience that helps to elicit an emotion directed at more than just the music. Establishing that music can, in its own right, arouse objectless versions of everyday emotions is an important part of seeing what can happen phenomenologically when music combines with other factors to arouse emotions with extra-musical objects. Unlike Kivy's purely aesthetic emotion, a musically elicited, objectless affect can provide some of the affective material for an emotion directed at an extra-musical object. This affective material, I'll shortly suggest, can be combined with extra-musical factors of a certain kind, which both provide an emotional object and, in doing so, can add further affective dimensions to the overall experience. This will have important consequences for specifically religious cases. For, if my account is right, then religious emotions will share core parts of their phenomenology with the everyday emotions that music can elicit. And this will mean that musical experience can highlight profound commonalities between a religious outlook and the rest of life.

Before launching into this matter, I should distinguish the issue treated in this section from another, similar issue. I do *not* propose to consider how music and text work together to form an emotionally expressive aesthetic whole. There is much existing work that explores this question, and I will not add to that debate.²² Rather, I am asking something different: how does music combine with extra-musical factors from *any* source (not just textual) to *arouse* emotions with extra-musical content?

First, I want to claim that musically elicited, objectless affects can acquire extra-musical objects. Kivy denies that they can: he claims that even if music *could* elicit objectless, everyday affects, they could not acquire extra-musical objects. He considers the possibility that while listening to music, one could come to think about non-musical things that become objects of a musically aroused affect

²² See, for instance, Peter Kivy, 'Tone, Text, and Title', in his *Sound Sentiment* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1989), 95–111; and Jerrold Levinson, 'Song and Music Drama', in his *The Pleasures of Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 42–59. Kivy argues plausibly that 'text [...] [provides] an intentionality which serves to particularize the expressiveness of the music' (103–104). Levinson points out that musical mood can *contrast* with textual emotion or mood, yet still make an aesthetically rewarding whole.

such as joy or sadness.²³ This idea, he thinks, is ‘bizarre’, since it is incompatible with ‘serious’ listening: if the listener were to do this, she would lose her concentration on the music.²⁴ I must say, I cannot help thinking that Kivy’s view is the bizarre one here. First, we must note that he does not argue for his claim that musically elicited affects *cannot* acquire extra-musical objects; only that if they do, the listener has become distracted from the music. But even this is clearly implausible. It *is* possible for non-musical, intentional objects to come to mind as one listens to music, thereby becoming *emotional* objects for the musically elicited affects that one feels, and for this to happen *as one concentrates on the music*. This is why music can be cathartic – an entirely familiar experience in which music enables us to feel our emotions about real-life events especially vividly and purely.²⁵ If something has happened in my life that is a source of joy, and I put on the first movement of Beethoven’s Violin Concerto, my joy is given expression and thereby intensified. It would be very strange to say that in this process I have become distracted from the music: my attention to the music is precisely *how* my joy has become intensified.

It seems clear, then, that musically elicited, objectless affects can acquire emotional objects from non-musical aspects of the listener’s experience. But *which* non-musical aspects? Some non-musical factors would likely be mere distractions from the musically aroused affect. For instance, if I am listening to the first movement of Beethoven’s Violin Concerto, and I catch sight of a basket of dirty laundry, then it is unlikely that my musically elicited joy will come to be directed at the laundry. So when do non-musical factors provide an object for, rather than a distraction from, a musically elicited affect?

The answer, I suggest, is that the emotion that a set of non-musical factors *alone* would elicit in the listener must share some of its phenomenology with the musically aroused, objectless affect. In such a case, the extra-musical emotion can combine with the musically elicited, objectless affect to

²³ Kivy is responding here to the possibility as raised by Peter Mew, in ‘The Expression of Emotion in Music’, *British Journal of Aesthetics* 25 (1985), 33–42, at 34. See Kivy, *Music Alone*, 166.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 168.

²⁵ For more on this, see Begbie, ‘Faithful Feelings’, 349–351.

form a unified emotional state, which acquires its precise quality from both the music and the non-musical factors. By having the non-musical factors added to it, the musically elicited affect is incorporated into another affective state, complete with emotional object and, in some cases, extra affective layers.²⁶

For instance, I listen to the Beethoven, which would in itself move me to objectless joy. As I am listening, I become mindful of the fact that I will soon be meeting with an old friend whom I have not seen for months. This fact alone would elicit in me a kind of joyful anticipation, which shares part of its phenomenology – the joy part – with my musically elicited affect. My object-directed, joyful anticipation can thus combine with my musically elicited joy to form, not a disjointed affective state (such as joy plus irritation at an imminent chore), but rather a unified one: joyful anticipation at the prospect of seeing my friend, refined and intensified by the joy I feel on listening to the music.

Now it might be objected here that non-musical factors sometimes elicit an emotion that *contrasts* with a musically aroused, objectless affect; yet, even in these cases, the affects can fuse to become a unified emotion. The writer Francis Spufford vividly describes just such an experience. Burdened by guilt at having betrayed his partner, and completely worn out by the ensuing all-night argument, he happens to hear the Adagio of Mozart's Clarinet Concerto. He hears the music's tender patience, its strong, calm rejoicing, which seem at the same time to recognize that 'sorrow is perfectly ordinary'. On listening, Spufford feels the relief that comes from realizing that, although his unhappiness and guilt are perfectly real, there is more to reality. In short, he feels that he is the recipient

²⁶ It is worth noting that a musically elicited, objectless affect (even if merely a theoretical construct) might acquire an object *from the music itself*. If Kivy is right that music *can* arouse an emotion directed at the music itself (and I haven't denied this), then this music-directed emotion might in some cases share some of its phenomenology with the objectless affect that the same music happens to arouse. In this case, the music-directed emotion would combine with the musically elicited, objectless affect to form a single, unified emotional state. Here, the theoretical nature of the objectless affect would not be its arousal by hypothetical music-in-isolation, since, even in isolation, the music would provide that affect with an object. Rather, the objectless affect is a component of the overall, final emotional state: it helps to explain the nature of that state. That is to say, the final emotional state involves more than simply, say, enthusiasm for the music: it also involves, say, happiness that requires no object, aroused perhaps by emotional contagion (see n. 14, above).

of mercy.²⁷ Here, then, is an example of non-musical factors causing an affective state – guilt and exhaustion – that contrasts with a musically aroused, objectless affect: although he is not explicit on this point, it seems that Spufford *feels* the calm rejoicing that he hears expressed in the music. And these contrasting affective states merge into a unified compound emotion: guilt, and a calm, relieved rejoicing that there is more to reality than his guilt.

How, then, can my account explain this? I claimed that an extra-musical emotion can share some of its phenomenology with a musically aroused, objectless affect, the two thereby combining to form a unified emotion. In Spufford’s case, we have a unified emotion; but how can it be true that the extra-musical emotion of guilt (and exhaustion) shares some of its phenomenology with the musically aroused, objectless affect of calm rejoicing? The answer, I submit, is that the shared phenomenology in this case is not a matter of the musical affect *itself* being mirrored in the extra-musical emotion, as it was in the case of my joyful response to the Beethoven combining with my joyful anticipation of seeing an old friend. Rather, the commonality will lie elsewhere, in a shared depth or sense of significance. Both Spufford’s guilt and his calm rejoicing *really mattered* to him: they both told him something important about reality. It was by being profound in this way that his response to Mozart’s music could hope to penetrate his guilt and loosen its grip on him. And, indeed, there was also an affective commonality between the two states. The calm, patient joy of the music was to Spufford’s ears grounded in a recognition of sorrow: though not itself sorrowful, it contained and acknowledged something of sorrow’s weight. Contrast this with musically elicited joy failing to be directed at a basket of laundry. Plausibly, the disjointedness of my resulting emotional state – joy-plus-irritation – lies in the fact that my joy is so much more profound than my irritation. My joy tells me something about my capacity to respond fittingly to deeply good things, whereas my irritation simply tells me that something mildly important is something I’d rather not do.

It is worth making an additional observation here. This hypothesis, that a musically aroused affect can have phenomenological links even with a contrasting emotion, has the added benefit of explaining how the same music can contribute to the arousal of contrasting emotions across contrasting

²⁷ Francis Spufford, *Unapologetic* (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), 14–17.

verses of text. If the texts of different verses arouse emotions that contrast with each other, then at least some of those textually elicited emotions will also contrast with whatever affect the accompanying music, in isolation, would arouse. Nevertheless, the musically aroused affect can still form a different unified emotion with each of the textual emotions, even the ones with which it contrasts – as long as the phenomenologies of the musical and textual affects have *something* in common. Take the hymn *Come Down, O Love Divine*, set to the tune ‘Down Ampney’. The text of verse 1 would most naturally arouse ardent desire for God: ‘O Comforter, draw near, within my heart appear, and kindle it, thy holy flame bestowing’. The text of verse 3, on the other hand, would most naturally arouse a painful awareness of one’s own shortcomings, asking, as it does, for ‘True lowliness of heart, which takes the humbler part, and o’er its own shortcomings weeps with loathing’. Yet the tune seems entirely fitting across these drastically contrasting emotions. On closer inspection this seems to have something to do with the movement in those falling and circling phrases, the swift crotchets propelling the music towards the home key’s centre of gravity, suggesting a sense of purpose and direction that is profoundly hopeful – as profound, indeed, as the ardent desire for God and the painful awareness of one’s flaws. Such hope can therefore infuse both a desire for the Holy Spirit to come into one’s own heart, and ‘loathing’ at one’s own shortcomings; in the latter case, it will be the comforting hope that acknowledging one’s flaws, however painful, is part of the journey home to God.²⁸

Let me sum up the argument of this section. I’ve been arguing that musically aroused, objectless affects can acquire objects from non-musical sources. This happens when a non-musically aroused emotion shares some of its phenomenology with a musically aroused, objectless affect. In such cases, the extra-musical and musical affects combine to form a unified emotional state: the musically aroused affect is incorporated into another affective state, thereby acquiring an object and, possibly, extra affective layers. Importantly, musically and non-musically aroused affects can combine in this way

²⁸ Contrast Kivy’s account of how the same music can form an emotionally *expressive* (i.e., not necessarily an emotionally arousing) whole, in combination with contrasting verses. Much music, he claims, has *no* expressive character, and this is why the same music can accompany contrasting expressive verses. On this account, it is hard to see what is added to multiple verses of text when they are set to the same music. However, given how much text has been set to music in this way, there can be no doubt that *something* is added. See Kivy, ‘Tone, Text, and Title’, 111.

even if they contrast with each other, since a shared phenomenology can involve a shared depth or felt significance, even if the affects in question are very different.

We have, then, a general account of how music and non-musical factors can combine to arouse emotions with non-musical objects. These objects can come from text, but also from all manner of other non-musical sources. With this account in hand, I'll now turn to a more detailed consideration of sacred music and religious emotion. I want to illustrate how the general account can work in this context, by showing how musically aroused, objectless joy can combine with religious factors to result in a particular quality of praise.

6. Music and extra-musical factors: a religious application

Religious factors, like non-musical factors in general, can come from any number of sources. They may come straight from the text that is set to music; typically, they will also come from a mixture of the listener's own experiences and thoughts, such as the physical or liturgical context of the performance, wider associations that the text has for the listener, and so on. This is an important point. It means that when a work of sacred music arouses a religious emotion, the music itself, though playing a vital role, is just one of several factors that do the arousing. In the following example I hope to illustrate this, as I show how the account developed in the previous section can be fruitfully applied to sacred music and a specifically religious response. In the example – a piece by Mozart – religious content is suggested by the text that is set to the music. This content comprises the text's emotional object, namely God, and the religious emotion heard in the text, namely praise – which itself has still further associations. These religious factors would thus on their own elicit, in a suitably receptive listener, some form of praise for God: an extra-musical, religious emotion. Praise shares some of its phenomenology with the musically aroused, objectless affect of joy. Thus, the praise for God that the religious factors alone would elicit can combine with the musically aroused joy to form a unified, multi-layered emotional response: joyful praise for God, refined and intensified by the particular quality of joy that the music can elicit.

The piece is Mozart's well-known setting of Psalm 117, 'Laudate Dominum', from his *Vesperae Solennes de Confessore*.²⁹ It is scored for soprano soloist, choir, and orchestra, and is a setting of the Latin words of the psalm, followed by the 'Gloria':

Laudate Dominum omnes gentes;
 Laudate eum, omnes populi.
 Quoniam confirmata est super nos misericordia eius,
 Et veritas Domini manet in aeternum.

Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto.
 Sicut erat in principio, et nunc, et semper.
 Et in saecula saeculorum.
 Amen.

An English rendering is as follows:

Praise the Lord all nations;
 Praise him, all people.
 For he has bestowed his mercy upon us,
 And the truth of the Lord endures forever.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.
 As it was in the beginning, and now, and always.
 And for ever and ever.
 Amen.

²⁹ K.339. A recording conducted by Christopher Hogwood with Emma Kirkby, Winchester Cathedral Choir, and the Academy of Ancient Music can be heard here: *Emma Kirkby - "Laudate Dominum" K 339 Mozart* (published online August 2015) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sUrcLzk5oKE>> accessed 19 July 2022.

Mozart's setting of the words is a true delight, with a melody of effortless, radiant joy. On 'Amen', the soloist's voice flows free in a melismatic ascent up the octave as it is liberated in praise, that act in which, as the Christian outlook has it, we humans are able to partake when we are at our freest. Rowan Williams expresses this idea well:

[T]he world [God] has made is designed to become a reconciled world, a world in which diverse human communities come to share a life together because they share the conviction that God has acted to set them free from fear and guilt [...] This reconciliation liberates human voices for praise, for celebrating the glory of the God who has made it possible and has held steadily to his purpose from the beginning.³⁰

The words of the psalm speak clearly of such praise. Yet even for a listener who does not understand Latin, a general knowledge of the theme – including one arising simply from understanding the title – would suffice for her listening experience to be religiously infused. Moreover, knowing the connotations of 'praise' or 'laudate' of which Williams writes can introduce a further dimension to the listener's experience: the piece can be heard as expressive of freedom – freedom from the aspects of our lives that lead to fear and guilt, and so freedom to recognize God's love, faithfulness, and glory, and to respond with gratitude and joy.

We see, then, that even if the piece's exact text has no role in the listener's experience, her response can have religious content. The religious content of the response to 'Laudate Dominum' that I have begun to sketch involves both conceptual and affective aspects. The conceptual aspect is provided by what can be the barest understanding of the text's subject matter, and by a wider conception of the nature of praise; and this aspect informs how the listener hears and responds to the aesthetic and affective qualities of the music. For she can hear the sheer happiness of the piece as the state for which she and all other humans are made, a God-directed state whose naturalness is embodied in the utterly natural feel of the melody, which sounds as though it had always existed and Mozart had simply to

³⁰ Rowan Williams, *Tokens of Trust: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (London: Canterbury Press Norwich, 2007), 8–9.

uncover it. She thereby hears the beauty and joy of the music as having a particular religious significance, and her affective response to the music is religiously toned in the following way. On grasping at least the text's general theme, she comes to feel praise for God; nuanced by the wider considerations Williams articulates, this becomes an attitude of praise that feels entirely natural and free. Such praise shares some of its phenomenology with the natural, effortless joy that the music without the words would arouse – an objectless affect that reflects the natural, effortless joy of the melody. The text's praise and the music's joy thus combine to form a unified affective response that is multi-layered, qualitatively shaped by both music and text, and directed at the text's intentional object: a joyful feeling of praise for God that is entirely natural and free.

The example thus shows us one way in which music can combine with religious subject matter to arouse a religious emotion, directed at God as its object. Since the music in its own right can elicit its own particular, *objectless* joy, the identity of that joy is not fixed by being directed at the music, or by representing the music in a certain way. The joy, then, can acquire religious content from the religious factors I have outlined. There is nothing to distinguish numerically the musically elicited joy from an affect with a religious object and phenomenology that one comes to feel on listening. Instead, the musically elicited joy can provide some of the affective material for the religious emotion.

As I have noted, a benefit of this account is that it shows how one can respond in a richly religious way to a piece of sacred music *even if one barely understands the text*. Being moved by music when one barely understands the text is no doubt a common experience. The account I have offered shows how this can be, and, moreover, shows how one can be moved in this situation in a way that befits the religious nature of the musical work.

7. Conclusions: sacred music, non-belief, and knowledge of God

Kivy claimed that music can arouse only a special 'aesthetic' emotion directed at the music itself. From this, I argued, it would follow that music can have nothing to do with eliciting emotions directed at anything other than the music. This would render false the intuitively plausible view that when works

of sacred music elicit religious emotions, the musical aspect plays a vital part. I have argued for one way in which the intuitive view is correct – one way in which music can combine with religious aspects of the listener’s experience to arouse emotions with religious objects. Having made the case that music in its own right can arouse objectless versions of everyday emotions, I argued that these can acquire both objects and further affective dimensions from non-musical sources. Specifically, this happens when an extra-musical, object-directed emotion shares some of its phenomenology with a musically aroused, objectless affect. In these cases, the musically aroused affect is incorporated with the extra-musical emotion into a combined, unified affective state, thus acquiring an object, and, sometimes, further affective layers. I then applied this account to sacred music and religious emotion, using Mozart’s ‘Laudate Dominum’ as an example: in this piece, musically aroused, objectless joy can combine with religious factors to result in a particular quality of praise. I also touched on how the account could be applied to a sacred work of a very different kind, the hymn *Come Down, O Love Divine*. Here, the sense of hope evoked by the music can infuse contrasting textually aroused emotions – desire for God and loathing at one’s own shortcomings – by virtue of the profundity shared by all these affective states. In short, the general account will, I suggest, have wide application across different kinds of sacred music.

I want to close by drawing out a couple of implications of the foregoing for an issue that has been the subject of recent philosophical attention: the relationship between sacred music and non-belief.³¹ The first implication I have touched on already. If my argument has been near the mark, then extra-musical, religious emotions can combine with musically aroused, everyday affects when the two share phenomenological content. Works of sacred music, by virtue of their texts, provide ready sources of such extra-musical, religious emotions. In the case of ‘Laudate Dominum’, praise shares a core part of its phenomenology with joy, a unique version of which can be aroused by the music. The piece thus illustrates how musical experience can highlight continuity, at an affective, phenomenological level,

³¹ See, for instance, David Pugmire, ‘The Secular Reception of Religious Music’, *Philosophy* 81 (2006), 65–79; Daniel Putman, ‘Can a Secularist Appreciate Religious Music?’, *Philosophy* 83 (2008), 391–395; Alex Neill and Aaron Ridley, ‘Religious Music for Godless Ears’, *Mind* 119 (2010), 999–1023.

between a religious outlook and life more widely. And this opens up a potentially fruitful way of unpacking a religious outlook for the secularly minded: a way that illuminates common ground between these different ways of seeing, and being in, the world. For it is clear that any religious outlook will centrally involve not just a theoretical commitment to certain doctrines, but an affectively toned way of reading reality. Or, as Mark Wynn has put the point:

[T]he religions are [...] typically concerned to [...] promote some generalised, affectively toned sense of the significance of human experience, a sense that extends not just to this set of circumstances or that, but to a person's life in its entirety.³²

Such an affectively toned sense of life's significance may, of course, be multi-faceted, reflecting the many facets of life itself. In his poem 'Bitter-sweet',³³ George Herbert, with characteristic honesty and succinctness, describes something of what this will involve in the Christian case:

I will complain, yet praise;
 I will bewail, approve:
 And all my sour-sweet days
 I will lament, and love.

If this set of responses does indeed characterise a Christian outlook, then our Mozart example can show a non-believer something of what it is like to inhabit that outlook. Specifically, the free, natural joy that the music can arouse is a core part of praise. Thus, if a non-believer comes to feel at least a joy of this kind on listening to the piece, then a Christian (or, indeed, a theist of some other persuasion) can point

³² 'Musical Affects and the Life of Faith', 33. Wynn notes that there will likely be reciprocal influence between one's metaphysical worldview and quality of affective life (ibid., 34).

³³ Reproduced in Mark Oakley, *My Sour-Sweet Days: George Herbert and the Journey of the Soul* (London: SPCK, 2019),

to that joy and say, ‘*That* is something of my experience of praise – and, by extension, something of my general religious outlook’. Given the centrality of affective states to our experience, there is the potential to foster deep understanding by uncovering common ground between religious and secular outlooks in terms of their affective possibilities. Music can contribute powerfully to this task.

The second implication of my argument that I would like to highlight concerns the following question: how, and to what extent, can non-believers respond *religiously* to sacred music? It is clear that choral music in the Western classical tradition can strike a chord even in non-believers.³⁴ Nonetheless, isn’t there something missing from the non-believer’s capacity to respond to such music? Isn’t there, as Daniel Putman has argued, a depth that a believer’s response can possess, but that a non-believer’s response necessarily lacks?³⁵ Moreover, how can a non-believer engage emotionally with sacred music without falling into cognitive dissonance? If the distinctively musical aspect of sacred works could elicit only Kivy’s aesthetic emotion, then these questions would have clear answers as regards that musical aspect: the non-believer, no less than the believer, is capable of music-directed enthusiasm, excitement, or ecstasy; and, regarding the music specifically, there is no danger of cognitive dissonance since the emotional response makes no reference to a religious outlook.

However, we have seen that the musical aspect of sacred works can contribute to the nuance and depth of specifically religious emotions, thereby opening up a range of responses directed at aspects of a religious outlook. But even these responses are logically consistent with non-belief, since they can be framed by propositional pro-attitudes other than belief. For instance, if the non-believer would *like* God to be real, then the joyful, natural praise that ‘*Laudate Dominum*’ can arouse may be framed by the *hope* that he is real, combined with a non-believing *acceptance* that he is: one resolves to use the thought that God is real as a basis for one’s thinking, feeling, and behaviour, even if one does not believe that God is real.³⁶ Alternatively, if one is content in one’s non-belief, then one could have the acceptance

³⁴ In David Pugmire’s words, ‘sacred music seems to have a surprising power [...] to ply [unbelievers] [...] with what might be called devotional feelings’ (‘The Secular Reception of Religious Music’, 65).

³⁵ Putman, ‘Can a Secularist Appreciate Religious Music?’, 393–394.

³⁶ See William P. Alston, ‘Belief, Acceptance, and Religious Faith’, in Jeff Jordan and Daniel Howard-Snyder (eds), *Faith, Freedom, and Rationality* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), 3–27, esp. 8–12. On Alston’s account, acceptance is

without the hope. One might approach sacred music in these ways for a variety of reasons: to expand the range of human experience with which one is acquainted;³⁷ to inhabit a worldview that one finds attractive in some sense; or to cultivate the capacity to respond to God in certain ways, this capacity being a great good if God were to exist.

The extent to which religious responses are open to the non-believer may depend on the emotion. But I think our example shows that it is possible, at least sometimes, for a non-believer to approach the fully fledged emotional response of the believer. As we saw above, in eliciting a joy that feels entirely natural and free, ‘Laudate Dominum’ lets the listener experience first-hand something of what praise is like. Moreover, given the textual theme, the idea that the joy is *in* God is readily available to the listener, regardless of what she believes; and by appropriating this thought non-doxastically in the form of acceptance, she can enter still further into the experience of praise for God. Parallel things can doubtless be said of other works and religious emotions. If Kivy were right, and one’s religious response on hearing a work of sacred music were restricted to the non-musical stimuli, then the non-believer’s capacity to inhabit the believer’s emotional landscape would be far more limited. As it is, music can expand this capacity if approached in the right spirit, and can thereby deepen someone’s appreciation of a religious outlook at the most fundamental levels of human experience.

With these arguments in mind, we can now circle back finally to the issue with which we started: how sacred music can contribute to human knowledge of God. We have seen that the music in sacred works can open up a range of affective responses directed at God and at the world (including oneself). We have also seen that these responses are integral to a religious outlook, which centrally involves a multi-faceted, affectively toned sense of life’s significance. We can now add to these conclusions our starting insight that, inasmuch as it is possible to know God personally, such knowledge must involve responding to God, and to the world, in various affectively toned ways. The upshot of all this is that by expanding the listener’s religious-emotional landscape, sacred music can give her vital

different from belief in two key ways: unlike belief, it does not engender a tendency to *feel* that *p* if the question arises of whether *p*; and unlike belief, it is voluntary.

³⁷ Pugmire, ‘The Secular Reception of Religious Music’, esp. 72–79.

aspects of the experience of knowing God. By way of the affective responses in question, one vividly apprehends what reality would have to be like in order to warrant those responses – including God’s existing and being such-and-such (for instance, glorious, steadfast, and loving). If reality really is like that, then one thereby affectively apprehends reality in those respects. This kind of affectively toned knowledge of someone’s character is, on any account of personal knowledge, an essential part of knowing someone personally. Moreover, because (as we have seen) the affective responses in question are at least to some extent available to the non-believer, such affectively toned knowledge of God’s character – and of the wider Christian vision of reality – is possible whether or not the listener subscribes propositionally to God’s reality or to other religious doctrines. It seems, then, that it is not only the case that knowing someone personally involves *more than* propositional knowledge. There can also be some significant degree of personal knowledge that lacks any propositional belief at all.³⁸

³⁸ For helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper, I am grateful to audiences at the Princeton Project in Philosophy and Religion Inaugural Conference, the Centre for Philosophy of Religion at the University of Leeds, and the Institute for Theology, Imagination and the Arts at the University of St Andrews – as well as two anonymous reviewers.