

THE LITHUANIAN ACADEMY OF MUSIC AND THEATRE

FACULTY OF MUSIC

DEPARTMENT OF COMPOSITION



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**Sacred Composition:**

**Exploring Christian Themes In Electronic Music**

Study program: Composition (Digital Technologies)

Master's Thesis

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Vilnius, 2023

**LIETUVOS MUZIKOS IR TEATRO AKADEMIJA**

**SAŽININGUMO DEKLARACIJA DĖL TIRIAMOJO RAŠTO  
DARBO**

2023 m. 05 mėn. 12d.

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## SUMMARY

Sound holds a special place in many faith systems, including Christianity. Sound is a symbol and an essential part of the creative power in Christianity. This suggests that there is something sacred about the nature of sound and its creative power. This notion had me wondering – how do electronic music composers who hold Christian beliefs shape their compositions? Do they directly reference a certain faith system or keep their beliefs hidden, allowing the sound speak for itself, as *sacred* enough? There is a lot of discussion about the influence of *spirituality* on electronic and electroacoustic music, however, not in regards to a specific faith system, in case of my interest - Christianity. Thus, through an overview of historical context and analysis of several cases, the goal of this research is to learn more about and expand the understanding of how Christian spirituality is reflected in the compositions of contemporary 21st century musicians who write electronic/electroacoustic music, profess the Christian faith, and how it influences their work. Part of my methodology involves interviews and analyzing my own composition. I am using Susan Frykberg's spiritual expressions' classification system to analyze four composers/artists – Susan Frykberg, “1921” (David Åhlén and Andreas Eklöf), Kinship (formerly Favela) and Eikon. In doing that, I point out Christian themes in the samples of their work, and then analyze my piece in the same way.

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## INTRODUCTION

*“Then God said,*

*“Let there be Light”;* and there was light”<sup>1</sup>.

Sound holds a special place in many faith systems, including Christianity. Seven times God’s spoken words brought different elements of the world into being in the book of Genesis, thus making sound a symbol and an essential part of the creative power in Christianity. This suggests that there is something sacred (mystical?) about the nature of sound and its creative power. This notion has been a topic of interest to me in the context of my Christian faith and study of electronic composition, and while studying electronic composition and technologies. It had me wondering, in the light of this last statement about the thought of *sacredness* of sound – how do electronic and electroacoustic music composers who hold such beliefs shape their compositions? Do they directly reference a certain faith system or keep their beliefs hidden? What qualifies music as “spiritual” – the person creating it, the intention, the content, or the form? Or is it the thought and the heart behind the sound that matters? These questions about the measures (and ways) of openness of composers arose, because historically, there has been quite a bit of tension between the Church institution and the artists (however, I will only overview music), even attempts to regulate what would be considered as *sacred* music, calling certain forms of stylistic expression *profane*<sup>2</sup>. I was wondering, would this tension still be affecting the genre (electronic music), once not accepted as *sacred* enough?

When I started researching this topic, I found a lot of discussion about influence of *spirituality* on electronic and electroacoustic (further abbreviated as EL/EA) music, and the spirituality of music itself. However, I found very little about influences attributed to specific faith systems. One particularly relevant book is “Sacred music in secular society” by Jonathan Arnold (2014), covering conversations with classical composers, performers, musicians, theologians and philosophers about the ways in which *sacred*<sup>3</sup> music is connecting the church to the world where

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<sup>1</sup> Old Testament (further- OT), the book of Genesis 1:3-21 (“Let there be light”; “Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters”; “Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear”; “Let the earth put forth vegetation”; “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years”; “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky”). Biblical references are going to be quoted from NIV translation.

<sup>2</sup> A distinction on the opposite of *sacred*, to refer to something that dishonors that which is deemed holy.

<sup>3</sup> Referring to „Western Christian sacred music of the classical tradition“ (Arnold, 2014, p. 1)

atheism is on the rise<sup>4</sup>. He highlights the power of music in building bridges between the *holy* and the *secular* (by connecting with those, who would not go to church or do not have much of other religious affiliations otherwise). This discourse fuels my inspiration; I see an opportunity to explore how this *holy* is being “communicated” to an audience who is interested in experimental, electronic sound. J. Arnold states that “far from moving away from the sacred in music and culture, society is embracing it through more media, and on a bigger scale, than ever before” (2014, p. 2). However, he does not mention the scene of contemporary EL/EA music. With the rise of the use of technology to create and distribute media across the globe, it is ever more interesting to explore spirituality, and in the case of this study, Christian spirituality, and its interactions with EL/EA music.

It is hard to determine why this subject has not been systematically studied yet. Perhaps it is because there are not that many Christian composers who write EL/EA music and are famous outside of their first-line audience (other Christians). Therefore, the topic has not attracted much scholarly interest in the broader academic community. Or perhaps, because this type of music is relatively new (as is the age of technology). Finally, electronic music might appear to be an unusual genre in which to look for Christian themes – considering the traditional forms of church music and the conflict in church about *sacredness/profanity*<sup>5</sup> of musical expression. What might complicate the endeavor of my study is being able to track those, who are not creating music that would be easy to recognize as having specific spiritual direction, thus, cannot be examined in the light of a similar academic interest.

Will we ever witness electronic Holy mass? Are those two compatible? Is it possible to find references of the Christian world in this comparatively new genre, which has flourished only from around the 1940s (as technology has improved) and often associated with the club and party culture? Leading up to this question, I found various studies discussing spirituality in the world of electronic music, and examples of this are plenty. However, I have not found a single study that would concentrate specifically on the topic of Christian themes in electronic music. This lack of scholarship is the reason why I decided to expand upon this topic.

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<sup>4</sup> „Why is sacred music so popular in the twenty-first century in a secular society whilst religion is being attacked by atheists and church attendance is on the wane? In other words, what is the status of sacred music in contemporary life? And what is sacred music anyway? Where does it come from, what does it mean and what is it for? Who writes it, sings it or plays it and who listens and with what motives?“ (Arnolds, 2014, p. 1)

<sup>5</sup> Will be discussed at length in the following chapter.

**My research topic** is Christian themes in contemporary EL/EA music as expressions of personal faith.

Through an overview of historical context and several cases, **the goal of this research** is to learn more about and expand the understanding of how Christian spirituality is reflected in the compositions of contemporary 21st century musicians who write EL/EA music, refer to Christian spirituality, and how it influences their work.

**Research hypothesis:**

1. Christian themes and symbols are deliberately woven into their work through subtle hints or open references to Biblical themes.
2. Through the form of a composition, or fragments and parts of those forms, it is possible to see Christian themes conveyed through references associated with traditional/liturgical church music.
3. Personal experiences of God conditioned by Christian faith become a starting point for the concept of a composition, which is subjectively interpreted and conveyed through creative means.

**Research tasks:**

1. Show the historical and current context of the relationship between electronic music and spirituality.
2. Review contemporary context in relation to electronic compositions with Christian themes.
3. Discuss the work and creative process of contemporary electronic music composers who fall into the target category by showing examples and doing interviews.
4. Present my own EL/EA music compositions created for my Master's studies, using my own interpretation of Christian themes that reflect my compositional style and the influence of my faith on the final result.
5. Summarize the observations of analysis and discussion.

**Research methods:** This research was carried out by analyzing scientific and methodological literature, conducting interviews, and analyzing compositions.

**Literature and sources:** These literature sources greatly impacted this research:

- Jonathan Arnold, "Sacred music in secular society"

- Jeremy Begbie, "Music, modernity, and God"
- Georgios Sakellariou, "Composing the sublime: rituals in electroacoustic music"
- Steven Wayne Gehring, "Religion and Spirituality in Late 20th Century Music: Arvo Pärt, Jonathan Harvey, and John Coltrane"
- Danutė Kalavinskaitė, "Šiuolaikinė religinė kūryba: ar pasaulietiskumas („profanum“) gali būti sakralus?"<sup>6</sup>
- Susan Frykberg, "Using Spiritual Intelligence as a Framework to Link Electroacoustic Music and Spirituality"
- Kristine Wolfe, "Sonic mysticism and composition"

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<sup>6</sup> "Contemporary religious creations: can secularism ("profanum") be sacred?"



# 1. Discussions of *sacred* and *spiritual* in music

Spirituality expresses itself in music in different ways. In this chapter I will briefly overview two of them, in rather broad terms. First one – when the allusions to religion, in this case, Christianity, are clear and are based on the tradition (of form or text) of the time; second one, when the expressions of spirituality are not necessarily clearly referencing one certain religion or adhering to its traditions, but rather drawing on the transcendence of the listening experience overall.

## 1.1. *Sacrum – profanum*

Spiritual and mystic properties have been attributed to the art of music since long-forgotten times; verily, most rites and rituals are incomplete without it (Wolfe, 2016; Sakellariou, 2017). Since the effect of music on a person (whether conscious or subconscious, on the soul, spirit, or the physical body) is widely discussed, attempts to regulate that effect have been around from ancient times. Some of the ways to do just that came through the tradition of Christian music, which, in taking the role as a guardian of human morality, has tried to define what holy, sacred music is and is not. This began a discussion, which has affected believing composers' choices of musical forms for centuries.

Starting from the first century, this divide has become a problem on a theoretical level as much on as on a practical one (Miliūnaitė, 2018, p. 30). Dedicated organizations and repertoire committees were created for the preservation of sacred music (according to the understanding of those times) (ibid.: p. 30). However, the attitude of “what is holy can only be found in the church” declined in small steps and, with time, church rite music (speaking mostly in terms of Western religious art) reverberated in other styles as well, such as jazz and pop, in an attempt to make religion culturally relevant (Kalavinskaitė, 2018, p.7). Themes of Christian faith<sup>7</sup> have by now filled the repertoires of many genres.

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<sup>7 7</sup> In a wide sense - references to relationship with God, Biblical narratives, traditional Liturgy (and what's associated with it, for example, church bells, organ). The exact criteria which will be used in this study are going to be defined in the Chapter 3 and are going to be based on Susa Frykberg's classification (2020).

When studying the distinctions between terms *sacrum/profanum*, layers and context complexity were unfolding. There were plenty of various definitions and difficult questions ('can something like that even be defined?'). It became clear that evaluating something as *sacred* or *profane* only according to the principles of composition, or only according to aesthetics still does not provide the desired clear guidelines for categorization. Since the issues behind these terms are quite deep, this study will not be able to discuss them all. However, I will review several of them.

From the beginning of the church's existence, throughout various stages of cultural development, spiritual authorities considered criteria which could fend off an invasion of worldly music on a "holy space" (Miliūnaitė, 2017, p. 30). There was a hunt for rules on melodies, performance, the use of instruments, and the song choice (ibid.: p. 30). There were quite strongly differing opinions. Take John Calvin (1509-1564), in his contemplations on music's strong effect on a person's heart (i.e. a person's moral center)<sup>8</sup>. He was one of those who categorically expressed his position on holiness in music and reflected both Europe's shifting view on music towards a more intellectualized one and his own reformed theology. According to Calvin, instruments were to be forbidden and the congregation should only be allowed to sing psalms (Begbie, 2013, p. 11). There was no place for harmonizing, and the melody should match the text in a way that would ignite the heart for prayer and help the mind concentrate on the spiritual meaning of the words, rather than bringing attention to oneself<sup>9</sup> (ibid.: p. 17). Interestingly, the spiritual forerunner of Calvin's theology, Martin. Luther (1483–1546), the pioneer of the Protestant Reformation, was not at all opposed to either polyphony or instruments, and although he took the effect of music on human morality very seriously, Luther was much more captivated by music's potential – not to imprison one in evil, but to free one from it (ibid.: p. 33). One thing they (and other spiritual institutions) firmly agreed on was music's strong effect on shaping a person's morals, which, in the eyes of many, seemed to invite those pastoring souls to take up the role of watchmen, which meant that the human heart has remained a battlefield for influence.

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<sup>8</sup> „It is true that every evil word (as Saint Paul says, 1 Cor 15:33) perverts good morals, but when the melody is with it, it pierces the heart that much more strongly and enters into it; just as through a funnel wine is poured into a container, so also venom and corruption are distilled to the depth of the heart by the melody“ (Begbie, 2013, p. 16).

<sup>9</sup> „<...>surely, if the singing be tempered to that gravity which is fitting in the sight of God and the angels, it both lends dignity and grace to sacred actions and has the greatest value in kindling our hearts to a true zeal and eagerness to pray. Yet we should be careful that our ears be not more attentive to the melody than our minds to the spiritual meaning of the words.“

As Christianity spread throughout the world, the repertoire of music performed for God, filled not only with the sounds and styles of other cultures, but also with various musical expressions. This encouraged debates about whether what was considered to be the true, pure, most sacred church music was merely a reflection of Western traditions (such as the Gregorian chant), or perhaps, it is not possible to make "an objective distinction between sacred and secular music in general" <sup>10</sup>(Miliūnaitė, 2017, p. 30; Kalavinskaitė, 2018, p. 8). As different expressions of religious music from various cultures increased (in the Christian context), and with the changing historical context after the two world wars, a challenge arose to rethink the aesthetic criteria: which ones are valid for the intended definition of religious music (Kalavinskaitė, 2018, p. 9)? Traits usually associated with the *profane* included noise, shouting, dissonance, theatricality, an affinity for dance, playing music as entertainment, also relations to the historical and cultural contexts<sup>11</sup>, and in the context of church music, these characteristics were treated as displays of worldliness (ibid.: p. 9). However, the aforementioned changes of the twentieth century caused believers to rethink the criteria, bringing about "new opportunities for religious musical expression (even in the liturgy)" (ibid.: p. 9).

In contrast, traits which are prone to be affiliated with sacred music, according to Danutė Kalavinskaitė (2018), are nobility, seriousness, meditateness, coherence of form, and strict stylistic forms (like Gregorian chants) (p. 8). However, the Catholic attitude, increasingly opening up and seeking to "culturize" religion<sup>12</sup>, started to shift its gaze – rather than focusing on seeing aesthetic forms as an enemy, it started to look toward the intentions which could make a piece unacceptable – meaning, intentions which would prevent the listener from connecting with God, would desecrate that which is sacred, or lead to a non-religious attitude<sup>13</sup> (ibid., p. 10). Of course, this is a tension point, because for someone, a certain kind of music may become a moment of

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<sup>10</sup> „objektyvi perskyra tarp šventosios ir pasaulietinės muzikos apskritai“ nėra galima.

<sup>11</sup> A valuable insight was given by the author, if we shall suppose that the ideal representation of what is *holy* is the Gregorian chant, then dance rhythms would be viewed as an expression of the secular or profane. However, during the 20th century, not only missionaries had to acknowledge that forms of cultural expression (language included) other than Latin could also be compatible with Christian faith. (Kalavinskaitė, 2018, p. 10).

<sup>12</sup> Liturgical reform after the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) authorised the composition of religious music in the vernacular from religious texts (Kalavinskaitė, 2018, p. 8).

<sup>13</sup> D. Kalavinskaitė expands in more detail, what would be considered as leading to a non-religious attitude. Music which is "intoxicating, obscuring or distracting consciousness, causing trance, directing listeners to self-serving entertainment or to its own (charming or ugly) sound, i.e. i.e. experimental, noisy or otherwise expressive; as well as the kind of creation that distorts the relationship of God-man (as Creator and creation in need of Redemption, as God the Father and God's beloved child), for example, expresses (at the same time forms) the frivolous, irreverent (familiar, superficial, formal) or fear (despair), dislike, mistrust in God's mercy) relationship" (Kalavinskaitė, 2018, p. 10).

divine revelation – hierophany <sup>14</sup>– which in some sense aids the listener to connect with God, although the style or genre would not fit into the norms of “religious music.”

Russian philosopher A. Golovko speaks about the importance of content (and less so, form). He emphasizes the different contrasts of sacred and secular origins, which are determined not by form, but by content (ГОЛОВКО, 2016, p. 67). This author emphasizes the sharp contrasts between the beginnings of the sacred and the secular, which are not determined by the form, but by the content. He discusses how even a person who does not identify himself with any particular religion seems to start giving his everyday existence sacred qualities – for example, important places such as home or birth place, or one's own room, become “sacralized” in some way (ГОЛОВКО 2016, p. 68). Therefore, expanding our survey from this standpoint, the sacred has already gone beyond the boundaries of religion, thickening (and enlivening?) the issues surrounding these difficult-to-define terms<sup>15</sup>: it raises even deeper questions to whether the name of sacredness is “earned” by the aesthetic choices of a musical piece, or is more related to what meanings the listener gives to the piece.

To conclude, it is fitting to mention Danutė Kalavinskaitė’s pointed, summarizing insights: after analyzing the previously mentioned features of religious pieces that were traditionally held as profane, it can be stated that “when performing a religious composition in a secular environment instead of a church, the listed musical features **are not necessarily profane** (that is, desecrating that, which is holy), **on the contrary, the piece can become an unexpected revelation of holiness or even a means of divine manifestation** (of hierophany through music)”<sup>16</sup> (2018, p. 19)<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> “breakthroughs of the sacred (or the 'supernatural') into the World” (Eliade, 1963, p.6); „From the most elementary hierophany-e.g., manifestation of the sacred in some ordinary object, a stone or a tree-to the supreme hierophany (which, for a Christian, is the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ) there is no solution of continuity. In each case we are confronted by the same mysterious act-the manifestation of something of a wholly different order, a reality that does not belong to our world, in objects that are an integral part of our natural “profane” world“ (Eliade, 1961, p. 11).

<sup>15</sup> A great article in Lithuanian uncovers more about these tensions – Kajėnas, G. Diskusija: Muzika, atverianti anapasybę. *Bernardinai.lt*, 2010.

<sup>16</sup> „religinį kūrinį atliekant ne bažnytinėje, o pasaulietinėje aplinkoje, išvardyti muzikos bruožai nebūtinai yra profanuojantys (tai, kas šventa, išniekinantys), bet priešingai, gali tapti netikėto šventumo atskleidimo, netgi dieviško apsireiškimo (hierofanijos per muziką) priemone“ (Kalavinskaitė, 2018, p. 19).

<sup>17</sup> The author adds that those „unacceptable“ expressions may convey a unique sense of genuineness, a feeling of joyful spiritual experience, and the depth of religious encounters. These expressions have the power to reinvigorate the relationship between humans and God, which can sometimes become mundane through the routine practice of faith. They can also challenge preconceptions and serve as a testimony of faith to others (Kalavinskaitė, 2018, p. 19).

## 1.2. Spirituality in electronic and electroacoustic music

*“I dream of instruments obedient to my thought, and which with their contribution of a whole new world of unsuspected sounds, will lend themselves to the exigencies of my inner rhythm.”*<sup>18</sup> E. Varese (1883 – 1965)

**Electroacoustic** music began to form around the 1950s, when the French composer Pierre Schaeffer (1910-1995) began to compose pieces which included sounds from his surroundings, and these first tries were called *musique concrète* (Holmes, 2008, p. 45). **Electronic** music was developing at a similar time, except that electronic music was compiled of only computer-generated sounds. One of the first recorded electronic pieces was by Halim El-Dabh (1921 – 2017) (ibid.: p. 156)<sup>19</sup>. Speaking of spirituality in electronic music, it is interesting to note that the basis of El-Dabh’s first, in 1944 recorded and played electronic music piece, was the voices of north African women performing the healing ritual Ta’abir al-Zaar – later that recording was transformed into abstract sound material (ibid.: p. 156). That was the start for connections between the spiritual and the material worlds in electronic and electroacoustic music.

The works of Karlheinz Stockhausen (1928 – 2007), one of the most famous modern German musicians, had a great influence on electronic and electroacoustic music coming together and making this new type of music more popular. He was not only innovative in his work, emphasizing freedom in his work process, but also a devout Catholic who had a desire to bring God honor through his music. He claims to have been constantly led by *das Geistig-Geistliche*, that is, the balance between the intellectual and the spiritual (“to go to the limits of reason, *geistig*, in order to transcend it towards spirituality, *geistlich*.” (Peters, Schreiber, 1999, p. 97, 123)<sup>20</sup>. This guiding drive is reflected in numerous titles of his work – “Choral” (1950), “Prozession” (1967), “Mantra” (1970), “Kreuzigung” (“Crucifixion,” 1978). Although these works refer to liturgies and spiritual revelations, they are driven by a throwing off of any kind of traditions or rules, striving to find a new way of merging the musical and spiritual worlds and in this way, go beyond the Christian and European contexts and strongly reflect the author’s own process of his search for God (ibid.: p. 98). This kind of work that broke the forms and rules was new and distinct; therefore, it did not slip past the ears of musical and religious traditionalists – they strongly doubted whether Stockhausen’s music was truly led *Geistig-Geistliche*. They compared it to the work of the devil

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<sup>18</sup> Holmes, 2008, p. 3.

<sup>19</sup> For some time these two „types“ of music were developing separately, but eventually connected.

<sup>20</sup> „Es ist meine tiefste Erfahrung, seit ich denken kann (erwa seit meinem dritten, vierten Lebensjahr), daß ich mich immer führen lasse—auch beim Komponieren.“ (Peters, Schreiber, 1999, p. 123).

more than a heavenly spirit and strove to forbid electronic music not only in churches, but in concert halls as well (ibid.: p. 98)<sup>21</sup>.

A search for the spiritual is also reflected in the work of another influential British composer of early electronic music - Jonathan Harvey (1939 - 2012), who testified to his inner world: Christian, Hindu and Buddhist spirituality greatly impacted his personality and creative work. His work is full of symbols from these movements like an autobiography guiding one through his spiritual journey (Gehring, 2011, p. 98). Harvey and a group of like-minded people developed the spectral music movement which was dominated by compositions made up of components of acoustic sound, such as overtones, deconstructed with the help of the newest technology. His prominent thought is that just as electronic music was a technological breakthrough, so the spectral composition can be likened to a spiritual breakthrough<sup>22</sup> (Harvey, 2000, p. 11). Harvey believed that, unlike tonal systems, spectral compositions are outside of this "world's linear flow of time" (ibid.: p. 12; Gehring, 2011, p. 95), outside of using sound elements through rhythm (tension and release in time) as it is common in traditional western music, because *spectralists* treated harmony itself as timbre that was not dividable into rhythmic segments, but flowing in a circle instead of in a linear time form. That creates a strong element of uncertainty which expresses the composers' spiritual search (Felici, 2017, p. 120; Gehring, 2011, p. 95, 96). For example, one of Harvey's most important works – "Mortuos Plango Vivos Voco" ("I mourn the dead, I call the living")<sup>23</sup> (1980) – is an eight-track composition tape based on the bell of Winchester Cathedral and Harvey's (chorister) son's voice<sup>24</sup>. These sounds were processed with digital programs, leaving overtones of the bell and the voice intertwining with each other, to the point where at times it is difficult to distinguish or even notice where the voice was and where the bell was, thus leaving the sound as if "hanging" between here and there. Because of its symbolism and the text on the bell, this work is an invitation to pray and ponder over the passing of time with each ring of the bell: "Listening to the bells is a form of contemplation and besides having the utilitarian purpose of counting time

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<sup>21</sup> „How were the oscillations produced by sound engines supposed to get in contact with those vibrations that were radiating from the splritual sphere?“ (Peters, Schreiber, 1999, p. 98).

<sup>22</sup> „History seems grand, for once; spectralism is a moment of fundamental shift after which thinking about music can never be quite the same again. Spectral music is applied to electronic music: together they have achieved a re-birth of perception. The one would scarcely have developed without the other. Electronic music is a well-documented technological breakthrough, spectralism .... is a spiritual breakthrough“ (Harvey, 2000, p. 11).

<sup>23</sup> Part of the inscription on the bell whose sounds Mr Harvey used in his work. The poem is attributed to V.M. Putin. The full inscription on the bell begins „Holas Avolantes Numero...“ (I count the passing hours...) (Vincas Mykolaitis-Putinas...; Sakellariou, 2017, p. 92).

<sup>24</sup> „The sounds were digitally processed at the IRCAM institute in Paris, with the aid of MUSIC V - one of the first computer music programs to process digital sounds - and resulted in an octaphonic electroacoustic composition.“ (Sakellariou, 2017, p. 89).

and communicating messages, their sound is an invitation to trigger and respond to deep human thoughts and emotions” (Sakellariou, 2017, p. 89, 92). Despite the fact that much of Harvey’s work reflected his inclination for Buddhist practice and philosophy, as well as other spiritual searches (whether religious or not), spirituality was a strong foundation and inspiration for the concepts of his compositions (Gehring, 2011, p. 102, 104, 105).

There are many more electronic and electroacoustic music composers whose work is full of allusions to spirituality. It is worth mentioning such outstanding creators of early electronic music like Éliane Radigue (1932), whose work reflects Buddhist practice, and Michel Chion (1947), who used liturgical texts in his works and openly admitted that Catholicism was one of his direct sources of inspiration in his compositions (ibid.: p. 16). The traditionalist attitude that attachment to technology is seen as an obstacle to spirituality (which rather means that spirituality is “in the transcendence of nature and the erasure of technology” ) is still a common occurrence, however, **technology can be yet another road that allows one to experience the world afresh** and in this way, draw a person closer to nature, since “both microscopes and telescopes provide access to aspects of the natural world generally hidden from the human eye” (Gehring, 2011, p. 96). Thus, in tracing the creative history of these composers, we can conclude that technological development neither eliminates nor distances the aspect of spirituality (and reflections of its search) in art. Instead, it gives it the distinct, new voice E. Varese dreamed of <sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> Referring to the quote in the beginning of the chapter.

## 2. Christian spirituality in contemporary electronic music

### 2.1. The ineffable in electronic music

Electronic and electroacoustic music is particularly well-suited to manipulate sound, and thus, the imagination. In Kristina Wolfe's words, "*ineffability*"<sup>26</sup> in music – especially electronic music – permits the mind to receive information along a wholly different dimension" (2016, p.35) and that way facilitate an impactful experience of the otherworldliness. One would think that composers who themselves practice spirituality and want to express their intangible experiences in their compositions would not shy away from the means which bring beyond-natural possibilities to express their beyond-natural concepts. Among the composers I interviewed<sup>27</sup>, it was proved to be the case (as they have described the goal of their compositions<sup>28</sup>). Theodor W. Adorno agrees with this notion by marking that "If art is the external representation of something internal, the concept of technique embraces everything which pertains to the realization of that interior substance" (1976, p.79). By (music) technique he meant both how the material is assembled, and how it's transformed „into a physical phenomenon" (ibid., p.79).

Technologies can be not just the means to the goal, but also a special inspiration for Christian composers to express their faith-related transcendental ideas – „Sonorities such as the blurred unison"<sup>29</sup> have inspired many composers to work with phantoms, visions of reality, and shadow instruments" (Wolfe, 2016, p.66). Among those composers is, for example, Jonathan Harvey, who composed an effect of "halo", by giving each character in his "Passion" opera<sup>30</sup> a "spectrum that moved above their lines in parallel, composed of from one to twelve partials according to the dullness or brilliance of the halo I imagined them to have" (Harvey, 1999, p.53). In Wolfe's dissertation she names categories of "otherworldly" effects that electronic music composers use – of course the list is not extensive, but includes *shimmer*, *glow*, *unison*, *presence*, each of them having their own significance in depicting *supernatural* and their own "color" (technique). She speaks that "composers conjure, using illusion and metaphors of light, beautiful timbres, and

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<sup>26</sup> Experience which is hard to put in words.

<sup>27</sup> The criteria for choosing the composers is defined in more detail in Chapter 2, in short - these composers write EL/EA music in the XXI century, and have indicated of their Christian faith.

<sup>28</sup> Will be reviewed in the upcoming chapter, but in short, they were talking about the desire to glorify God with their music, and push the boundaries of how it could sound.

<sup>29</sup> Blurred unison refers to the slight detuning of unison pitches. This makes the pitch less concrete; harder to locate, more impressionistic.

<sup>30</sup> „„Passion and Resurrection" - church opera in twelve scenes for soloists, chorus and ensemble of 20 (or 21) players" (Passion...2023).



construct ghostly images of phantom objects (using techniques like ring modulation and instrumental synthesis)” (Wolfe, 2016, p.12).

Quite a lot of EL/EA music is nowadays also acousmatic<sup>31</sup>. In his D.A thesis Jonas Jurkūnas mentions the relationship between acousmatics and Christianity, naming it a fertile ground for more future research as „acousmaticity in Christianity is inseparable from the being-beyond-human, from absolute transcendence“<sup>32</sup> (Jurkūnas, 2017, p.34). He presents two ways of seeing how acousmatics is expressed in the Bible – God’s transcendence, and His immanence.

1. “Transcendent acousmaticity is God's direct communication with the subject ("God said..."), God's speaking without intermediaries.”<sup>33</sup> (ibid., p.36). In other words, God’s voice piercing through the veil of the natural world, and being heard, without being seen as a source. For example, when Jesus is baptized, He comes out of the water – “And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:17)
2. Immanent acousmaticity refers to the idea that divine listening or hearing can be experienced indirectly, in God’s communication with the subject <sup>34</sup> (ibid., p.36). That means, through mediators, which represent God’s voice, such as the burning bush speaking to Moses in God’s physical stead, but in His personal authority (Exodus 3, 1-12).

In short, J. Jurkūnas likens transcendence to the invisibility of electronic sounds, and immanence – to the interaction between the physical realities on “this side” of the natural <sup>35</sup> (Jurkūnas, 2017, p.37). There is more nuance and interaction in this topic, however I will not expand much further, except for highlighting why this overview is important to this study. There is quite a lot of personal interaction (especially through sound/word) between the Christian God and His people<sup>36</sup>: we read about that in the stories of the Bible (like the ones mentioned recently), we “hear” His voice in preaching (preacher/priest being the mediator of God’s Word) (Jurkūnas, 2017, p.34), we hear the

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<sup>31</sup> Derives from the Greek, meaning a sound that one hears without seeing the source of it. “The word was taken up again by P. Schaeffer and J. Peignot to describe an experience <...> consisting of hearing sounds with no visible cause on the radio, records, telephone, tape recorder etc.” (Kane, 2014, p.4)

<sup>32</sup> „Akusmatiškumas krikščionybėje yra neatsiejamas nuo būties-anapus-žmogaus, nuo absoliučios transcendencijos – tai atskira ir ganėtinai derlinga ateities tyrimų sfera galimai jungianti teologijos ir muzikos disciplinas naujais saitais.“ (Jurkūnas, 2017, p.34)

<sup>33</sup> „Transcendentiškas akusmatiškumas – tai tiesioginė Dievo komunikacija su subjektu („Dievas tarė...“), Dievo kalbėjimas be tarpininkų.“ (Jurkūnas, 2017, p.36)

<sup>34</sup> „Imanentinis akusmatiškumas – tai netiesioginės dieviškosios klausymo/girdėjimo patirtys, netiesioginė su Dievo komunikacija su subjektu.“ (Jurkūnas, 2017, p.36)

<sup>35</sup> „šiapusinių subjektų ir objektų sąveika kuria tam tikrą garsinę tikrovę“ (Jurkūnas, 2017, p.37).

<sup>36</sup> Biblically, God’s people are named those who are the Jews, or those, who confess believing in Him.

witness of the work of the Holy Spirit in testimonies of God-encounters (both from early church mystics such as Teresa of Avila, Ignatius Loyola, and the contemporaries alike). Therefore, it is **quite characteristic to find experiences of these kind of interactions expressed in music of professing Christians as well**. I will present examples of this feature at length in the further chapter where I overview contemporary Christian composers. However, it is worth pointing out, that one of the unique features of Christian themes in EL/EA genre is that those personal encounters with God are expressed through music.

## 2.2. Three ways to classify spiritual expression

Susan Frykberg (1954 – 2023) has come up with a way to classify spiritual expression into three dimensions, to which I am going to refer to in the upcoming chapters. While researching composers related to spirituality and electroacoustic music, she noticed, that different composers express their spirituality differently, and classified those approaches into these categories, or as she calls it, classes:

1. Class 1. Works that fall within this class usually reference spirituality by **drawing from sacred texts or using the methods of that spiritual system**. That might include incorporating divination tools into the creative process, prayer, characters, symbols or narratives from sacred texts, using recordings of religious spaces and objects (like church, bells), or crafting music intended “for spiritual practices such as meditation, prayer, or ritual” (Frykberg, 2020, p.302).
2. Class 2 is linked to the more elusive aspect of sound creation, positing that **there is an inherent spirituality in exploring and producing sound, but it does not have to belong to a specific religious or spiritual tradition**. In this category, both the creation process and the resulting sound seem to evoke unintentional and enigmatic emotions and reflections that Susan describes as spiritual (for a lack of a better word). **Composers whose work falls into this class do not like their compositions to be associated with terms like ‘religious’, ‘sacred’ or ‘traditional’,** (and do not try to reference certain faith tradition). (ibid., p.302)
3. Composers and their works that belong in the class 3 are those who lean on the ancient methods of comprehending the universe. These "ways of knowing" from ancient traditions contend that “sound is an intrinsic component of the nature and relationship between God(s), cosmos, nature, human governance, and individuals, and that it is also tied up with

mathematics” (Frykberg, 2020, p.302). The processes and results of class 3 allude to “The Great Tradition”, or otherwise *Pythagorean* tradition, as he talked about connections between music and numbers, which lead him to theorize of music being inherent in the cosmos, and the whole universe sounding in harmonies (Bagbie, 2007, p. 120). To put that idea in short, the **harmonic series' mathematical grace and straightforwardness suggest the presence of a divine force at work in the realm of sound** (Frykberg, 2020, p.305).

To reiterate in more concrete terms, this is how we may recognize **some of the main features for each class**:

1. **“Traditional”**. Direct way of referencing sacred texts or engaging in practices: a scripture, characteristic narrative, symbol, allusions to the structures or elements found in a liturgical or other ritual, choosing to incorporate spiritual practice (such as meditation, prayer) as a component of creative process, the result of composition being an attribute/part of that faith system’s practice (a chant, a prayer), incorporating the ambience of a sacred place or an object in creative way (for instance, soundscape) (Frykberg, 2020, p.305).
2. **“Experimental”**. No clear indicator or mediator to refer to a certain spiritual tradition. Highlighting the both sound-making and listening (especially, immersive), as spiritual experience in and of themselves. “This kind of experience is particularly pronounced in soundscape listening, as well as spectral and reduced listening” (ibid., p.305) .
3. **“Ancient ways of knowing”**. Revolves around the Pythagorean tradition, and refers to works “where sound and mathematics is intrinsic to the nature and relationship between God(s), cosmos, nature, human governance and individuals.” Algorithmic music could be referred to as belonging in class 3 due to its connection with mathematics (Frykberg, 2020, p.303).

Surely these cannot be perfectly strict guidelines, as there might be certain overlapping, however, for the class 2 and 3 to be identified correctly, more information could be needed, such as program notes. Since EL/EA music does not always use words, it sometimes becomes a game luck to find out which way of spirituality the composer follows, if any, as quite a few of them do not write program notes, or other kind of descriptions of their works. Also, for some composers, a ritual of prayer before the composing process might be the only “spiritual component” of their piece, thus making the threads of Christian faith barely recognizable in their musical expression. Given these

limitations, I decided to direct my thesis towards the works that could mostly be put in the class 1 according to Frykberg's classification, i.e. to **concentrate on the detectable aspects specific to religion**. In the next chapter I will explain how I chose composers, and analyze their work.

## 2.3. Examples of contemporary Christian electronic compositions

### Methodology

EL/EA music entails many genres and sub-genres. Since one of my criteria was musical originality, I excluded EDM<sup>37</sup>, which consists mostly of remixes of popular Christian songs. Also, I am not going to elaborate on electronic-only (meaning, without lyrical content) or acoustic-only music, as that could be a whole separate study.

I selected four contemporary composers (some of them might refer to themselves as producers, artists), who are open about their Christian faith, and compose original EL/EA music, ranging in genres of experimental, sound art, ambient, pop, Lo-Fi and folk-tronica, to name a few. They were contacted via email or Facebook messenger for an interview, however, not all of them were able to provide the answers because of the big work load, or, in one case, death.

I am going to give a brief bio and present some of their works discussing the Christian themes in them; where possible, will include excerpts of their interview<sup>38</sup>, and provide a brief analysis based on the classification of spiritual expression by Susan Frykberg.

### SUSAN FRYKBERG (1954 – 2023)<sup>39</sup>

New Zealand born, EL/EA music composer as well as a sound artist, has written works also for various combinations of instruments and vocal music. She has composed over 80 musical pieces, which have been very highly acclaimed for her original approaches and performed (or played) worldwide in various settings. Her compositional style and techniques have been continually influenced and shaped by her studies and interests. Susan started her compositional path with computer-music research, and got fascinated by computer-based music. Later on she

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<sup>37</sup> Electronic dance music, generally played in entertainment settings such as night clubs to facilitate dancing.

<sup>38</sup> The quotes will remain original, unedited.

<sup>39</sup> One of the parts I anticipated the most when writing my thesis, was getting to interview some of these composers. However, since Susan Frykberg recently died, when presenting her, I will rely on her own autobiography and some notes from earlier personal correspondence.

studied electroacoustic composition (where learning about soundscape, or otherwise, acoustic ecology, has had a significant effect on her approach to composition), theater (which she incorporated in unique ways in her electroacoustic compositions), and finally, she wanted to give more attention to her “religious inclinations which included serious study in theology, ancient languages, Gregorian chant, Christian spirituality and Christian notions of social justice” (Susan Frykberg...2023). That has not gone unnoticed, in Cat Hope’s words – “Susan Frykberg was an electronic music composer and sound artist whose music practice became an increasingly spiritual one” (Hope...2023). That is because her music openly reflected her inner life (spiritual, intellectual) and experiences she was going through, as those were expressed in her choice of compositions’ content, names, or faith-related symbolism (ibid., 2023). Susan’s bend towards exploring Christian spirituality has birthed some uniquely creative acoustic, EL/EA compositions on Christian tradition related themes, and, since she is open about it, that puts her in the category 1 – traditional approach – of her own spirituality expression classification system. This composer’s style is the most experimental of all that I have included.

### **1. “Prayer in the Time of the Virus” (2020) 1’49”**

As the name suggests, the piece is written as a prayer, inspired by Susan’s own prayer life (private communication, 2023), in times of the pandemic of Covid-19. The lyrics are:

*In the year of the virus, Lord, have mercy on us, and the whole world.*

*In the year of the virus, Creator, have mercy on us, and the whole world.*

*In the year of the virus, God, have mercy on us, and the whole world.*

It’s a rather short piece, electronically processed vocal line resembling that of traditional liturgical manner, monk-like chant – a lot of staying on the same note, only making more elaborate melody turns in the ends of the phrases. The background electronic track starts with high-pitched long, drone-like electronic notes, resembling sirens, which brings a sense of caution and warning to the piece, intensified by the pulsating bleeps, continuing on different ranges throughout the piece. Later on the drone sounds transition to the lower registers and resemble the organ both in timbre and liturgical playing manner. During the piece the harmonic changes are very subtle, layers of background long notes creating an atmosphere, a soundscape, rather than a certain chord. The mood shifts seamlessly back and forth from intense, warning-like, into a light one. Towards the end, this intensity begins to lighten, and the low register notes dissolve into light, airy ones, the sound becomes pure, light, crystal-like, pulsating and noise-static-like sound effects are gone.

### **2. “Soul Search” (2020) 11’14”**

This piece is made out of short (few seconds) cut-up pieces of a podcast conversation about Christian contemplative practices<sup>40</sup>, for vocal parts and electronic sounds. The focus is shifting between electronic sounds being in the background to voices, later – disappearing, and finally, being in the foreground of attention. The concept is rather unusual, as the voices are not used to create a melody, while it is so common to sing to (or about) God in compositions done by Christian artists. Instead, the vocals that are processed in various ways are creating a texture – with snippets of words, or even just parts of words, coming in and out at different, unpredictable timings, with different processing and layering. Usually it is hard to distinguish the spoken content which is woven together with electronic sounds. The electronic sound side is constant arpeggio-like pulsating in the lower register in contrast with longer lasting rather clear higher range notes. Towards the end of the piece those higher notes imitate a singing bowl envelope – the vibration of the sound is evolving, akin to that of a natural singing bowl sound.

There are more interesting works by Susan to be discovered (“Kyrie”<sup>41</sup>, “Psalm 2”, and others) with innovative and interesting techniques combining traditional Christian themes and creative use of electronic music. The main takeaways from this short overview are that Susan Frykberg’s faith has definitely left a mark in her creative endeavors and her most recent compositions reflect most of what is mentioned in class 1 features: spiritual practice is part of the creative process and is reflected in the compositions (like the first piece discussed), there are references to sacred texts (like for instance in her piece “Psalm 2”), there are allusions and structures found in a liturgical ritual (like in “Kyrie”), as well as incorporating (in discussed cases, creating) a soundscape symbolically resembling elements from a sacred place (like electronic sounds of organ). Thus we can conclude that Susan’s faith has provided a source of inspiration for her compositions and we can find its traces.

### **“1921” (DAVID ÅHLÉN, ANDREAS EKLÖF)**

This unique sounding Swedish duo is headed by David Åhlén, who is mostly known as a solo artist<sup>42</sup>, with a background influence of basically “growing up” in a church (being a Baptist

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<sup>40</sup> Meredith Lake and Sarah Bachelard talk on “Soul Search” Apple podcast.

<sup>41</sup> A traditional part of Holy Mass in Catholic liturgical tradition, which in Susan’s version is completely wordless (just electronic), yet, resembling the structural and dynamic changes. The discussed recordings can be looked up on her website <https://susanfrykberg.com>

<sup>42</sup> Before that he’s been part of different indie bands and projects

pastor's son), hearing hymns and learning to play his violin (Bio...2023). This has shaped him as an artist, as he opens up about it in the interview (Appendix A):

*"I grew up in church and was heavily influenced by spiritual music. For me the christian faith is intimately related to music so it's been impossible to separate them."*

His intricate, poetic compositions, subtly arranged electroacoustic songs and a signature falsetto timbre have earned him a title of "indie pop music's answer to Arvo Pärt"<sup>43</sup> (ibid., 2023). David Åhlén has mainly toured Scandinavian lands, however, his three albums<sup>44</sup> have been widely acclaimed beyond Scandinavia, and not only within the traditional Christian communities (even though that is his primary audience), but has found listeners among wider audience, not necessarily associating themselves with his religion<sup>45</sup>. He has been a part of various indie bands before, however, nothing quite like "1921"<sup>46</sup>, where he joined his strengths with synthesizer-electronics player Andreas Eklöf<sup>47</sup>, known for his "Manifest-winning album "Klavikord" "<sup>48</sup> (New...2017). Andreas Eklöf's experience in composing electronic, pop, contemporary art music and movie soundtracks has brought to "1921" "electronic-organic soundscape", full of "minimalist harmonies and clever counterpoints", (David...2016; New...2017; Hareuveni, 2017). Together they released an album "In My Veins" (2018), where a powerful unique blend of sounds was called "electronic chamber music" (New...2017). "1921" have expressed in one interview, that they "wanted to create a room for a restless stillness. Like recording the silence in a church. Everything seeps through the walls to create subtle transformations" (Murray, 2018).

Secular media has acclaimed "1921" music as "enigmatic" (Hareuveni, 2017), "haunting and inspirational" (Driver, 2018), which suggests that the deep, spiritual lyrics have transferred a sense of otherworldliness, even though there was no mention of specific references to Christianity. When asked about whether genres can be more or less holy (question 6 of the interview) he answered:

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<sup>43</sup> As quoted from "Kulturnyhetera SVT" (Swedish Public Television) on his bio page. (Bio...2023)

<sup>44</sup> We sprout in Thy soil (2009), Selah (2013) and Hidden Light (2016)

<sup>45</sup> Such as previous mentioning in the television, or the praise of critics as a masterpiece within its genre (David...2016).

<sup>46</sup> That is the death year of a Swedish mystic (Christian), poet Linnea Hofgren, who's poems have inspired two of the songs ("New worlds" and "The clear fount") <https://soundcloud.com/1921music>

<sup>47</sup> There is much less personal information available on Andreas, so in this case I will concentrate more on David, as the one who is heading the concept of the band.

<sup>48</sup> Both David and Andreas are signed with Compunctio label.

*“It’s not about genres but capturing a heavenly sound. There is music that is made for making money and you can actually hear it - but if you create music for the glory of God there is a depth in it that is hard to explain.”*

That *depth* is something that his contemplative style evokes. I will touch on that in the following examples.

1. The first album song **“Holy” (2017) 2’51”** already sets the tone for what kind of atmosphere we can expect from this unusual collaboration<sup>49</sup>. Soft electronic sounds bouncing in arpeggios in the background lead the way in, as to prepare a beam of light for David’s gentle voice to enter in with a prayer:

*God, release my tongue, to sing Your praises,  
To join with the angels, come, release my soul to sing*

*Holy, You are Holy, I’ll bow with the elders,  
I bow with the creation down, before Your throne, consuming fire.*

*Touch, touch my blinded eyes, let me see Your face,  
Dwell in this place, let my eyes see Your face.*

Throughout the whole song vocals stay in the focal point, electronic synthesizers playing a supporting role in bringing minimalistic harmony ground. All the parts with lyrics in them give full attention to the voice, however, in the short melodic interludes, a couple more layers of warm synths join in, expanding the soundscape with weightless sonic strokes. These layers gently subside, as David’s voice enters back in. An important element in creating the atmosphere in this piece is that there is no clear rhythm, or tempo, even though the soft arpeggiating foundation is constantly bubbling – all this undefined space creates an impression of timeless flow, with no hurry in the melody or the background music, just joining in the atmospheric flow, which glows with beauty and light. This kind of flow, lack of rhythm is characteristic to liturgical music. The lyrics add to elevation by communicating awe, surrender and worship towards the creator. In prayer, the author longs to “see” God’s face, and his prayer is resolved with melodic sighs.

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<sup>49</sup> It is not that common for Christians who come from more traditional worship music backgrounds (like hymns) to collaborate with experimental electronic music artists



2. **“Psalm 115” (2018) 3’09”** is another vocal and electronic piece, which is revolving around the Psalm narrative. Out of the silence, emerges David’s voice, with the first lines:

*Not for our sake, wishing not for our sake,  
But for Your name’s sake, Lord  
For Your kindness, and for Your truth,  
Why should the nations say, “Where is their God?”<...>*

Structurally, this piece is somewhat similar to the first one, in that there is no clear rhythm, which again, is characteristic to how Psalms (or some of the other Holy Mass parts) are being sung in a Liturgy. This creates a very interesting creative/interpretive precedent to the music of such genre, as there is hardly ever an electronic synthesizer background at a church during the Holy Mass, to which the priest would sing. Also, the singing manner has recognizable elements reminding the style we would hear at the more traditional Church service (for example, simple, repetitive melody, chant-like mood). The electronic pads again are playing more of a supportive role, with long notes, coming in layers, one after another at various lengths (hard to tell when will one end and the other begin), giving a minimalistic harmonic ground, dynamically catching up with vocal intensity, which is growing in waves towards the second part of the song, where the synthesizer sounds become thicker as well. The minimalistic manner of electronic music effects and of the vocal melody seems to be created in such a way that it allows a lot of the attention to rest on the plea itself, together creating a rather contemplative mood. The Psalm is not fully completed in the song.

The music of “1921” is innovative, however, it is not pushing the limits of the form, structure or expression that much, and the melodies do sound akin to the liturgical music manner, at the same time, even though being rather calm, vocally they are conveyed with a very strong emotion. The whole album could be called contemplative. Leading us in prayers and reflections coming from David’s faith and even his faith tradition (we know he grew up with traditional hymns, and the echoes of those hymn-like features are put in a new setting – the church gets a new robe – and its archaic threads are weaved together with new ones, making that new tapestry resonate with the contemporary listener of EL/EA music). Since there are references to the sacred texts and symbols, allusions to the Liturgical elements and spiritual practices incorporated in the compositional processes<sup>50</sup>, we can conclude that David’s music falls into class 1 of spiritual expression classification. And yet, in quite a few of their songs the references are subtle, poetic, reflecting

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<sup>50</sup> There are more of the songs with David’s lyrics which are prayers.

inner conversation, but not always clearly stated with who, that would, in my opinion, hint of Class 2 features as well.

### “KINNSHIP” (formerly “FAVELA”)

This UK based producer, singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist, has been a rising star in the recent years, since his first EP “Easy Yoke” release in 2014. He is known for how his “evocative, melodic soundscapes” (Kinnship...2021), “voice as an ethereal, otherworldly instrument” which “dances atop the immediate urban beats”, and how the natural soundscape-like and urban-like atmospheres collide in his music, creating “a mingling effect of the countryside with the city” (Sweetman, 2019). Starting in 2014, he has since released more work – two EP’s “Visions” in 2015 and “English Letters” in 2017, then, three full solo albums every two years, starting with “Community” in 2018, “Commensality”, and “Interserenity”. He has also collaborated on albums “A thousand fibres” in 2019, and “Stones & Geysers” in 2021. Over the years, being quite a productive artist, Kinnship has established his music style, which has been called *folk-tronica*, *chill-wave*, *new-retro*, however, his lyrics have also been noticed and acknowledged as “poignant”, “mesmerizing” (Favela...2020), “earnest and heartfelt” (Kinnship...2021), “increasingly complex” and “holding glimpses of profound meaning and insight” (Sweetman, 2019), however, never referred to as “religious”. Kinnship himself admits that he loves the words themselves, and how “things can mean two or more things” (ibid., 2019). He admits to basing “things in the mundane, but they mean something more and metaphorical” (ibid., 2019).

Kinnship has been playing classical music with his family since childhood, which lends itself to his music by involving intricate structures and detail (Sweetman, 2019). Despite the classical music background, Kinnship confessed that “modern music is my true love” (Inspiration...2021). When speaking about his inspirations Kinnship mentions movie soundtracks, conversations with friends, playing around with violin, synthesizer or drum machines (ibid., 2021). Besides instruments, he is quite passionate about nature (that has been a recurring theme in a lot of his interviews), telling about his recent album’s (2022) with Pablo Nouvelle inspirations: “The album lyrically is based on the concept of **describing spiritual, emotional or unseen things in physical, day-to-day objects and ideas**. It’s personally something I tend to often do in my lyrics, and with this album I tried to immerse myself in the imagery of nature <...>” (Mullen, 2022).

His songs are usually of a slower groove, leaning more on a minimalistic side, with intricate drum patterns and colorful rhythms, gradual build up of effects and layers. Synthesizers, drum pads are some of his most used tools for creating the electronic ambience, however, guitar and soulful, emotional vocals add to the building of a spacious soundscape, which somehow manages to transport us into the green meadows, despite the common heavy, dark basslines and beats in the background. Usually the mood of the songs is melancholic, however, hopeful, with lyrics inviting the listener into the deep inner processes, wrapped in metaphors and imagery. As mentioned earlier, Kinnship enjoys the duality of meanings, and that is exactly why he caught my attention, when I first started listening to him. It was interesting that in all the interviews I could find, there was hardly a trace of him talking about faith openly. However, in Christian media, he is acknowledged as a musician who belongs within the believers' circle. I wonder if that might be because of my previously mentioned premise, that some of the artists leave "breadcrumbs" which lead to deeper revelations of the lyrics for those **who already know** the references. These are some of the lyrics excerpts as examples of the references.

#### 1. "Homingbird" (2020) 8'28"

*<..> I eat my food in the presence of my enemies  
I raise a glass to the fear that used to shackle me. <...>*

A motive from Psalm 23:5 comes to mind as a symbolic reference: "You prepare a table before me **in the presence of my enemies**. You anoint my head with oil; **my cup overflows**." This Psalm is often referred as strengthening in the face of fear, thus, the last line could as well be taken as a reference (Ps 23:4a "Though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil"). Hopeful lyrics of this song resonate well with the overall determined, bright mood of this song.

Music-wise, this track is longer than his other ones, lasting over eight minutes, however, the development is quite dynamic and even ecstatic in the end. Vocal line starts the build up with just a melody, joined by a growing amount of harmonies, one by one. A soft piano and a sole distant synthesizer line enters the soundscape in the background, followed up by a drum pattern, eventually strengthened by a constant heavy beat. The vocals continue in repetition, and only at 3'30" does the song start to feel established to begin the mentioned lyrical line. It keeps developing with more synthesizer effects adding, expanding the musical soundscape, which comes to a short calm interlude around 5'55", and restarts powerfully by going back to the developed harmonic thickness and beat patterns, strengthened by doubling the accent of the downbeat. "Reaching a phenomenal eight minutes in length, this track effortlessly amalgamates the world of electronic and introspective music with the bold, iconic prowess of an esteemed professional" (Favela...2020).

## 2. “Gong” (2015) 4’09”

<...> *Let me not be a clanging gong or a crashing cymbal*  
*Let me not be a clanging gong or a crashing cymbal*  
*Else I've got it wrong. <...>*

The resounding reference here is from the New Testament (further – NT) book of Corinthians 13:1-2 “If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a **resounding gong or a clanging cymbal**. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, **but do not have love, I am nothing.**” The lyrics are formulated in a prayer form – “*Let me not be...*” and resemble a reflection on Apostle Paul’s passionate speech on the importance of love in the mentioned chapter.

On the music side, the song is set in the strict frame of pulsating electronic drum patterns – keeping quite an intense background, however, the placement of the downbeat manages to keep the sense that the overall tempo of the song is not fast. The beats are lightened by harp-like string (most likely guitar) arpeggios, and wind-instrument-like electronic synthesizers, holding long notes, opposing the fast background. Piano enters with a clever counterpoint rhythm which stays further on, softening the mood and making it even more melancholic. Coupled with the lyrics, it sounds like a prayer, where the subject experiences longing to love well.

The overall style of Kinnship is quite unique in how it balances groovy, even though not fast-paced<sup>51</sup> drum patterns, long and warm synthesized notes and a rather laid-back singing manner, which is continuously juxtaposed with the intensity of the background, and makes the songs feel mellow. The emotional vocals and deep lyrics draw into the contemplative mood. Considering classification of spiritual expression, it would not be easy to assign Kinnship to just one category. His expressions of faith are quite subtle, and over the years have been increasingly so, yet, looking at his earlier compositions, and in that receiving a compass for his current works, it is possible to see more hints of his personal conversations with God (“*I petition all on bended knee*” (Worship, 2017), “*It’s not heavy load, it’s an easy yoke*” (Easy Yoke, 2018, Matthew 11:30 reference<sup>52</sup>). There are also themes in which he appears to draw attention to materialism, which is a Biblical (of course, not only) value (“*Are you worth your weight in gold, when you take your necklace off yourself?*” Easy Yoke, 2018). In addition, Kinnship’s tendency to speak about deep, emotional, spiritual matters through the metaphors, nature imagery, is also something that Jesus did quite often, when He was teaching the crowds (using parables). To sum up, references to the

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<sup>51</sup> Average tempo of the songs would be around 70 bpm.

<sup>52</sup> NT, Gospel of Matthew 11, 29-30 “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Bible, prayer-like lyrics, choir-like singing manner – those would be the characteristics that would allow us to put this composer into Class 1 according to Susan Frykberg’s classification. At the same time, we have to take into account that the author himself has not spoken openly about his faith references (on the media at least) – and perhaps he does not need to, if his songs speak for himself. In his own words: “Writing songs helps me to digest emotions, situations and the profundities of life” (Inspiration...2021). The sparse openness does give off the hint that the author might subscribe to the idea that the act of creating is “inherently spiritual”, and that both the process and the composition produce “unintended and mysterious feelings and thoughts” (Frykberg, 2021, p.302) which are spiritual, and there is no need to make the exact spiritual way explicit. So it may be concluded that his creativity expressions are drawing on both Class 1 and 2.

### **“EIKON” (Dave Hendra and Dave Pilcher)**

The London based duo<sup>53</sup> is the closest in its sound to EDM music among my mentioned musicians, however, most of their songs are original and musically nuanced. The musicians met while studying theology, and found a mutual goal in writing a new type of *worship*<sup>54</sup> music, which would appeal not only to believers who like electronic sound, however, secular audience as well (About...2023). Dave Pilcher, who is more on the production and arrangement side of the band, says this about the development of Eikon’s sound:

*“(I) <...> found that in the Christian music scene 14 years ago there wasn’t much variety of styles within it. I loved experimentation with synths and creative interesting sounds, and wanted to bring some of that from the music I loved at the time such as James Blake or Sohn to the Christian realm.”*

Their music is referred to as being a fusion “modern electronica, house music and chilled-out ambient”, which brings “passionate and melancholic worship, blended with some dance-floor-filler moments” (About...2023). The more unusual description is *electronica worship* or *electro-gospel*, which also indicates, that the references in their music are quite clear. As for the *worship* in *electronica*, Dave Pilcher opens up more about his idea behind the music:

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<sup>53</sup> I was only able to get Dave Pilcher’s interview, attached in the Appendix B.

<sup>54</sup> Christian worship music, which even stands as a genre of its own.

*“I consciously didn’t want to make Christian House / dance music, or just add synths and drum machines to the contemporary worship style, but wanted it to have its own vibe, but still fit in a worshipful setting.”*

Eikon came together in 2013, in the same year releasing their first EP “The only thing that matters” and becoming part of the very few starting artists, who had similar endeavors – create original *worshipful* electronic music. Since then they have released six more EP’s and eleven singles, and, unlike most of Christian electronic music creators, they have managed to connect with their audience in the very places of worship: “Our original intention was for the tracks to be listened to for more personal worship, but then we started leading a few worship sessions at church and have expanded our songs out a bit so some can be more corporately used<sup>55</sup>” (The rise...2018).

Dave Pilcher is the person who produces the electronic side of Eikon’s sound, and since most of his experience has been in electronics, rather than vocals (which is Dave Hendra’s area), it has been valuable to hear more about how that side of music can be intentional in regards to spiritual practices in creative process:

*“I will intentionally try and lead the soundscape that to me helps interact with God. For me, it is finding a balance between sounds that are not distracting or abrasive but yet still creative, interesting and dynamic. For non-Christian music that I compose, generally I pray whenever writing so asking Jesus to lead me in what I do is how I start, but the spirituality is less intentional on this side.”*

#### 1. **“I will follow You” (2019) 5’28”**

<i>There's a hunger in my heart</i>	
<i>A hunger in my soul for You, Lord</i>	Chorus
<i>And it grows and it grows</i>	<i>I will follow You</i>
<i>And it feeds me like it's never fed me</i>	<i>I want to be with You</i>
<i>before</i>	<i>And I want to be with You</i>

A lot of Eikon’s lyrics (written by Dave Hendra) are prayers and reflections, just like this one. That is one of the components that brings associations of *gospel* or *worship* to their “electronica” (as in communal worship songs it is often personal addressing God in prayer – in

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<sup>55</sup> „corporately used” meaning where people are able to join in singing praises together, or where the music can be played during the service.

praise, supplication, thanksgiving). Also, even though rarely quoting direct scriptures, the lyrics refer to Biblical themes, for instance in this song, mentioning spiritual hunger is a rather common theme in the Bible <sup>56</sup>. The confession of hunger resolves into proclamation of heart's devotion – “*I will follow You*”, which is answering one of most “iconic” invitation from Jesus – “Follow me”<sup>57</sup>.

The song starts with a “fat” base synthesizer sounds laying out the harmony of the song in a minimalistic way, note by note, soon joined by the vocals main lines, which repeat many times through the whole song. Out of the background emerge “glimmers” of bright continuous high register pads, filling up the space which expands even more with vocal reverb. After the refrain swimming in reverb and atmosphere of glimmer finishes its echoes, a drum pattern suddenly comes in, starting a new, groovy section of the song. Overall, the song is very rhythmical and framed by clear drum patterns throughout its length. The background tempo is medium paced, however, unhurried vocals balance the overall song feel as quite laid back. There is intensity, restlessness, resolve in the voice and melody, reaching for high notes on the lyrics “*I want to be with You*”. Synthesizer pads, staying in minor notes, sustain main chord colors. The layers of new electronic sounds keep adding until the intensity reaches its peak, and subsides, leaving just the main three harmony lines, together with the bass that started the song.

## 2. “Human” (2015) 3’16”

<i>Hope has come to meet us</i>	Chorus
<i>Sucking out the poison and the pain</i>	<i>Savior you're all I,</i>
<i>Healing lepers, raising dead men</i>	<i>Savior you're all I</i>
<i>Till it finished like he said...</i>	<i>You are all I need, You are all I need</i>
<i>This is what a human is &lt;...&gt;</i>	
<i>You show me how, you make me now to be a human, to be a God-child</i>	
<i>You took my pain, you suffered shame to make me human</i>	

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<sup>56</sup> For example, OT, Psalm 63:1 “You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water.” Or Matthew 5:6 “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”

<sup>57</sup> For example, NT, Matthew 4:19 “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.”

One more song with openly Biblical references<sup>58</sup>, which are turned into poetic lyrical interpretations, personal reflections and addressing God. Here God is personified as “hope”<sup>59</sup>, who is relieving us of something deadly – sin – which is referred to as poison<sup>60</sup>; healings and resurrections refer to Jesus’ miracles; “finished” – Jesus’ last words<sup>61</sup> signifying He accomplished His mission. The refrain shows surrender and devotion – addressing the “Savior” as the One who can satisfy all need. The theme of “human” is thought provoking and inviting into deeper reflection, what it is to be a human. In authors approach (which is Biblical), being *human* is being who God intended for humans to be – “*God-child*” – by having that relationship with God restored through faith in the “Savior”. Overall most of the lyrics refer to Jesus.

The song starts with clear pulsating arpeggiated bass beat, and soon after entering vocal line. The mood sets in as assertive and determined, vocals are in clear focus. The sound gradually thickens with more synthesizers joining and setting off the chorus lines into quite a different mode – hopeful and light, yet still determined. Soft pads, long notes are in the background to the vocal line, together with the pulsating rhythm and bright short notes dancing on top of all the harmonic base. When the verse or the bridge begin, layers are thinned, bringing voice into more focus. Harmonies slightly change during the bridge (“*You show me how...*”), but soon go back to the refrain (“*Savior You’re all I...*”), which leads all the way until the end.

To sum up, most of Eikon’s music is song-like in regard to structure and elements, so certain features remain in most of their compositions (meaning, high focus on lyrics, voice, and electronica mainly supporting the dominating mood). Over the years they have been developing their sound, and now there is more experimenting with the electronic side of their sound. In regards to lyrics, they have decided on their direction and the aforementioned *worship-electronic* term describes their music quite well.

Closing off the second chapter, in the light of the discussion on sacred/profane in the previous one, Dave Pilcher expressed a thought that might be encouraging to other believers, starting out their journey with EL/EA composition:

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<sup>58</sup> Quoting not full lyrics of the whole song, but an excerpt, as a sample of references.

<sup>59</sup> NT, 1 Timothy 1:1 “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of **Christ Jesus our hope**”

<sup>60</sup> NT, Romans 6:23 “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

<sup>61</sup> NT, John 19, 30 “So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, “It is **finished!**” And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.”



*“I don’t think any one genre is less Holy, I think it is the people making it who bring Spiritualness to the music. It is clear when the lyrics or production are very dark, abrasive and offensive with negative messages that these do not come from God though.”*

Meaning, that it is not so much about the form, but the content, and the heart behind it. In my previously cited article “The rise of electronica-based worship music”(2018), there is resonating thought considering this “rise”: “As an alternative to ancient organ-led hymns or the stadium-rock sounding modern worship, clearly electronic music has potential. It will be interesting to see how the approach to worshipping God takes shape in the coming years.” I agree, and I am eager to see the development.

### **Summary of observations**

- When Christian themes are used openly in song texts, they are either direct references to scripture, or personal reflections coming from interactions with the scripture or personal relationship with God.
- A lot of the times musicality consists of contemplative, melancholic mood, wide and spacious soundscapes, rather conservative but still emotional singing manners, unusual harmonies.
- Compositions, even though many of them are filled with prayer-like lyrics, are not meant for congregational worship settings, except rare occasions.
- Most of the discussed artists’ lyrics communicate deep inner processes – questions, poetic/metaphoric reflections, self-awareness in spiritual matters, pleas, prayers, confessions, words of admiration to God and His truths. However, a more in depth study is needed in order to quantitatively identify the occurrence of various themes in lyrics.
- In a lot of compositions that have lyrics, voice stays in the main focus (often not that much processed, highlighting the message of the song), while electronic sounds are mostly for creating the soundscape.
- There is not that much of experimental electronic music (most experimental that I have found being Susan Frykberg) form, sound and structure-wise.

### 3. Analysis of my electroacoustic composition

#### 3.1. “Banquet in the grave: in search of true love”

The phrase “banquet in the grave”<sup>62</sup> is part of the title name of Edward Welch’s (2001) book about addictions, where he gives a Biblical perspective on the issue, and how church can be helpful in walking alongside people who have this struggle. This approach of practical theology has reshaped my own outlook on addictions, and because of my background in Psychology and Biblical Counseling, I found it an inspiration to work on this topic as my final Master’s composition project<sup>63</sup>.

“Banquet in the grave: in search of true love” is a four-part<sup>64</sup> electroacoustic composition for voice, violin and kalimba, with drama elements<sup>65</sup>. The mentioned acoustic sources are processed to create new timbres and synthesizers, which are layered with unprocessed sounds of those same instruments. I used Ableton Live 10 DAW<sup>66</sup> for sound processing – mostly tools like pitch shifting (Aroglunar plug in), simplifier, sampler, arpeggiator, modulator, reverb, delay, EQ, compression, layering, spectrogram RX 10, Ozone 8. The goal of limiting the sources of input was so that I could get creative with experimenting in bringing out new colors of those instruments. I will describe the four parts of my composition, both musically and conceptually.

The overall idea of the piece is to present a sonic snapshot for each of the four stages of someone’s journey of addiction, with the perspective of spiritual (from Christian perspective) and psychological forces at play.

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<sup>62</sup> The reference comes from the Old Testament book of Proverbs, 9:13-18 “Folly is an unruly woman; she is simple and knows nothing. 14 She sits at the door of her house, on a seat at the highest point of the city, 15 calling out to those who pass by, who go straight on their way, 16 “Let all who are simple come to my house!” To those who have no sense she says, 17 “Stolen water is sweet; food eaten in secret is delicious!” 18 But little do they know that the dead are there, that her guests are deep in the realm of the dead.” Cited as a title name reference in E. Welch’s book “Addictions. A banquet in the grave” (2001).

<sup>63</sup> The mentioned book gives conceptual foundation for this piece. As in E. Welch’s words, “The basic theology for addictions is that the root problem goes deeper than our genetic makeup. Addictions are ultimately a disorder of worship. Will we worship ourselves and our own desires or will we worship the true God?” (Welch, 2001, p. preface).

<sup>64</sup> Will refer to parts as movements further on, interchangeably.

<sup>65</sup> I intended for this piece to have potential to be performed (in theater or dance), with music as a soundtrack, portraying the story of a person struggling with addiction.

<sup>66</sup> Digital audio workstation

## 1. The wound.

**Concept:** *"I was just a small child, when howling winds pierced the silence of my growing heart, and let the wind in, and left the hole of emptiness"*<sup>67</sup>. This vocal line in the introductory part works as setting the scene for the whole story. "Small child" is symbolic for being vulnerable and in that being hurt, experiencing trauma (could be abuse or neglect of sorts<sup>68</sup>), which leaves with a sense of "hole of emptiness". Later on, words "let me in" repeat, which is open for twofold interpretation. First, from the perspective of hurt ("the wind", the hard emotions entering), or the healing (God's love, which is the main agent of restoration). Both are asking to get in.

**Music:** This intro part begins with slowly pulsating background beat, which stays as a main motive in the first and last movements (musically 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> movement frame the whole piece). It is layered with long notes, which change slowly, and at times, trigger echoes of kalimba. The beginning elements and tempo are rather calm and light. Then, bass synthesizer sound enters together with the vocal line (*"I was just a small child..."*), and the mood darkens, major scales starting to gradually change into minor ones. Slowly, distant sounds of processed violins enter, gradually occupying more space, while the vocals recede and become part of the soundscape. The sound becomes more ambient, flowing; rhythmical elements start to dissociate and fall out of sync with one another. The musical process represents the experience of a person, who is experiencing hurt, becoming more and more lost – slowly falling into emotional darkness, no longer able to grasp that which used to be clear; what used to be intact, starts to lose its pattern.

## 2. Escapism<sup>69</sup>/denial

**Concept:** When it comes to unhealthy coping mechanisms<sup>70</sup>, most of the people have that to some extent. However, avoiding the problem or denying it altogether does not make it go away, while engaging in self-destructive behaviors only deepens it. The second part (which leads to the third part, thus, they are musically connected) touches on these aspects. We hear hints of conversation in which the person is out of touch with his/her emotions, not honest with oneself or others, trying

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<sup>67</sup> All lyrics are written by me, except the last, fourth movement

<sup>68</sup> which actually quite often happens in childhood, so those words could be taken literally as well

<sup>69</sup> According to Dixon and Baumeister (1991) escapism consists of reduced self-awareness, in order to escape from self (self-evaluation, comparison, judgment). Another way to view it is as ways to disengage from emotions induced by every-day life stressors (Carver, Connor-Smith, 2010). Recommended reading on the link between escapism and addictions – Jouhki & Oksanen (2022).

<sup>70</sup> Destructive/harmful ways of solving internal and external problems, such as addictions, over-use of alcohol, excessive working, video-gaming, drugs, etc.

to convince someone (and him/herself) that everything is all right, at the same time being isolated from his/her feelings, building defensive walls up:

*“Too much? No, I’m good. I can stop whenever I want. You know... It makes me feel better. So why would anyone care? I feel happy! Yeah. You know, I feel happy. Yeah... I don’t know how else I can feel happy...feel me...Anyways. Who is “me” anymore. Who am I...”*

Instead of turning towards healing – the restorative love of God – the person is searching for that love and relief in places which do not bring real, lasting, deep change, but only temporary alleviation. Thus the second part of the title name – “in search of true love” – depicts this desire and search for comfort and health (to fix that painful “hole of emptiness”), while at the same time, running from it.

**Music:** The movement opens with energetic ascending and descending arpeggios, symbolic of building the walls of self-defense, isolation. The mood is intentionally upbeat because usually in the acts of escaping we seek for pleasures to forget ourselves and our problems; it is a “feel good” illusion. The person is hustling, the “bricks” in the walls behind which the person is hiding are being laid, however, that work also includes the seeds of self-destruction, so we start hearing the hints of trouble – violin sounds get distorted, broken (as in, not everything is as good as it seems). Percussive elements on both lower and higher ranges add even more energy to the unrelenting pulse, representing “the run”. With the entry of the spoken voice, the background arpeggios subside, allowing more space for the words. Vocalizing melodies enter again, bringing to focus the question “Who am I”. Musical background layers become thinner, less intense, signifying a slight slowing down, enough to start hearing one’s thoughts, which leads to a realization of being lost, and a series of fearful questions: “Who am I? Where am I? What is this place?” These spoken questions bridge the second and third parts. The transition features a sparse texture of persistent percussion, a creepy-sounding “broken” violin (symbolizing thoughts), coming in and out of tune, and kalimba sounds – also uneven, without much sense of direction, like child’s play – echoes of the time when that inner “breaking” took place.

### **3. The fight.**

**Concept:** This part represents misery of the inner battle – the relentless attack of dark, demonic thoughts as the self-destructive patterns have taken their course. In the raging of the chaos, there are moments of light and hope, however, the habit of running away, building walls of isolation and not remembering how to let love in get in the way of healing. Many contradicting and

confusing thoughts are clouding the person's thinking and hiding the truth. The person is walking in circles:

*„But, where is it? Umm, just...Just turn right... I know this building... I've been here before... Yeah... I know these walls... I think I know this street... look, a bird! I'll maybe...I'm not sure.... Can you, uh....excuse me, do you know where to turn? Yeah, I know, I know....it's ok, I know....I'm not sure... I'm not sure I can exit... I'm not sure I can find a way out... I don't know if there is a way... ”*

The person is lost, and is being stormed by deceptive and discouraging thoughts – “it's over”, “give up”, “trapped”, “hopeless”. Amidst the chaos, there is a voice of hope – God's invitation to surrender and look “up”:

*“What if there is a way? The way... Come to me... Let me in. “*

**Music:** most of music in this movement depicts dark intertwined with light. For example, fast, detuned, “distressed”, detached violin sounds (which are mostly staying on one note in high register with short sharp strokes, not making any harmony) are juxtaposed to clear, long, evenly-bowed string notes (hopeful, bright tones, playing in harmony), representing two sides of the battle. The line “*What if there is a way...Come to me...Let me in.*” is sung by two voices in unison – one in higher register, another in low – depicting that there are two voices (one which leads to death, another – God's voice – to life) inviting one to listen and follow. Later, there is a hopeful moment, when a string interlude signals that the light is breaking through, and yet the “annoying” (sharp, fast strokes again) violins (habitual thoughts) still lurk in the background. The chaos gains focus once again – many voices fight for focus, they are all lost, but in the midst of confusion, a voice of clarity starts to emerge: “*Somebody once told me that I have to look up, that I have to fight, that I have to believe*”. These words are the last thing that echoes in this distressed mind, and we are not sure, how the fight ends. Last sounds evoke the beeping of a heart monitor – will the person live?

#### 4. The invitation

**Concept:** Last movement is meant to not show the outcome of decision, but the process, an interpretation, how this inner conversation could sound like. Time stops, and we hear a symbolic exchange<sup>71</sup> between the person who was hurt, and God:

*Earthquake is my mind that doesn't trust You  
I cry for the open city, the Kingdom, that lasts longer than this day.*

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<sup>71</sup> The poem was written by Laura Alpe.

*Where I see walls, You see bridges.  
Sun breaks through the mist, sing me a song of Your wind.*

*I hear You say....*

*“Give me your heart – let me adopt it, caress it  
Trust me – I won’t drop it.  
You will learn to breathe and walk in this reality.*

*I’m the Love you seek. I AM THE LOVE YOU SEEK.  
I’m the Love you’re running from  
I’m the Love you seek.”*

There is the confession of difficulty to trust, as well as longing for a different life, different “Kingdom”<sup>72</sup>, where it is not just about surviving “*this day*”. An answer from God comes; it is an encouragement to trust one’s heart into God’s hands and learn to “walk” in this new reality, realizing and accepting that we were looking in all the wrong places; His is the love we seek. These lyrics were meant to be less straightforward, as metaphors and poetry is often the language for complicated emotions and feelings. The purpose was to facilitate this inner dialogue, but leave the response to the listener.

**Music:** This part musically connects with the introduction – the slowly pulsating low background beat gives the grounding sensation after a chaotic episode. Soft, sustained, long string notes give this movement the character of a soundscape, not representing an action, but rather an inner state. However, the mood is quite different from introduction – hopeful, bright in tune, and in sync. The “conversation” mood and atmosphere (between the person and God) is calm, ending the piece with soft fade out of strings and a “chirping” sound, which has been present at different times in all four parts. It represents Holy Spirit, and it speaks to the notion that God has been present all the time – even in the hardest of days.

### 3.2. Reflection on influences and methods and discussion

Some of the composers that I have described in the previous chapter (especially David Åhlén, Kinnship) have been an inspiration to me for a while, for different reasons. One of those reasons being the variety of their faith expressions through their music. For instance, they leave

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<sup>72</sup> Referring to the Kingdom of Heaven which Jesus proclaimed with His coming, also connected with His invitation from the gospel of Matthew: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” (11:28)

subtle hints of scripture, or hints of Biblical narratives, which, for someone who is familiar with that tradition, will be quite understandable, but for someone who is not, it might be unclear, or raise questions – ‘who is he/she talking to/about?’ It can be both an advantage and a disadvantage, depending on what is the goal of the composer. If there is no goal to be very clear about what message they are trying to convey and thus intend to leave space for interpretation, naturally, there might be very few clear hints, or even none. On the other hand, the message might be made to be quite obvious and clear. But if the composer wants those messages to be found only by listeners who are attentive (like in the case of Kinship), or, simply it is their choice to communicate something in a riddled, poetic, metaphorical way, as a preferred creative expression, then we will hear something that will be relatable for a wider audience<sup>73</sup>. This is the route I chose for my piece.

“Banquet in the grave: in search of true love” falls into the *less obvious references to the exact tradition* category. That would still make it a class 1 according to the aforementioned Susan Frykberg’s (2020) classification, because of these traits: I am open about my faith in my other compositions and do not mind being associated with a certain faith system (opposite to class 2 and 3) (p. 302); involving spiritual practices in creative process – prayer and meditation, Bible reading; using hints that would give someone an idea (or raise questions) that I am referencing a faith tradition (and those who know those references, would know, which one is it). The signs of referencing to Christian themes would mainly be in the lyrics, such as “*Come to me*” (‘Who is it calling and why?’, ‘Is the one who is talking – personal?’), “*What if there is a way? The way*” (‘What is *the* way? *Who* is the way?’ Jesus references Himself as *the Way* <sup>74</sup>), “*the Kingdom*” (as mentioned earlier, Kingdom of Heaven is a common narrative in the New Testament <sup>75</sup>), “*that I have to believe*” (‘Believe in what? Why?’), “*I’m the love you seek*” (‘Who is claiming to be the answer to my problems? Who is this love?’ Jesus talks about God being love <sup>76</sup>) and similar “hooks”.

On a deeper level, “banquet in the grave” refers to feasting on things that are dead, or simply cannot satisfy and bring life, and that is one of the important topics in the Bible <sup>77</sup>. The issue is the

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<sup>73</sup> Since some of those who are off put by certain spiritual directions might avoid music, which obviously hints of their dislike.

<sup>74</sup> NT, John 14:6 Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

<sup>75</sup> For example, NT, Matthew 5:3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

<sup>76</sup> NT, 1 John 16 So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

<sup>77</sup> For example, NT, John 6:35 Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.” Or the previous reference No. 50.

duality of desires – those of the “flesh” and those of the “spirit”<sup>78</sup>, and one of the ways to get into addictions is by “gratifying the desires of the flesh”, “flesh” being the desires opposite to those of the “spirit”, which lead to health and God’s wisdom. God’s wisdom for those who fight difficult emotions (there is a lot on this topic in the Bible) is to call on His name for help, rest in His love and His promises, and walk towards healing, instead of turning to temporary solutions or harming self <sup>79</sup>. In its essence, this piece is an invitation to turn to God (that only “true love”, as our addictions or things we escape into can not love us back) in one’s struggles. However, it is not so obvious, because first I wanted to catch the attention of people who resonate with this topic, despite their spiritual background, and at least leave the listeners with an invitation to ask questions, fight and believe. As for the hints that are left “beyond” that invitation, as Jesus said in the Gospel of Matthew – “Who has ears, let him hear” (11:15). Or, who knows the references, they will be able to tell specific pointers.

At the same time, there is certainly space for interpretation, which would have this composition overlapping with the Class 2 characteristics. To remind shortly, the characteristics of Class 2 which would fit, are: seeing exploration of sound as “inherently spiritual”, both the process and the composition evoking “mysterious and thoughts” that could be described as spiritual (Frykberg, 2020, p.302). Standing between 1 and 2 leaves space for exploration, however, does not bring the message in a very clear way, which is always a risk when playing with hints in art (it’s a risk for those who do want to communicate clear invitations to specific ideas). This “in between” creative territory reflects my own inner journey of expressing spirituality through music – I find it valuable to both raise questions, and share certain ideas. In the light of this analysis, it appears important to know more about the author, in order to understand the depths of their piece, but at the same time, there surely are composers, who want to be “read” by their music, and that can be as impactful, as we never know when the previously mentioned phenomena – hierophany – might hit.

Important to note, that this composition was written before my thesis research, so there was no intention to try to “fit” into a certain class or category of composition. The result (this music piece) is the sum of influences in my life. That is to say, this expression is authentic, not coming out of the desire to calculate a certain performance for this thesis, in order to fit the “theme”.

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<sup>78</sup> NT, Galatians 5, 16-17 So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the flesh craves what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are opposed to each other, so that you do not do what you want.

<sup>79</sup> For example, NT, Matthew 11:28 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”



## Further discussion

One more aspect that added to my interest in this topic is meeting quite a few artists (both visual and sound artists) who identify as followers of Christ and are in quite intense psychological and spiritual thought processes in regards to practical theology of art and its implications<sup>80</sup>. Questions arise, such as what is the purpose of art in God's Kingdom, how does the change of spiritual direction shape artistic expression, its motivation, purpose, is there such thing as sacred and profane art and what would make it such, especially, if some art is meant to shock, stir strong emotions, and similar other questions. Mentioning this is relevant because I was wondering what I will find among the sound artists in the contemporary EL/EA music scene in that regard (do they share the same inner conflicts, or do the specifics of a genre allow certain flexibility in expression, which removes the pressure?). To be more specific, for example, one thing in Christianity that might be a shaping factor in art expression, is the Great Commission by Jesus, where He sends His followers to share the Gospel into the whole world<sup>81</sup>. How does such commission affect the way Christ followers create art? Is it enough for it to exist for the sake of itself? Or do composers have a "duty" to imply messages of Christ for "bigger purpose", for their art to serve a certain function? If God is the author of all creation, music and sound included, would He not move through it despite the human effort? Can our creative choices defile something that might have holy origin, such as sound, music? These are big questions, which are being discussed in books on practical theology of art <sup>82</sup>, and are full of potential for more research, even though it might be challenging due to entering the waters of abstract terms which need agreed definitions. As I was trying to navigate some of those terms in this thesis, it was my unexpected joy to read a simple yet profound statement in one of the interviews (found in Appendix A). Answering to the question about "whether music can be thought of as "sacred", or "profane/worldly" "<sup>83</sup>, David Åhlén captured depth in one straightforward sentence:

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<sup>80</sup> For more research on this topic I recommend thesis by Dominyka Čiplytė (2020), where she talks about the tensions of believing artists not feeling fully accepted/understood neither in the church, nor in the secular setting.

<sup>81</sup> NT, Matthew 28, 19-20 "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

<sup>82</sup> For further reading on the topic of the role of arts in theology I recommend to start with William A. Dyrness "The Arts" (Dyrness, 2009), and follow the chapter's bibliography for more.

<sup>83</sup> Question no. 5.

*“Yes. Sacred music is written to glorify God while profane music is about glorifying man.”<sup>84</sup>*

And that certainly takes different forms and shapes – just like Christ’s death on the cross was nothing that one would typically call “beautiful”, but rather – gruesome, however, for those believing in that act’s significance, it would be the most beautiful and holy thing, in its own way.

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<sup>84</sup> This answer even ties in with my previous discussion about “banquet in the grave” meaning – who are we going to worship with our life choices – ourselves, or God.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the goal to expand the understanding about spirituality in EL/EA music, and how Christian spirituality is reflected in the EL/EA compositions of contemporary (21st century) musicians who profess the Christian faith, final observations, suggestions and conclusions are presented.

1. I have reviewed historical and contemporary contexts about the interactions between spirituality and EL/EA music, as well as features of EL/EA compositions with Christian themes, and proved that that themes of spirituality have been included from the earliest recordings<sup>85</sup>, and have been affecting EL/EA music until present days. Based on the research, I would argue that there is still very little academically analyzed information on this topic. For example, a comparative study could research how different belief systems affect EL/EA music differently (what are the recurring themes, experiences of the listeners, contexts and purpose in which the music is played, similarities/differences of content, form, composers' attitudes and motivations, etc.). In addition, spirituality has clearly affected EL/EA music, however, the opposite approach has yet to be investigated – how has *technology* (in music making) influenced spirituality, or, how *does* it influence spirituality of the listeners.
2. After a more detailed analysis of the four contemporary EL/EA music composers<sup>86</sup>, overview of their creative influences and samples of their works, all three hypotheses were confirmed in regards to their compositions:
  - a) Christian themes do appear both through subtle hints and open references to Biblical themes.
  - b) There are compositions which include (non-verbal) fragments of and references to what is associated with traditional/liturgical church music (for example, references to the Holy Mass structural or symbolic elements, singing manner, and similar associations formed by the church music tradition).
  - c) Personal experiences of God (and statements of faith) have worked as the basis for concept of the composition (or an inspiration for it), which were subjectively interpreted and conveyed through creative means.
3. I have created and presented my own electroacoustic composition as part of the research methodology and it has allowed me to partake in analyzing it by the same criteria I used for other composers in this study. That brought understanding about one more case of how Christian

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<sup>85</sup> as demonstrated by the composition of Halim El Dabh, the first electronic recording with North African ritual music

<sup>86</sup> Openly professed believers in Christ

themes' are expressed through music and thus this interpretation<sup>87</sup> contributes to the global context of Christian EL/EA music compositions. In the case of my piece, the references to traditional forms were not as obvious compared to the discussed composers', thus this composition belongs with those which hint subtly (however, where the composers are still more specific about their belief tradition, as in contrast to those who hint spiritual elements, but do not associate their work with any kind of specific way of spirituality/religion). There is yet more work to discover and to study Christian composers who would put themselves in the classes 2 and 3 according to Susan Frykberg's classification, and learn more about their "theology of composition".

4. Thanks to Susan Frykberg's seminal work (2020), I was able to analyze Christian themes in the works of contemporary composers of choice (as well as my own work) according to her classification of spiritual expressions in EL/EA music. It can be concluded, that the use of technologies has been a tool of choice for composers discussed in the Chapter 2.2, to express their inner life of faith. In the light of the historical overview in the Chapter 1.2 (where the use of new technologies in expressing inner journey of faith was likened to the works of the devil, even though the music was made by a devout Catholic Stockhausen), it is quite a change to see the amount of freedom of expression gained in that regard, and see that more and more professing Christians step out with EL/EA music compositions and their works are embraced by both, communities of faith and secular.
5. This research was carried out by analyzing scientific and methodological literature, conducting interviews, and analyzing compositions. In conclusion, echoes of spiritual life reflect in EL/EA music, and Christian themes are present in various shapes and forms.

Christian composers are making use of contemporary technologies and bringing new colors to the contemporary music scene – inviting us to not forget the spiritual in the age of technological, and showing that those two do not oppose one another. As this study was a review of one belief system, as mentioned earlier, there is potential to research how electronic music is influenced by different belief systems and overall how spiritual interacts with the technological. Lastly, with this study and my composition I have added to the body of work that reflects Christian themes. And since the techniques of EL/EA music making are unique in ways how they can bend the nature of acoustic sound, I hope that we are going to see more works where in order to express topics about

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<sup>87</sup> interpretation of Christian themes that reflect my compositional style and the influence of my faith on the final result

subjects “beyond natural”, Christian composers will increasingly appropriate these contemporary technologies.

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## APPENDIX A

Facebook messenger interview

DAVID ÅHLÉN

1. How does your Christian faith find its way into your music – is it intentional, or more intuitive like (when it's not the type of music meant for congregational worship)?

*I grew up in church and was heavily influenced by spiritual music. For me the christian faith is intimately related to music so it's been impossible to separate them.*

2. Could you tell a bit more about how 1921 started – what ideas came together, to make it sound the way it does? (How did the ideas come? What was the process, inspirations, of composing? (having in mind that it is a very unique sound, liturgy'esque vocals combined with electronic, as if two worlds coming together)

*Me and Andreas Eklöf were both on the same record label and started to discuss a collaboration. We tried some ideas and the result was the song "Holy" which is the first track on the album. That specific song became a template for the rest of the album. The main idea was to combine vocals (me) and synth (Andreas) in a simplistic and organic (electronic chamber music) way, we wanted it to sound like two actual instruments. We also used lyrics by the Swedish poet Linnea Hofgren (1868-1921), her year of death became the name of the project.*

3. What is your usual/typical creative workflow – how do you compose? (For example, what are your inspirations, rituals; which comes first – idea, lyrics, melody, beats, prayer, etc.?)

*The melody always comes first. I usually just record it on my cell phone then it develops and lyrics are added.*

4. What is your motivation to write music? (the aim, the goal, the fuel)

*I have an inner creativity that I need to express.*

5. Do you think music can be thought of as being "sacred", or "profane/worldly"?
  - If yes, what do you think makes music in one way or another?
  - If not, what are your thoughts on this (why not)?

*Yes. Sacred music is written to glorify God while profane music is about glorifying man.*

6. Do you think there are more, or less, "holy" genres/music? What do you think makes us think of some of them in such terms?

*It's not about genres but capturing a heavenly sound. There is music that is made for making money and you can actually hear it - but if you create music for the glory of God there is a depth in it that is hard to explain.*

7. What's your favorite composition (that you've written, but not necessarily), and why?

*Linger (my solo project). I love to sing it, it's a minimalistic composition that captures something nostalgic.*

## APPENDIX B

e-mail interview

DAVE PILCHER (aka EIKON producer)

1. How does your Christian faith find its way into your music – is it intentional, or more intuitive like (when it's not the type of music meant for congregational worship)?

*From the production side which I contribute, If writing christian music whether congregational or not, I will intentionally try and lead the soundscape, that to me helps interact with God. For me, it is finding a balance between sounds that are not distracting or abrasive but yet still creative, interesting and dynamic.*

*For non Christian music that I compose, generally I pray whenever writing so asking Jesus to lead me in what I do is how I start, but the spirituality is less intentional on this side.*

2. Could you tell a bit more about what guides your creative ideas/writing style? How did it get started/ or got established (influences? inspirations?)?

*I have been involved in producing electronic music and hip hop for years before I became a Christian, and found that in the Christian music scene 14 years ago there wasn't much variety of styles within it. I loved experimentation with synths and creative interesting sounds, and wanted to bring some of that from the music I loved at the time such as James Blake or Sohn to the Christian realm. I got started by working with Dave Hendra who I met at our church in London and working together with our mutual love of electronic music came up with ideas together to do it.*

*I consciously didn't want to make Christian House / dance music, or just add synths and drum machines to the contemporary worship style, but wanted it to have its own vibe, but still fit in a worshipful setting.*

3. What is your usual/typical creative workflow – how do you compose? (For example, what are your inspirations, rituals; which comes first – idea, lyrics, melody, beats, prayer, etc.?)

*Generally I think we start with praying and asking Jesus to guide our creativity and process. Thus we don't really have a set pattern. Sometimes I will write some music and send it to Dave Hendra who will add vocals and other musical elements to it, other times he will write a melody on the guitar / synth / piano, then vocal it and send it to me where I will add the production, other times he has a lyrical idea which he tries to write music around which is then sent to me where I finish the production.*

4. What is your motivation to write music? (the aim, the goal, the fuel)

*Initially I wanted to make a living out of music which I now do, as I write for adverts and do sound engineering too. But when I became a Christian the focus changed, I just wanted to write some Christian music that still glorified God but pushed the boundaries of what Christian music could be. Thankfully these days there are so many Christian artists and producers that are making amazing music doing this which I love!*

5. Do you think music can be thought of as being “sacred”, or “profane/worldly”?

- If yes, what do you think makes music in one way or another?
- If not, what are your thoughts on this (why not)?

*I would say yes, as kind of covered in the question below answer, I think the people involved in the music can bring sacredness to it, if the music has been playfully created and the artists have sought God's direction in the process the music will be connected to God, and hopefully listeners will experience his Spirit via it. An example I know is where a friend of mine who isn't a Christian came to my church a few times, and whilst disliking the contemporary worship music, did experience the Holy Spirit during pray and worship time and was in tears, experiencing God. A month later he went to a secular gig and found himself in tears again like what he had experienced in church. He asked me what was going on and I looked up the musician he went to see and found out he was a Christian! Whilst the music he was making was not worship or even mentioning God or Christ, clearly the music he was making carried a sacredness and my friend experienced Jesus through it!*

6. Do you think there are more, or less, “holy” genres/music? What do you think makes us think of some of them in such terms?

*I love such a variety of genres of music and Jesus and permeate into anything and work into any situation. I have no doubt people can experience the Spirit through a Christian playing heavy metal or raving at a Gabba festival. I don't think any one genre is less Holy, I think it is the people making it who bring spiritualness to the music. It is clear when the lyrics or production are very dark, abrasive and offensive with negative messages that these do not come from God though.*

7. What's your favorite composition (that you've written, but not necessarily), and why?

*I think my favourite track we have made is Let me Lay Down featuring Haydn. I had fun with the production on this one creating some new sounds for this using synths and guitars. I love Dave Hendra simple but catchy vocals plus the theme of resting with Jesus and knowing you are loved in his shelter. I love that we have a rapper on the track too which adds the the variety and blend some of my musical routes!*