

# **Performances of Religious Music in Medieval and Late Modern Culture**



# Introduction

*Martin J.M. Hoondert*

In November 2012 John Harper, professor of Music and Liturgy and director of the International Centre for Sacred Music Studies at Bangor University (UK), visited Tilburg University at the invitation of the Music Research Group.<sup>1</sup> His research is on both historical and contemporary sacred music and liturgy. For his research on medieval rituals, he designed a new method: liturgical enactment. Through enactment of medieval rituals, he investigates the physical, acoustical and spatial aspects of rituals and ritual music. In a two-day conference 'Performances of religious music in medieval and late modern culture' professor Harper gave two keynote lectures: one on liturgical enactment, and one on spatial, sonic and sensory experiences of rituals. Researchers from several Dutch universities expanded on these themes, the results of which will be presented in the following pages.

Professor Harper was the leader of the innovative research project on the experience of worship in late medieval cathedrals and parish churches. This project started in December 2009 and ended in November 2012. It was commissioned by the Religion and Society Research Program, which is based in the United Kingdom. The project explores what the experience of late medieval worship was like for all who participated in it. A key feature of the project has therefore been the preparation and enactment of several late medieval liturgies, each enacted twice in two very different buildings: the great medieval cathedral at Salisbury, for which the liturgies were first intended, and a small rural parish church to which the liturgies were adapted – in this case St Teilo's Church, now reconstructed as it was c.1520 in the grounds of St Fagan's National History Museum, near Cardiff. The enactments, which took place between May and October 2011, attempted to recreate the full sensory experience of medieval worship (including smell, sound and touch) and were attended by a fully briefed 'medieval' congregation and other observers. Professional singers and a director were engaged to provide the integral chant and polyphonic elaboration where appropriate. The enactments were recorded and will be made publicly available via the project website ([www.experienceofworship.org.uk](http://www.experienceofworship.org.uk)).

At the Tilburg conference, November 2012, professor Harper delivered two keynote lectures. The first discussed the investigation of medieval ritual through liturgical enactment, the second the spatial, sonic and sensory experiences of medieval worship. Harper's focus on the method of enactment on the one hand, and on aspects of experience and performance on the other hand, in-

<sup>1</sup> The Music Research Group is part of the Research Program Group 'Religion & Ritual' of the Tilburg School of Humanities. In November 2012 the Music Research Group consisted of Martin Hoondert, Lieke Wijnia and Heleen Kommers.

spired other lecturers at the conference. Their papers will be presented on the following pages.

*Tineke Nugteren* goes into the role of the body and the senses in the academic study of ritual. *Heleen Kommers* compares Harper's enactment method with her ethnographic approach to (religious) experiences of to-day's pop and rock festivals. After these methodological papers, three papers on contemporary performances of religious music are presented. *Hanna Rijken* (in cooperation with Marcel Barnard and Martin Hoondert) presents her research project on the performances of Anglican choral evensongs in the Netherlands. *Lieke Wijnia* discusses two performances that took place during the festival *Musica sacra Maastricht 2012* and analyzes them on the characteristics of ritual and theater, relationality and sacrality. *Martin Hoondert* and *William Arfman* present their research on musical performances related to All Souls' Day and analyze these performances using the conceptual frameworks of Richard Schechner, Gerard Lukken and Catherine Bell. The series of conference papers is concluded with a paper by anthropologist *Jojada Verrips* on the 'chanted' performance of sermons by the Dutch preacher Jacobus den Hartog (1892-1963).

With his research, professor Harper is a protagonist of the *performative turn* in cultural studies. For a long time, musicologists and scholars of liturgical studies studied mainly written sources.<sup>2</sup> When I was a student of musicology, I studied for several weeks the *liber ordinarius* of one of the churches of Utrecht, the church of Saint Mary.<sup>3</sup> It was really difficult for us to imagine what actually happened in the rituals, what the impact was of the singing of the psalms and the smell of the incense. As students we searched for the antiphons in the antiphonale of the church, but we did not sing. We tried to imagine what the processions performed inside and outside the church building were like, but we never did any actual walking, never got a feel of what it would have been like. The enactment method of professor Harper reaches beyond the written sources and as such is a useful complement to existing methods. It is, to quote Tineke Nugteren, 'a challenge to probe into the sensitivities, the subjectivities, and the intersensorial experiences of "the sacred" as (probably, plausibly) lived by people in an era so radically different from ours.'

<sup>2</sup> J. HARPER: *The forms and orders of Western liturgy from the tenth to the eighteenth century. A historical introduction and guide for students and musicians* (Oxford / New York 1991).

<sup>3</sup> K. VELLEKOOP (ed.): *Liber ordinarius Sancte Marie Traiectensis. The Ordinal of St Mary's Church, Utrecht (Ms. London, British Library, Add. 9769)* (= Documenta et archivalia ad historiam musicae neerlandicae 6) (Amsterdam 1996).