

Distinguished Lecturers in Music Theory Series

**Examining Black Gospel Music Worship
Practices****Dr. Cory Hunter**Assistant Professor of Music
University of RochesterAssistant Professor of Musicology
Eastman School of Music

Tuesday, February 28th, 2023

12:45 PM

103 Music Practice Building

Free and Open to the Public

**Lecture Abstract**

During the current century, worship music has significantly grown in popularity as a subgenre of contemporary black gospel music. While a few scholars have examined worship music within the white contemporary Christian music industry (Boone 2013), very little critical attention has been given to black gospel artists who specialize in worship music in the contemporary moment. In gospel music practice, real worship is understood to be an outward expression of an internal, genuine relationship with God and facilitates the transcendence of materiality. Worship music thus functions as a catalyst to reorient material place into an immaterial space of spiritual abandon in which God becomes immanent (Ingalls 2011). Worship music also involves temporal transcendence; the more that worship defies the planned program, the more real it is understood to be. Artists describe the transcendence of worship as so sublime that finding words to articulate such an experience eludes them. These artists therefore engage in musical constructions of ineffability, in which nonsense syllables are used to communicate the incommunicable experience of worship. Through analyzing their music, lyrics, concert DVDs, and discourses in online articles and interviews, I examine how two gospel artists—Judith McAllister and William McDowell—use their worship music to prove that worship authenticates one’s relationship with God. Their musical constructions of worship are changing the lyrical and theological climate of the gospel industry and are invigorating the worship and musical practices within countless black American churches.

Bio

Cory Hunter received his Bachelor of Music in Vocal Performance from Eastman School of Music in 2006 with distinction, a Master of Divinity and Certificate of Music from Yale Divinity School and the Yale Institute of Sacred Music in 2009, and a PhD in musicology from Princeton University in 2016. He currently holds a dual position as Assistant Professor of Music at the University of Rochester and Assistant Professor of Musicology at Eastman School of Music. His recent article, “Thy Kingdom Come: Racial-Ethnic Oneness in African American Gospel Music,” published in *The Musical Quarterly* (Summer 2022), examines the ways in which gospel artists use their music to encourage racial and ethnic reconciliation. His current book project, *Spiritual Realism in Gospel Music Discourse and Practice*, considers how contemporary Black gospel artists use musical and discursive practices to accommodate the popular cultural infatuation with realness and to deconstruct the conventional theologies of conservative Black churches.

Dr. Hunter will also lead the following workshop on Monday, February 27th:

African American Spirituals: A History

3:00–4:50 PM

MPB 241

All are welcome to attend