

Jonathan Dueck, *Congregational Music, Conflict and Community*. Congregational Music Studies Series. London and New York: Routledge, 2017. Pp. x + 198. Hardcover, \$149.95.

This is the fourth volume to appear in the Congregational Music Studies Series published by Routledge. The series grew out of the conferences on Christian Congregational Music held at Cuddesdon College, Oxford in alternate years, beginning in 2011. The first volume, published by Ashgate in 2013, includes twelve papers from that inaugural conference (including one by Jonathan Dueck). While the approaches welcomed at the conference embrace multiple disciplines, ethnomusicological studies seem to dominate. This fourth volume in the series is a monograph by Canadian ethnomusicologist Jonathan Dueck. Dueck is currently Assistant Professor of Writing at The George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

Dueck writes engagingly and with insight about the musical practices of three Mennonite congregations in Edmonton, Alberta: First Mennonite Church, River West Christian Church, and Holyrood Mennonite Church. The author conducted his doctoral

ethnomusicological field works at these three churches in 1998 to 2001, and returned for follow-up visits in 2009 and 2012. During his research he both participated in and observed the musical practices of each church. These particular congregations were chosen because of the comparison they afforded of what are widely regarded as the three principal musical positions taken in the so-called “worship wars”: “traditional” (First Mennonite), “contemporary” (River West Christian) and “blended” (Holyrood Mennonite). The annual joint Good Friday service shared by these three churches and other Mennonite churches in the Edmonton area also provided an opportunity to study what Dueck calls “a performance of community and conflict” and three musical approaches came into contact with one another.

The book is made up of seven chapters. Chapter 1 is an Introduction in which the author reviews previous attempts to analysing the worship wars and proposes his own approach. Chapter 2 examines the joint Good Friday services. Each of the following three chapters reports in depth on one of the three Edmonton congregations. Chapter 6 changes focus from congregations to the stories of individual musicians and worshippers at each of the three churches, arguing the ‘musical life stories’ of these various individuals show how each is ‘constructing their own musical meanings’ against the backdrop of the musical values of a particular congregation. Finally, in Chapter 7, Dueck both reflects on the changes in musical practice he finds at these churches when he returns for visits in 2009 and 2012, and relates these changes to parallel changes in church music more generally and in Mennonite church polity and identity.

The particular lens through which Dueck analyses these musical practices is what he calls “an aesthetics of encounter”, an approach that he proposes in response to the perceived limitations of earlier studies of the worship wars from the perspective of either musical style or theologies of worship. Dueck’s development of this idea of an aesthetics of encounter is for me the major contribution of the book. The claims that he makes for it are strong, especially as an approach to analysing the musical practices of Mennonites in particular:

Reframing musical aesthetics, as I do here, is a way of asking us to *first* consider how musical practices are situated in particular relationships and memories for individuals and *then* to work towards ways in which these meanings can be shared, performed, critiqued and exchanged....

(6)

I do not see what Dueck is asking for as incompatible with other approaches to the issue. Rather, he is putting the pastoral necessity of recognizing and affirming what is already valued in the worship life of congregations at the beginning of any process of movement and change. However, the question of how and even whether the meanings being performed relate to the theological and liturgical aims and values of a congregation remain to be answered.

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