Sacred Sounds: A Compassionate Listening Guide to Musical Worship

Madison Blonquist

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I. Original Project Proposal

Project Purpose

To create an immersive, multimedia, musical experience that focuses on the three Abrahamic religions and explores the ways in which music embodies and interacts with the Divine.

Project Importance

I feel that this project has the potential to impact a wide range of people. Music is a key component in how we worship God as a community and individuals, not only in our LDS culture for all “people of the book.” Because it will explore cross-disciplinary, inter-faith relationships through music, this project has the potential to breed empathy and understanding, giving participants an opportunity to practice compassionate listening.

Project Profile Body

I feel that the preservation of the arts is of vital importance because through them, we are able to cultivate empathy. My love of learning, music, art and culture has led me to reflect deeply on how I can contribute in meaningful ways to these fields. This project, of exploring diverse musical and religious traditions from around the world (and close to home) would merely be an extension of what I believe my life’s purpose to be: to create experiences that change people.

I have already been able to secure a space and collaborate with reputable faculty members on this project. The final product will be an aural exhibition in the exhibit space on the first floor of the Harold B. Lee Library from November-January. Christ Ramsey as well as the IT and design staff are working closely with me to prepare for an interactive, technologically enhanced experience in which listeners will be able to hear the sacred sounds of Islam, Judaism and Christianity in appropriate and educational ways. Since this project is in conjunction with an ORCA grant project, Jeff Sheets is my primary faculty advisor for execution and Dr. Jeremy Grimshaw, an ethnomusicologist in the School of Music is my primary content advisor. In addition, I plan to reach out to various disciplines across campus (i.e. religion, humanities, music, etc.) in order to ensure accuracy in my representation of these diverse cultures and reach a wider audience. I also feel that it will be especially effective if I can include interviews and filmed performances of local groups performing some of the musical works included in the exhibit. I hope to be able to include members of a local Jewish synagogue, mosque and interfaith choirs.

Qualifications of Thesis Committee

Since the content and not the exhibition will be more relevant to my final written thesis, I would like to include Dr. Jeremy Grimshaw as my faculty advisor. Dr. Francesca Lawson
has been a wonderful mentor to me in the Humanities department and is also an ethnomusicologist in her own right. I feel that she would be a wonderful addition to the committee as a faculty reader. Dr. Steven Johnson, a former professor of mine, is the designated honors coordinator for the School of Music and, since Music is my primary major, it seems fitting that he should be the faculty reader. Dr. Johnson is familiar with former multimedia projects that I have completed and would provide helpful academic feedback as a professor of musicology.

**Project Timeline**

I am completing an independent readings course with Dr. Jeremy Grimshaw and by September, will hopefully have all of the preliminary research completed. By October, I hope to be filming, compiling and writing much of the label content for the exhibit. By November, we should be ready to install. During the three months that the exhibit will be open, I hope to collect feedback to include in my Honors Thesis write-up. I should be ready to defend and perhaps publish by April 2018.

**Funding**

While this project is already being funded by an ORCA grant and the library has many available resources that significantly decrease the cost of the exhibition, there are some expensive aspects of this project that could make or break the experience. Because I hope to be able to provide each listener with a personal experience with the music/sounds as an art object, I would like to supply them with an MP3 player and include iPad installments throughout to guide the visit in each defined section of the space. I also am hoping to be able to work with a film student to produce a quality video of local groups and also am hoping to commission a piece of sculpture for the space that will enhance the visual experience and lend a feeling of universal sacredness to the space. There are also costs with advertising and publications that I hope to be able to cover as I intend the exhibit to reach a variety of people, on and off campus. If possible, I wish to be considered to receive an additional $1000.

**Culminating Experience**

I am anticipating the final project to be a type of performance exhibition. I hope to be able to present this in a public space, in a formal enough setting that people can appreciate the sacred subject matter, but in an accessible and engaging way that will allow viewers from all backgrounds to walk away feeling like they can appreciate the beauty in how others, not of their faith(s), worship through sound.

While the finished product will be an educational exhibit, my actual thesis will be a compilation of my research in written form. I also hope to reach out and publish my work in more innovative ways. For example, I am hoping to use the adjacent auditorium to host
musical performances and lectures once a month while the exhibit is up to maintain interest in the exhibit and invite people who may not otherwise pay a visit to the first floor of the library.
II. Concluding Report

Introduction

Sacred Sounds was an ORCA funded research project that resulted in an exhibit that ran from November 10, 2017 to February 1, 2018 in the Harold B. Lee Library. The overall goal was to curate an immersive, multimedia, musical experience that focused on the three Abrahamic religions and explored the ways in which music embodies and interacts with the Divine. I hoped to create, through the lens of music, a compelling experience for visitors to cultivate empathy among local Jewish, Christian, and Islamic communities.

Methodology

The exhibit itself had five components: a self-guided audio tour featuring the sounds of prayer, worship, and devotion from the three Abrahamic religions; sacred texts on display courtesy of the BYU Special Collections; an interactive playlist; a custom made “prayer bench” and art installation by Brandon Boulton (MFA Student); six original documentary segments highlighting local congregations and interfaith choirs by Peter Totten (BFA Student). Each part of the exhibit served an integral purpose to the visitor experience. For example, listeners could enjoy a variety of musical samples from the Islamic “Call to Prayer” to the “Kyrie” from the Mass Ordinaire. Because the medium of music is time, it requires patience and gives listeners an opportunity to practice listening. Visitors begin their visit by practicing listening to music and, with the documentary segments, conclude by practicing listening to people. I felt that the documentary component, which showcased Imam Muhammed Mehtar of the Khadeeja Islamic Center and Cantor Wendy Bat-Sarah of the Kol Ami Jewish Congregation among others, communicated the relevance of the exhibit content by bringing in a local element. This was perhaps the most time consuming—and most important—aspect of the Sacred Sounds experience.

It is important to mention that early on in my research process, I came to realize that “music” in and of itself is a problematic term. The definition is not universal, even if the concept seems to be. Rather, it may be the most correct to say, in the words of Bruno Nettl, “that all societies have a kind of sound communication that they distinguish from ordinary speech, and that this could be a kind of baseline for music” (Nettl 466). This became an especially important consideration with regards to Islamic acoustical practices. Thus, the term music is used carefully throughout the accompanying audio guide, and the title considers “sacred sounds.”

Due to the multidisciplinary nature of the project, Sacred Sounds required collaboration across a variety of fields and departments. Additional support for selecting musical content was given by Dr. Jeremy Grimshaw of the School of Music, and interfaith coordination and consultation was given by Dr. Andrew Reed of the Department of Religion. The exhibit was made possible by the generous funding of the ORCA Foundation and the BYU Honors Program. Other contributors, such as Dr. Lloyd Miller, Cantor Wendy Bat-Sarah, Imam Muhammed Mehtar, Debra Bonner, Leland Spindler, Jeannine Musarsa, Lucas Jones, and Jeff Sheets made invaluable contributions to the final product through their willing participation.
Results

It was my hope that *Sacred Sounds* would facilitate open and respectful interfaith dialogues and pave the way for future organizations that would long outlast the duration of the exhibit. I am pleased to report that this is exactly what has occurred. I had an opportunity to participate in the Jewish-Mormon Dialogue Project, an initiative that until then had only included a select group of professors. While the community we interacted with was remote, it was a personally enriching experience that I would not have had otherwise. I was able to apply what I had learned from my mentors to the diverse parties involved with the *Sacred Sounds* interfaith initiative. As a result, relationships between BYU and local religious leaders have been strengthened. An interfaith panel discussion will take place on January 25, 2018 where members from a variety of religious and ethnic backgrounds will be given an opportunity to discuss the role of sound in worship and strategies for future interfaith discourse. Perhaps the greatest accomplishment of all is the creation of the BYU Student Interfaith Club which will be official by Fall 2018.

Response & Discussion

This initiative has received nothing but positive feedback from the campus and local communities. Several have expressed the timeliness of this exhibit with concurrent events and have appreciated the opportunity to learn more about the shared commonalities, rather than our integral differences of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Around 100 people were in attendance at the exhibit opening on November 10, confirming both a need and an interest in the topics at hand. Since then, articles have been featured in print and online formats in *The Daily Herald*, *The Universe*, and the *Deseret News*. In addition to positive press, the College of Fine Arts and Communications has secured funding in order to make a video feature of myself and others who were involved in the creation of *Sacred Sounds* in order to encourage future experiential learning opportunities and the generous donations that make them possible.

Conclusion

This project has resulted in a community awareness of our religious diversity, a more educated audience and even a BYU Interfaith Student Club. As I worked to create an experience that changed people, I found myself constantly overwhelmed by the amount of support and enthusiasm from those I invited to participate. The effects of my research and its presentation will, as I hoped, long outlast the exhibit itself. While there is much work ahead of us in the field of interfaith relations, I am confident that the *Sacred Sounds* exhibition made—and will continue to make—a valuable contribution and inspire empathy among the three Abrahamic religions.
III. Exhibit Labels

Sacred Sounds

Brigham Young University
Harold B Lee Library
Auditorium Library
November 7, 2017 - January 31, 2018
Oroz Group exhibit organized by
Maddie Blomquist
Welcome | Salve

Conflicts between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have existed over the course of history. Still, they share a monotheistic belief in God and a common claim as “Children of Abraham.” As such, these faiths revere the divine word in written and spoken form, which has led each to develop a rich tradition of sacred sounds. This is perhaps the most important way in which all three seek to convey the transcendent nature of God’s message.

The purpose of this exhibit is to inspire a greater appreciation for the integral differences and intimate similarities between the three primary Abrahamic religions. We hope that you leave with a renewed curiosity and respect for the sounds of these faiths and the beliefs that inspire them.

As you move throughout the exhibit, you will encounter both familiar and unfamiliar sounds. We ask that you approach all of these with a fresh perspective. How do the aural effects and written meanings of the selections complement each other?

A Note from the Curators

Dear Friends,

Early on in its conception, we recognized that the content for Sacred Sounds would include delicate subject matter. We have felt the weight of our responsibility to handle this material with care and consideration. In an effort to avoid misrepresentation, we have corresponded with experts from a variety of disciplines, consulted leaders of local congregations, and done our best to thoroughly research the chosen topics. In view of this, it should be noted that this exhibit is meant to be a sampling and is in no way comprehensive.

Each religion has its own rich, acoustic tradition. We have tried to achieve a balance between making the content accessible to a primarily Western audience and celebrating the unique practices of these selections in context. However, we acknowledge our inadequacy to fully do so since truly moving outside of our own cultural and religious backgrounds is an ultimate impossibility.

Our hope is that this exhibit will allow its participants to cultivate empathy between members of the three Abrahamic religions through the lens of musical sounds. While there may be slight imperfections in presentation, this project is the product of nothing but the best intentions.

Respectfully,
Maddie Blonquist & Lucas Jones
The Word

“To begin, the faith of the Jews, Christians, and Muslims, the identity of each as a community, and their shaped hope for salvation are all inextricably tied to a book.”  

In addition to their claims to the lineage of Abraham, these three faiths are also known as “People of the Book.” God is considered to be a Divine Author, his very words imbued with the power of creation. The attempt of mankind to illuminate the Word through sublime sound is a common thread that links Jewish, Islamic and Christian tonal traditions.

The Qurʾān, Torah, and Holy Bible are cherished records of God’s instructions and are treated with the utmost reverence and sanctity.

Device Instructions

This device will allow you to access the curated musical selections in the first portion of the exhibit space. We encourage you to listen to the musical examples in their entirety, but have programmed the device to enable you to select and repeat musical examples at your leisure. By plugging personal headphones into the second splitter outlet, two visitors can use one device simultaneously.

Please return devices to the charging dock at the conclusion of your experience. Thank you.
What is a “sacred sound?”

“The world itself seems to be composed by a certain harmony of sounds, and heaven itself revolves with an accompanying change of harmony.” -Isidor of Seville, Etymologicarum sive Originum libri xx

Music has always been a mystical experience. We instinctively use this intangible medium to facilitate and communicate with the Divine. Believers use music—both personally and collectively—to deliver pleas for mercy and express proclamations of faith. These practices can range from recited prayers, the blowing of the shofar, the chanting of holy writ, to the unified timbre of a choir, the call and response of a congregation, or even the voice of a solitary soloist. We invite you to contemplate the innumerable types of sounds that could be encompassed by this broad definition.

Prayer
Islam | *Adhan* (Call to Prayer)
Performed by Ahmad Al-Nafees

Allahuu Akbar
Aashhadu Allaa ilaaha Illal-Laah
Aashhadu Aanna Muhammadar rasulul-laah
Haiya 'Alas-salah
Haiya 'Alal-falah
Haiya 'Alal-falah
Allahuu Akbar
Allahuu Akbar
Laa ilaaha Illal-Laah.

Allah is Most Great.
I testify that there is no god except ALLAH.
I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.
Come to prayer.
Come to success.
Come to success.
Allah is Most Great.
Allah is Most Great.
There is no god except Allah.

Judaiivism | *Neilah* (“Closing the gate”)
Responsive High Holiday Forgiveness Prayer, closing of Yom Kippur
Salomon Sulzer arrangement, Ashkenazic tradition

[Adonai, Adonai]
Eil rachum vechnunus
[erech apayin]
verav chesed ve'emet
[nosar chesed la'ahafin]
nosei avon vafeshe vechehu'ah venakeh
[vesakhatsh la''avoneimu]
alechatateimu senechalatu

[The Lord, the Lord,]
merciful and compassionate,
[patient One,]
abounding in love and faithfulness,
[assuring love for thousands of generations,]
gorgiving iniquity, transgression and sin,
[pardon our iniquity]
And our sin, claim us for Your own.
Christianity | The Lord’s Prayer
Book of Common Prayer, 1635
Recordings taken from Madrid, Barcelona, Paris, and Washington DC

Pater noster qui es in caelis,
sanctificetur nomen tuum.
Adveniet regnum tuum.
Fiat voluntas tua,
sicut in caelo et in terra.
Panem nostrum quotidiam da nobis hodie,
et dimittite nobis debita nostra sicut et nos
dimittimus debitoris nostris.
Et ne nos inducas in tentationem,
sed libera nos a malo.
Amen.

Our Father which art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done
in earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive them that trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation.
But deliver us from evil.
Amen.
Islam | Surah No. 4
Excerpt from the fourth chapter of the Qur’ān
Recited by Abdul Basit Abdus Samad

Yaa aiyuhan naasut taqoo Rabbakumul lazee khalakum min nafsinw waahidatinw wa khalaqa minhahaa zawjahaa wa bas sa minhumaa rjaalan kaseeranw wa nisaa'a'a; wattaqul laahallazee tasawaa 'aloona bihee wal arhaam; innal laaha kaana 'alaikum Raqeeba

O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women. And fear Allah, through whom you ask one another, and the wombs. Indeed Allah is ever, over you, an Observer.

Judaism | Ahavah Rabah ("With Great Love")
The Priestly Blessing’s Introductory Liturgical Verse
Supplicatory mode

Eloheinu veillohei avoteinu,
borceinu vabrachah hamshuleshet,
batorah haktuvah

al yedei mosheh avdecha,
ha'amurah mipi

aharon uvanav, kohanim

am kedoshecha, ka'amur.

Our God and God of our forebears
bless us with the three-fold blessing
written in the Torah
by Your servant, Moses,
and pronounced aloud by
Aaron and his priestly descendants,
Your holy people, as it is written.
Christianity | *La Messe de Nostre Dame*: Kyrie
Guillaume de Machaut (1300-1377)
Mass (Mass Ordinary cycle)
Performed by the Oxford Camerata

*Kyrie eleison.*
Lord have mercy.

*Christe eleison.*
Christ have mercy.

*Kyrie eleison.*
Lord have mercy.

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Devotion
Islam | *Tala’al Badru Alayna*
Nasheed (Chant)
Performed by Sami Yusuf

*Tala al Badru ‘Alayna*
Min Thaniyati-al Wada’
Wajaba Shukru ‘Alayna
Ma da’a lillahi da’

*O the white moon rose over us*
*From the valley of Wada’*
*And we owe it to show gratefulness*
*Where the call is to Allah*

Ayxyha-al Mab’uthu feena
Ji’ta bi-al amru muta’
Ji’ta sharaafa al Madneenah
Marhaban ya khayra da’

*Oh you, who were raised among us*
*Coming with a word to be obeyed*
*You have brought to this city nobleness*
*Welcome best caller to God’s way*

Judaism | *Mizmor le'Dovid*
Psalm 23
Performed by Yitzchak Meir Helfgot and Itzhak Perlman

*Mizmor le'Dovid;*
Hashem roei lo echsawr.

*A Psalm of David.*
The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures:
He leads me beside the still waters.

Binos desheh yarbitzaim, al mei menuchos yenahaleini.

He restores my soul:
He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.

Nafshi yeshovery yanchaim bemagelel tzedek lema’an shemo.

Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of Death, I will fear no evil: for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff they comfort me.

Gar mi elech be’gei tzalmawves, lo iarw raw ki ataw imadi, shvtechaw u mishantechaw hemaw yenachamuni.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies: you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Ta’aroche lefe’awal shulchaw neged tzoriro dischantaw vashemen roshi, cosi rivawyaw.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Ach tov vaw’chesed yirdifuni kol yemei chayoi ve’shavti be’veis Hashem l’orech yawnim.
Christianity | 7 Magnificat Antiphons: “O Weisheit”
Arvo Pärt (b. 1935)
Performed by the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir

O Weisheit, hervorgegangen aus dem Munde des Höchsten,
O Wisdom, sprung forth from the mouth of the most high,

Die Welt umspannst du von einem Ende zum andern,
You embrace the world from one end to the other.

In Kraft und Milde ordnest du alles:
In strength and mildness you put everything in order;

O komm und offenbare uns den Weg der Weisheit und der Einsicht.
O come and reveal to us the way of wisdom and understanding.

Brandon Boulton | Three People
Light and building material

Artist Statement:

“While creating this piece, I began thinking about the core concepts of the Sacred Sounds exhibit. I entertained various responses to many topics: religion, historiography, texts, faith, power, semiotics, humanity, language, and then juxtaposed these ideas to three other guiding concepts: People, Places, and Things.”

As you engage with this installation, ask: “In what ways does this piece embody the themes of sacred text, musical practices and interfaith unity to me?”
What are your “sacred sounds?”

While we have presented you with a rudimentary sampling of musical texts, we recognize that there is a plethora of other selections individuals and communities throughout the world draw upon to connect with the Divine and elevate spiritual understanding. We invite you to leave your mark on the exhibit by adding spiritually significant selections of your own to our interactive playlist.

Please respect the sacred nature of the content by only adding appropriate material.

Peter Totten | All the Families of the Earth

While these religions may have originated ancienly in other parts of the world, we are lucky enough to enjoy a rich community of diverse faiths right here in our own local communities.

These documentary segments highlight local congregational leaders, students and faculty from a variety of religious backgrounds, as well as musical groups who are promoting interfaith initiatives through music. We hope the viewpoints our participants provide will be insightful and enable you to feel more confident as you have opportunities to interact with religious diversity in the future.

The views shared by the participants are entirely their own and do not reflect the opinion of Brigham Young University.

Segments (Approx. 5 minutes each)

1. About the Project
2. The Kadeeja Islamic Center of Utah
3. Cantor Wendy Bat-Sarah: Thoughts on Jewish Music
4. Songs of Praise: Debra Bonner & the Unity Gospel Choir
5. Lux Singers: Blending Hearts and Voices
6. BYU’s Interfaith Community
Thank You | Tibi gratias ago

There are many opportunities to participate locally in interfaith dialogues and community music ensembles. We invite you to continue to cultivate empathy and understanding for those within and without your religious community through attendance and participation. Below you will find a list of corresponding lectures, events, services, and performances from some of our participants. If you’d like to receive these updates online, follow our “Sacred Sounds: Interfaith Initiative” Facebook page or take a flyer on your way out.

Please feel free to write your impressions in our notebook; we’d love to hear from you! We hope you had an uplifting experience.

Special Thanks

Brandon Boulton
Peter Totten
Solomon Reynolds
Dr. Jeremy Grimshaw
Dr. Andrew Reed
Prof. Jeff Sheets
Dr. Lloyd Miller
Eric Howard
Christiane Ramsay
Ben Crowder
Carlie Weyrauch
Christina Thomas
Leland Spindler

Lux Singers
Debra Bonner
The Unity Gospel Choir
Kol Ami Jewish Center
Cantor Wendy Bat-Sarah
Khadeeja Islamic Center
Imam Muhammed Mehtar
Maggie Kopp
Alan Harker
ORCA
BYU Honors Program
Harold B. Lee Library
Student & Faculty Participants
IV. Audio Content

**Introduction**

**Narrator:** Welcome to the audio portion of *Sacred Sounds: A Compassionate Listening Guide to Musical Worship.* I’m Solomon Reynolds and will be accompanying you today. As you move throughout the space, feel free to repeat audio examples that you find especially meaningful. We hope you will find this presentation insightful and gain a greater appreciation for the beautiful and diverse tonal traditions of the three Abrahamic religions. When you are ready to begin, please join me at the prayer wall, located to the right of the audio station.

**Prayer**

**Narrator:** Prayer is a common practice among faiths throughout the world. Since Islam, Judaism and Christianity share a common monotheistic theology, you will notice that their prayers similarly reflect proclamations of One God over all. That being said, as you listen to the selections in this section, notice the differences that uniquely distinguish each faith and express their respective interpretations of God’s character.

Either during or after your experience, we invite you to use the prayer bench to sit, kneel, and ponder what you have heard today.

**Narrator:** The call to prayer occurs 5 times a day, ringing out over the landscape by a lone voice from the top of the minaret. In cities with multiple minarets, the call to prayer creates a flood of echoes that immerse the surroundings in music and ritual. Prayer is one of the five pillars of Islam and invites all to pause from their daily activities and worship. Followers of Allah find quiet spaces, and practice ritual cleanliness by placing a prayer rug on the ground, facing the direction of Mecca—the center of Islamic worship.

Islam - Track 1: A recording by Ahmad Al-Nafees of the Call to Prayer.

**Narrator:** This selection is a High Holiday Forgiveness Prayer from *Neilah,* the closing service on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Typically, this prayer chant is led by a Cantor and invites worshippers to sing each bracketed opening line, creating an ensuing call-and-response antiphonal effect. Keep in mind that this particular interpretation is modelled after the Western Ashkenazic tradition; Judaism as a broader entity encapsulates a rich variety of musical modes and melodies. This selection is in no way a representation of the whole, but rather an example of what you would most likely hear locally.

Judaism - Track 2: Recording taken from Guy L. Beck field recording

**Narrator:** In Catholicism, The Lord’s Prayer occurs each week during Mass in congregations around the globe. Led by the Priest, it unites the crowd in communal devotion, filling stony sanctuaries with the blend of an anonymous murmur. In loving
imitation, Christians of all denominations have used variations of the prayer that Christ taught to his disciples for thousands of years.

Christianity - Track 3: Recordings taken from the National Cathedral in Washington DC, Notre Dame on Paris, Plaza Mayor in Madrid, and La Sagrada Familia in Barcelona

Worship

Narrator: I would now like to invite you to hear a few liturgical examples from each of these faiths. Like prayer, these selections are typically heard in formal religious settings. The recitation of the Qur’an, the Mass Ordinary and the excerpt from the Priestly Blessing are just a few examples of devotional texts that are incorporated in standard worship.

Narrator: While many Westerners may define the sacred sounds in Islam as “music,” it is important to remember that Muslims would not consider it as such. However, these sounds are set apart from regular speech patterns and take on a melodious quality to better communicate the divine message of Allah.

The recitation of the Qur’an is perhaps one of the best examples of this. It is performed formally in the mosque and informally at home by professional reciters, religious functionaries and Muslim laymen and laywomen. As a highly developed art, many Muslims spend years learning the correct pronunciation and nuances of inflection required to adequately recite it. This tradition invites followers to listen with the kind of respect, attention, and awe that the text deserves.

After you complete the audio tour, please feel free to look at the 18th-century Qur’an and the corresponding rules of recitation located in the front display case.

Islam Track 4: A recording by Abdul Basit Abdus Samad of Surah 4, An-Nisa.

Narrator: A prevalent feature of sacred Jewish music is its use of “modes.” A “mode” is a type of scale that provides the melodic framework and overall tone of a musical message. Jewish Cantors throughout time sought to enhance the meaning of the text by thoughtfully pairing sacred texts with associated modal connotations. These introductory liturgical verses are accompanied by the Ahavah Rabah, “the supplicatory mode.” Its major quality and lowered second and sixth scale degrees are intended to inspire contrition in the worshipper. As you listen, consider how the melodic contour imitates the imploring text.

Judaism - Track 5: Priestly Blessing’s Introductory Liturgical Verse from Guy L. Beck field recording.

Narrator: The Kyrie is the first of five movements that constitute the Catholic Mass Ordinary. This piece, and others like it, expresses a reliance on the Divine and a supplication for Christ’s mercy--a central fixture of Christianity. The Western Tonal
tradition was born from these modal arrangements of religious text. This arrangement
dates back to the mid 1300s and was transcribed using early musical notation. To see an
example of this medieval type of score, check out the Gradual in the front display case.

Christianity - Track 6: A recording by the Oxford Camerata of *La messe de nostre dame.*

**Devotion**

Narrator: Let’s listen now to a few examples of spiritual “Devotion.” Here, you will find examples of music that strive to create an experience with the divine outside of formal settings.

Narrator: The Islamic world is home to a rich acoustic tradition, even if it does not define its practices as “musical” in the Western sense. This *nasheed* or chant, is a vocal genre that is either sung a capella or accompanied by percussion instruments such as the *daf.* The subject matter typically references Islamic beliefs, history and religion in addition to current events. The poetry of this *nasheed* pays homage to the Prophet Muhammed and recalls his inspired journey from Mecca to Medina.

Islam - Track 7: *Nasheed Tala’al Badru Alayna* recorded by Sami Yusuf.

Narrator: The book of Psalms appears in the third section of the Jewish Tanakh and contains poems meant for musical worship. Psalm 23, one of the best known passages, describes the role of God as our Shepherd. This somber rendition of the Psalm, sung in the original Hebrew, instills confidence in God’s guidance and protection.

Judaism - Track 8: A recording by Yitzchak Meir Helfgot and Itzhak Perlman of *Mizmor le’Dovid.*

Narrator: “O Weisheit” is a 20th-century composition that borrows the text of one of the seven Magnificat Antiphons. Typically these pieces would be performed during the last seven days of the Advent in the Roman Catholic tradition, but other Christian congregations have adopted them as part of their standard praise litany. Regardless of when or where you hear it, the triadic harmonies of this selection invite listeners to indeed approach the source of divine Wisdom.

Christianity - Track 9: A recording of “O Weisheit” by Arvo Pärt. Performed by the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir.

**Conclusion**

Narrator: We hope you enjoyed this brief survey of sacred sounds. For the remainder of your visit, we invite you interact with Brandon Boulton’s art installation entitled *Three People,* watch a few documentary segments about local congregations and interfaith communities, and take some time to view the objects on display from BYU Special Collections. To find out more about our corresponding lecture series and how to get
involved in interfaith dialogue, follow our Facebook page at Sacred Sounds: Interfaith Initiative or take a flyer on your way out. Thanks again for taking the time to listen.

**Narrator:** Special thanks to the Harold B. Lee Library, ORCA Grant Foundation, and the Honors Program for generously making this exhibit possible. Consulted resources include *Sacred Sound* edited by Guy L. Beck, *The Voice, the Word, The Books* by F.E. Peters, and highlighted participants.
V. Selected Guest Book Comments

“I especially loved the installation piece! Thank you for creating this uplifting exhibit.”

“Congratulations on a truly remarkable exhibit. The exhibit and the inspiration behind it is truly touching.”

“A marvelous concept very beautifully presented. Very educational and broadening. Thank you for your talent and effort to give us this experience.”

“Very beautiful exhibit, makes me appreciate those around me more.”

“Powerful. Spiritual. Beautiful.”

“This was absolutely beautiful. I wish we could all come together to learn from each other.”

“Very important exhibition in this day and age. Thank you for bringing awareness to all of us, human beings.”

“A thoughtful and well done exhibit. It is important material and encouraging hope. Thank you!”

“I freaking love the Middle East, thank you for bringing it into our home.”

“Beautiful exhibit with a timely message! Thank you.”

“Incredible reminder that these different religions are founded on similar principles and united in their similar end goals.”

“I truly felt the united connection with other faiths that this exhibit promoted. I realized that we all want the same thing; connection with God. Sounds have a unique way of doing that. Thanks!”

“This is enlightening. I love how similar these faiths are in their methods of worship through song.”

“Thank you so much – I feel strongly that there is much more that unites our faiths than that which divides it. Your representation of musical traditions is respectful and meaningful. Thank you thank you thank you!”

“This was a beautiful and important exhibit. Thank you so much!”

“What a timely and important exhibit. In a world that tells us we’re all different (too different from each other) this sacred place is a beautiful reminder that the same light shines on all of us.”
BYU's 'Sacred Sounds' brings together Islamic, Jewish and Christian musical traditions

By Jason Swansen @jnswansen
Published: December 20, 2017 11:20 am
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PROVO, Utah — As a dual major at Brigham Young University (music, humanities), Maddie Bionquist has developed an affinity for ancient religious texts and how music elevates their sacred messages.

As a returned missionary (New York, New York), she also owns a deep and spiritual love for connecting people through shared religious beliefs and traditions.

Those sensibilities were essential to Bionquist as the primary curator of "Sacred Sounds" — an interfaith exhibition on display at BYU’s Harold B. Lee Library.

"Sacred Sounds" explores the many ways Judaism, Islam and Christianity use sound in worship. Music plays a fundamental and historic role in each of the three primary Abrahamic religions.

For believers, holy texts such as the Talmud, the Quran, the Bible or the Book of Mormon convey God’s message to the world. "And music," said Bionquist, "helps elevate that message to a higher plan of communication."

The exhibition offers a variety of sounds designed to draw listeners closer to their Creator — including the Muslim "Call to Prayer;" Jewish liturgical verses and choir performances from Christian community choirs.

Because worshipful music and sacred texts are inextricably linked, "Sacred Sounds" includes a display of several ancient religious texts from the Harold B. Lee Library Special Collections.

Bionquist hopes visitors feel an active, personal connection and investment with the sounds and relics on display. "Music is a medium that requires patience and time," she noted.

"Sacred Sounds" also offers empathy and connection at a time when religious beliefs often prompt division and distrust.

"I would hope [the exhibition] gets us to think more openly and have religious conversations," she said.

Andrew Reed, a BYU religious education professor who assisted with the exhibition, said unity could often be found through religious music. "We focus so much on the differences that we forget there is a rich vein of commonality."

Professor Reed added that religious music has, for centuries, been utilized as a teaching tool for sacred matters. Consider how Latter-day Saint children learn gospel principles each Sunday by singing Primary songs.

Lectures are being held at the BYU campus in conjunction with "Sacred Sounds," including a Jan. 25 interfaith panel discussion. Go to the library’s website for additional information.

Bionquist worked closely on "Sacred Sounds" with several faculty members and BYU alums — including Lucas Jones, advertising professor Jeff Sheets, music professor Jeremy Grimmer and Professor Reed.


The LDS Church News is an official publication of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The publication's content supports the doctrines, principles and practices of the Church.
Many people associate libraries with silence. In the Harold B. Lee Library's newest exhibit, however, the focus is on sound.

“Sacred Sounds: A Compassionate Listening Guide to Musical Worship” is an interfaith exploration of how Judaism, Christianity, and Islam use sound in worship. In the form of a guided audio tour, visitors listen to the Muslim “Call to Prayer,” Jewish liturgical verses and Christian choral anthems while reading the words displayed. They also have the opportunity to view art installations created by Visual Arts student Brandon Boulton and a documentary created by film student Peter Totten. Ancient religious texts from Harold B. Lee Library’s Special Collections are also on display.

The exhibit, curated by Maddie Blonquist, hopes to inspire a greater appreciation for the differences and similarities of the three Abrahamic religions. While the religions have a long and complicated history, each believes in a monotheistic God and considers themselves as “Children of Abraham.” They also have all created similar traditions of sacred sounds, stemming from the reverence they carry for their divine written and spoken word.

Blonquist said, “If you trace most music back to its most primitive roots, it almost always is based in sacred subject matter. The voice of God, recorded as holy scripture, is probably the most sacred sound there is, and I think it’s the desire to preserve this in its authenticity that has motivated all three religions to cultivate such a rich aural tradition for hundreds of years.”

BYU student John Carden said that walking through the exhibit “reaffirmed [his] knowledge that the three religions are closely related. The similarities are seen by how they convey their devotion to God.”

Blonquist added that the exhibit experience can range from five minutes to an hour, depending on how engaged visitors would like to be. Near the end of the exhibits, visitors are encouraged to add music to a playlist, allowing them to wonder what sounds are sacred to them. They are also invited to corresponding lectures that will be hosted each month. The lectures will encourage interfaith dialogue and promote community initiatives.

She hopes that the exhibit will prompt people to “cultivate empathy among other faiths through the lens of music, a medium that in and of itself asks us to practice patience and careful listening.”

The exhibit will run until Jan. 31, 2018. It is located in Brigham Young University’s Harold B. Lee Library on the first floor. It is open during all library hours and admission is free.
This new BYU student group seeks interfaith understanding

By Kelsey Dallas  @kelsey_dallas
Published: January 26, 2018 12:00 pm

PROVO — Maddie Blouquist celebrated the end of one interfaith adventure and the beginning of another Thursday at the front of Brigham Young University’s Harold B. Lee Library auditorium.

The art exhibit she’d curated for display in the library, *Sacred Sounds: A Compassionate Listening Guide to Musical Worship,* was wrapping up its three-month run. And the new BYU Interfaith Club, which she will co-lead, was just getting started.

“I wanted the interest in this exhibit to funnel into something that has more longevity,” said the senior humanities major.

She launched that transition with Thursday’s hour-long panel on the importance of interfaith dialogue, bringing together an imam, a Jewish music leader, a BYU professor and more than 100 of her classmates.

Blouquist first got interested in religious diversity during her mission for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in New York City. She was exposed to unfamiliar faiths and wanted to learn more.

Kelsey Dallas, Deseret News

This display, part of a BYU library exhibit titled "Sacred Sounds: A Compassionate Listening Guide to Musical Worship," showcases important prayer songs from Islam, Judaism and Christianity.

Her sacred sounds research allowed just that, bringing her out of her comfort zone and into new houses of worship. She met Imam Muhammed Mehtar, the religious leader for the Khadeejah Islamic Center in West Valley City, and Wendy Bat-Sarah, cantor for Congregation Kol Ami in Salt Lake City, who both sat with her during Thursday morning's event.

Blouquist, Imam Mehtar and Cantor Bat-Sarah were joined at the front of the auditorium by Blouquist's two on-campus partners in her interfaith work: Savannah Clawson, the other student leader of the BYU Interfaith Club, and Andrew Reed, a comparative religions and church history professor.

The group discussed common misconceptions about interfaith engagement and the value of choosing curiosity over fear. The non-Mormon panelists laughed while sharing common pitfalls to avoid when visiting their faith communities.

"One of the things that always comes up when we have visitors is a comment like, 'That's odd you didn't mention Jesus,'" Cantor Bat-Sarah said. "Jesus is not part of Judaism."

Imam Mehtar joked that people don’t believe him when he talks about Muslims love of Jesus. "They say, "No, I think you are wrong," he said.

Reed told the students gathered in the auditorium that learning about other religions should be considered part of a good BYU education, noting that graduates are called to "go forth and serve" everyone, not just Mormons.

"One of the things I hope you are getting from this is the open invitation for us to be curious, to ask questions and to learn more," Reed said during the panel.

"Having this type of dialogue is very, very positive," added Imam Mehtar.

https://www.deseretnews.com/article/980008627/this-new-byu-student-group-seeks-interfaith-understanding.html
Kelsey Dallas, Deseret News

This display, part of a BYU library exhibit titled "Sacred Sounds: A Compassionate Listening Guide to Musical Worship," showcases important prayer songs from Islam, Judaism and Christianity.

Moving forward, BYU Interfaith Club will focus on making members more comfortable talking to people from different religious backgrounds, said Reed, who serves as club adviser. Meetings will include conversations about how to be a better friend to non-Mormon classmates and neighbors.

"This club is an opportunity for students to learn how to have interfaith dialogue in a respectful way, in a sensitive way, so that we're not just running around out there unaware that Jews don't necessarily believe in Jesus," he said.

Club leaders also envision the group as a safe space for non-Mormon students at BYU, although they admit it may take a while to make the group truly diverse.

Kelsey Dallas, Deseret News

Panelists from Brigham Young University, Khadeeja Islamic Center and Congregation Kol Ami discuss the value of interfaith engagement during a Jan. 25, 2018, panel at BYU.

"Because of our setting here at BYU, there's a good chance we'll have predominately LDS students at first, and I think that's OK," Reed said.

Blonquist and Clawson are currently preparing for their first formal club meeting, scheduled for Feb. 1, and working to fill open leadership positions.

"We're hoping that we will be able to start something really big and create an organization that will provide students ... with some training on how to respectfully approach interfaith dialogue," Blonquist said. "There's a good chance they're not going to be working in a homogenous LDS environment their whole lives."
Why interfaith programming matters at religious schools like BYU

by Kelsey Dallas  @kelsey_dallas
Published: February 1, 2018 5:00 am

PROVO — Maddie Blonquist wrapped up her proselytizing mission for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints feeling like she still had a lot to learn. During her time in New York City, she'd been exposed to many other faiths, but she hadn't had time to study them.

After her mission, Blonquist, now a senior humanities major at Brigham Young University, remedied her desire to know more with research and field trips. She visited synagogues and mosques and met with leaders from other faiths.

"I wanted to reach out to people that I didn't have a chance to meet while I was a missionary," she said.

Blonquist recently drew on her discoveries to create an exhibit on sacred sounds for her school's library, emphasizing a shared interest among Jews, Muslims and Christians in singing praises to God. This year, she'll help launch another learning opportunity, serving as co-leader of BYU's new interfaith club.

"We'll offer interfaith dialogue training for LDS students and an inclusive community for students who are not LDS," she said.

Provided by Kathryn Hiedelberger
Participants in Benedictine University's 2017 Interfaith Retreat participate in meditative practices at a local Buddhist temple.

Interfaith activism at religious colleges and universities can be difficult to negotiate, since most students, professors and even staff members come from the same faith background. Leaders like Blonquist can't just assume that students who belong to minority faiths will want to take part, said Brian Anderson, student leadership manager for Interfaith Youth Core, an organization that partners with schools to encourage interfaith cooperation.

In spite of those unique challenges, schools like BYU do well to offer interfaith programming, he said. The world beyond the college campus requires knowledge of many religions and an understanding of how faith intersects with all areas of life.

"Students are entering a diverse world. Even if they're living in a bubble now, they're not always going to be living in a bubble," Anderson said.

Beyond a safe space

Before taking his current role with Interfaith Youth Core, Anderson worked as an interfaith campus minister at Loyola University Chicago, a private Catholic school. Catholics comprised about half of the student body, and it was part of his job to support the non-Catholics who made up the other half.

Muslims, Jews and members of other minority groups self-organized into their own student groups, leaning on people who shared their faith to help them navigate campus life. Anderson's goal was to ensure that interreligious friendships were forming, too.

"I wanted to create an educational space, not just a safe space," he said.
Kathryn Heidelberger, coordinator of ecumenical and interfaith engagement at Benedictine University, another Catholic school in Lisle, Illinois, also addressed that distinction, noting that interfaith programming isn’t about simply playing nice with others.

"I’m trying to challenge the notion that interfaith is just about having a bunch of people around you who are different than you. It involves working to make a place that’s truly comfortable and inclusive," she said.

It isn’t enough for her school’s Catholics, Muslims, Jews and Protestants to be able to sit in the same room exchanging pleasantries. Heidelberger wants them to work toward addressing contentious political and theological differences.

Meaningful debates are a valuable outcome of interfaith activism, but they’re not possible right away, especially at religious colleges and universities, Anderson said. You can’t fairly represent all perspectives if participants all belong to the same faith.

"The work that needs to be done stems from the demographics that you have," he said, encouraging faculty and student leaders to focus on boosting religious literacy before planning high-profile events.

At BYU, it will take some time for the interfaith club to be truly interfaith, said Andrew Reed, a comparative religions and church history professor who is serving as the group’s faculty adviser.

"Because of our setting here at BYU, there’s a good chance we’ll have predominantly LDS students at first, and I think that’s OK," he said. The group can still start discussing the basic practices and beliefs of the world’s religions.

At religious schools, interfaith groups and programs don’t have to ignore their unique setting, Heidelberger said. It’s possible to emphasize Catholic or Mormon teachings that form the campus culture without making members of minority faith groups feel unwelcome.

"We are a Catholic school. We don’t want to make apologies for that. Our Catholic identity provides a robust commitment to welcoming and including everyone," she said.

As a result of the unique setting, however, members of minority religions on campus may be wary of getting involved, Anderson said, noting that other students need to respect that.

"If there’s no interest, leave them alone," he said.

Preparing for the real world

Interfaith activism is challenging for any person of faith, not just those enrolled at religious schools, according to campus leaders. It requires participants to take stock of their own limitations.

"Interfaith cooperation is only effective if you put in the work to figure out who you are," Heidelberger said.

This soul-searching should include grappling with your evangelistic instincts, or the desire to recruit new members to one’s own faith, Anderson said. Members of interfaith groups shouldn’t deny their interest in evangelism, but they also shouldn’t focus on it.

"If evangelization is part of your identity, don’t deny that part. But don’t go into the space seeking to evangelize," he said. "We encourage students to acknowledge that there are parts of their identity that are not as interfaith friendly."

At BYU, sharing one’s beliefs with others is an area of unique expertise. Many students serve religious missions for the LDS Church, during which they strive to bring new people into the Mormon faith.

As Blonquist works to launch the BYU Interfaith Club, she is trying to keep her fellow students focused on a different aspect of their missions: exposure to unfamiliar faiths. She reminds them that life after BYU will have more in common with the mission field than the campus environment.

"We're hoping that we will be able to start something really big and create an organization that will provide students ... with some training on how to respectfully approach interfaith dialogue," Blonquist said. "There's a good chance they're not going to be working in a homogenous LDS environment their whole lives."

Interfaith groups can also make life on a religious campus more interesting, noted Jacob Keeth, a senior at Biola University who helps lead a student ministry called Evangelical Mormon Interactions. When he enrolled at the evangelical Christian school, he was worried about the lack of theological diversity. The friendships he's formed with Mormons through the group helped expand his religious horizons.

"That's not something every Biola student has the opportunity to say," he said.

Anderson celebrated these stories, noting that all college students can benefit from engaging with people from different faiths.

"It's just as important to understand diverse religious backgrounds as it is to understand racial and gender differences," he said.
Works Cited


SACRED SOUNDS: Installation Shots