

**Past. Present and Future Memory informed by reverberation characteristics of worship (and performance) spaces**

Abstract

Worship spaces have a sound character of their own. The acoustical makeup of any space is complex. Among the components that contribute to the acoustical architecture of a worship space are reverberation characteristics. These characteristics affect both the spoken word and music and thus have an impact on the experience of worship.

The scope of this Project/Dissertation has been limited to the reverberation characteristics of two contrasting worship spaces and shows how they affected the responses of fifteen participants to selected pieces of choral music that were recorded in those spaces. The theoretical basis for the research centered on the participants' memory (past, present and future), a theme of aesthetics (as process rather than object-oriented in concept), and the creative imagination as the vehicle for the participants to articulate their experiences.

The methodology for the project was a phenomenological model that utilized individual interviews as the research technique. Fifteen participants sat for pre- and post-interviews; a listening component was the central focus. The pre-interview helped to establish what memories of music and sound each participant brought to the listening experience. Post-interviews served as the gathering tool for the raw data of the listening experiences. The interview responses were analyzed and coded and a thematic model of the essence of the listening experience emerged.

The results suggested that reverberation characteristics were a dominant player in the listening experience and by extension in the experience of worship. A sense of awe, wonder and mystery emerged as the prerogative of reverberation characteristics for all of the participants most of the time. The implications are that reverberation characteristics of worship spaces act as a theological soundboard that resonates with the worshipers' faith, and that reverberation characteristics hold potential to function as a language of mystery, aiding the interpretation and articulation of that faith. It occurs to me that these are rich but uncharted waters for neuroscientists as well.

The research project concluded that clergy, musicians and others (notably architects and church designers) are challenged to use existing reverberation characteristics more

creatively and to factor reverberation characteristics into the design of planned new worship spaces.

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## *Biography*

### *Bruce Wheatcroft*

Dr. Bruce Wheatcroft has spent most of his working career in the service of the church as a conductor, organist, teacher and administrator. He holds a D.Min. in theology from St. Stephen's College, Edmonton, a M.Mus in Musicology from the University of Alberta a B.Mus. in organ performance from the University of Calgary and the ARCCO diploma from The Royal Canadian College of Organists. He has also been active as a teacher in the public school system of Alberta and has lectured at undergraduate and graduate levels for the University of Alberta in the Department of Music and the Department of Education and has taught for the faculty of music at McGill University.

Since 1972 Dr. Wheatcroft has conducted, performed and recorded as a concert organist throughout North America, Asia and Europe. He has been frequently heard as a recitalist or as conductor for national CBC broadcasts and has performed at national conventions of The Royal Canadian College of Organists. He has held important church music posts in Montreal (The Church of St. Andrew and St. Paul) and Western Canada (Robertson-Wesley United Church and St. Paul's United Church), is very active as an adjudicator and has developed a distinguished career as a teacher, workshop leader and lecturer throughout the country. He has served as a board member for *Festivals on the St. Lawrence*, a bi-national performing and visual arts, heritage and outreach initiative along the St. Lawrence Seaway.

He is a co-founder of *The Abbey for the Arts, Inc.*, his country home, which functions as a retreat centre for the arts and other special interest groups. At *The Abbey*, he serves as workshop leader, facilitator, teacher or as host for others using the facility.