

Creating Harmony

A Review of the ArtServe Festival 2024
Friday 18th—Sunday 20th October

'Creating Harmony' will mean different things to different people, and during our Festival weekend we tried to include as many interpretations of the theme as we could. There was opportunity for creating harmony through practical music and singing, as well as talking about the music we use in worship; we thought about creating harmony within the environment and protecting our beautiful earth, and about harmony between different cultures; there was harmony among ourselves, with companionship and conversation as we learned new things; and of course we created harmony with one another and with God in our worship, in our activities, and in our being together.

This was, of course, the first Festival in a new venue: Kents Hill Park Conference Centre in Milton Keynes. The facilities were excellent, with comfortable accommodation, and good and plentiful food, with meals taken in the pleasant dining room. The meeting spaces suited our needs perfectly, and some people even took advantage of the on-site gym and swimming pool! There were a few hiccups, as there will always be in a new place – some found the site difficult to navigate due to lack of signage, and we had some difficulties with the new sound system, for instance – but the Festival Planning Team will look carefully at all the feedback from participants to see how we can make improvements for future events.



*Good venue, good food!
Staff pleasant and helpful
So much walking...*

Rock 'n' Roll's Rocky Relationship with Worship

The Festival began after dinner on Friday evening with a keynote address by our guest speaker, Revd Jenny Pathmarajah. She spoke about the appearance of rock 'n' roll music in the 1950s, and about its origins in slavery, oppression and tyranny before the right white face – one Elvis Presley – made rock 'n' roll music (and the anything-but-innocent dancing that accompanied it) marketable, thus causing a genuine moral crisis for the nation and the church.

So how did we get from public burnings of rock n roll records and magazines to guitars, drums and microphones inside a church? Jenny spoke about the flower power movement of the 1960s, the civil rights movement, the feminist movement, the beginning of the LGBT movement, and how music mirrored the change society and young people craved. There was a new willingness to blend popular music with an evangelical message, and modern music was used as a means of engaging with non-Christian young people in an accessible way.

The genre of 'Christian rock' became a dominant force in pop music in the 1980s and 1990s; the protests died out, and a dying church saw the rising popularity of churches embracing this style of music. The last 70 years have shown us a chequered history of the church's relationship with music, but God has the power to work through everything.

Jenny concluded by reading her version of Psalm 150:

Turn up the volume!
Make music in God's holy house of worship,

Listen to God in the open skies;
feel God's awesome power through a soundwave;
know in your heart of God's magnificent greatness.
Make God's music by turning up the electric guitar to number 11;
make God's music with the slapping of a bass;
make God's music with synthesisers and dad dance;
make God's music with DJ booths and mixers.
Show God you're there with cymbals, snares and every drum possible;
say yes to God with karaoke and microphones.
Let every living, breathing creature make music to God!
Turn up the volume!



Wonderful keynote speaker

Very enlightening and
challenging

Jenny was amazing and so
positively enthusiastic

Saturday morning prayers were led by our magazine editor, Jude Simms, and included both 'secular' and 'sacred' music. We began by listening to a song called 'The Sky and the Sun and the Dawn' (sung by Celtic Woman), which celebrates the rising sun bringing light to the world, then sang together Michael Baughen's hymn 'We worship God in harmony' (sung to the tune of Auld Lang Syne). We heard (and joined in) a Doxology written and performed by Far and Wide, and to finish, listened to a song by heavy metal band Disturbed, called 'You're Mine', which speaks of a man in despair finding someone – God, perhaps? – who lifts him out of darkness, bringing healing and new life.

Saturday workshops

Aspects of Drama in Worship

Facilitator: Richard Adams

Our workshop started with Richard walking in as though we were in a church service and giving an opening sentence and introducing a hymn. We then discussed how those leading worship need to draw on the skills of the actor: voice projection, articulation, body language and improvisation.

In pairs we improvised using conversation starters. Using voice projection and body movements to develop the 'drama', my partner and I improvised a conversation about how my bicycle had been stolen. We swapped partners, and I had to tell my new partner that the dress she was wearing looked awful. We learnt how to use humour, while delivering the lines without embarrassment and laughter.

For our final exercise, one group selected a scripted humorous piece on a bible text, while my group devised a conversation between Abraham, Sarah and Issac as they returned home after the near sacrifice of their son. This was a great way to explore the passage, present it in a new way and think carefully about what we say and how the message can be heard.

This was a well-paced session and everyone felt they had learnt new skills, enjoyed the company and laughter, and been given time to think about new ways to use drama in bible study and worship.

Gill Barrett

Circle Dancing

Facilitator: Gillian Pengelly

I was looking forward to the Circle Dancing workshop this year and it didn't disappoint. Gillian explained that circle dancing was not a performance but a way of expressing our own worship. In the centre was a beautiful inspiring display – silk cloths, flickering LED candles, shiny stones, small colourful pictures and much more.

We learned several dances, which became progressively more complex, and I found the slow, gentle rhythmic movements to beautiful Celtic and Eastern European music very calming and incredibly meaningful. Although in circle dancing the idea is to look at and bless each other, we were all watching and concentrating hard on Gillian's feet to start with!

Hands are very important too; the left hand is held palm downwards to represent 'offering' to your neighbour, while the right is held palm upwards to represent 'receiving'. Time didn't allow us to move on to more fast and furious circle dances, but we realised that slow movement is actually quite demanding, both physically and in concentration.



Thank you, Gillian for a really enjoyable introduction to Circle Dancing.

Helen Sheppard

Close Harmony Singing

Facilitator: Something for the Weekend



For many years I have enjoyed singing in four-part harmony choirs but, until now, I have never ventured into 'close harmony' singing; this certainly was a new challenge!

After a voice warm-up I joined the bass singers who practised their line (no sheet music and, of course, *a cappella*). Then it was the turn of the baritones (I joined them too), and finally the tenors (you guessed right – I joined them also!) – so when the three parts had to sing together, then... Oh dear, what shall I sing?!

Finally the ladies joined in, and close harmony was accomplished. I might not have sung all the right notes, but harmony was achieved – and yes, I really did enjoy the end result. 'Lean on me' was an ideal choice to sing, as we all 'leaned' on one another!

Geoff. Wainwright

Icon Writing

Facilitator: Susan Cooke

Susan began by sharing her love of Icon writing, particularly historical icons. She shared several images, explaining why they were painted in certain colours and designs. One icon showed monks going up a ladder to heaven; not all the monks made it, as they fell due to temptations. When Jesus was shown with the apostles they would all have different colours and symbols, so the individuals could be identified – for example, the Virgin Mary was traditionally shown dressed in very dark red robes.



We were then given an opportunity to produce our own icons. The painting medium used is egg tempera, which is quick drying and long lasting. The colour pigments are mixed with egg yolk and a little water. Susan had drawn an outline of a pointing hand, representing God pointing from heaven. We mixed various colours, including gold for divine light and blue which represents heaven and eternity. I enjoyed the experience of painting with the tempera and learning about the art of icon writing.

Jackie de Bourcier

The Life of Jesus: A South Korean Art Perspective

Facilitator: Jacqui Hicks



Jacqui's enthusiasm for and knowledge of the 20th century South Korean Roman Catholic artist Kim Ki-Chang was enhanced by her fascination and respect for the traditional culture and clothing of South Korea. In displaying images of artwork depicting the life of Christ, she showed their relevance to that country. It was interesting as they were very different from our traditional Anglicised version and stimulated thought and conversation during and after the session.

We learnt too about Korean garments and their decoration, hats, and love of fans – and got a fan to decorate ourselves, to remind us of the workshop.

Alison Bannister

Needle-felting

Facilitator: Michelle Pickering

One of the joys of the ArtServe Festival weekend is the opportunity to have a go at something you have never tried. This year was no exception, as I signed up for Michelle's needle-felting workshop.

We were given lengths of wool fleece and a very sharp needle with a barbed end (health and safety warnings given!). After rolling the wool into a ball and continually stabbing it with the needle, the fibres began to 'knit' together, and we had our basic shape. This was embellished by layering on different colours, using the same stabbing technique.



As we 'stabbed together', there was constant encouragement within the group, and a feeling of astonishment when we saw what we had created!

Thank you, Michelle, for guiding us through the process.

Helen Cooper

Painting on Silk

Facilitator: Beth Burton

I greatly enjoyed this workshop. It was highly practical, with lots of tips and hints along the way.

At the start we each chose a template, a backed piece of silk already marked out with gold 'goutre' (a special medium through which drawn lines form impermeable barriers for the paints). There was a variety of designs, from fish to cats, giraffes to flowers, and more.

Then we used fabric paint to fill in the spaces in the design, a fascinating process as we watched minute quantities of colour spread rapidly across the silk. Even more interesting was the way we could mix paints on the fabric itself, creating different blended colour effects. Some of us tried sprinkling salt onto the wet surface to produce a speckled pattern.

As with other creative arts, I personally found the whole process of painting and observing the results therapeutic, both physically and spiritually.



Pauline Loveday

Scripture, Song and Story

Facilitator: Richenda Milton-Daws

The Song of Solomon, the Magnificat, the Song of Deborah and the four women in the genealogy of Jesus were suggested as possible starting points for our creative writing. Judges 5: 24-27, part of the Song of Deborah, prompted my response (which you can read below). In the earlier drama workshop, we were asked to become a character; a natural progression then, in my writing, to become Jael. There are no winners in war, so Jael's soliloquy moves us away from the 'bigger picture' expounded in the Song of Deborah and invites us to question and consider the personal cost. How many hitherto unremarkable lives today have also been irrevocably changed by war?

Jael

I'm not sure I can tell you, even now, *why* I did it, but I can tell you *how*.

I had no idea, then, how easy it is to smash a man's skull; what it is to hear the sound of crushed bone splintering, how far the blood would splatter, how it would pool beneath him.

I shouldn't have looked into his eyes: I wouldn't have seen his realisation of what was to come – the surprise (no – shock), the fear (no – dread) as he knew his final breath was upon him. There was no time for repentance. In those last moments, did he see before him the thousands he'd massacred? Did he experience even a fraction of the terror he'd inflicted on others? Had he ever considered the widows and orphans he'd birthed in his conquests?

In many ways it was too easy: trust gained by the provision of milk and yoghurt in a bowl fit for a king. He must have thought he was on to a good thing – the conquering hero.

Hero. A strange word, an even stranger concept. You don't get to be a hero guarding flocks, labouring in fields, selling merchandise, healing the sick, fetching water or keeping house.

I wasn't a heroine until that night. "Most blessed among women," Deborah says. Do heroes tell you they're haunted by the memory? Do heroes sleep easy, their consciences and souls at peace? I don't. I doubt I ever will.

Most blessed among women? Not me.

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Two Music Workshops

Facilitator: Jenny Pathmarajah

'Why should the Devil get all the good tunes?' explored the use of 'secular' music in church. Jenny warned us we would probably feel uncomfortable – and she was right!

To begin, we considered ways of protesting – letters, marches, hunger strikes, boycotts, graffiti, unions – and were reminded that music is also a powerful means of protest, often intertwined with these other methods.

The song 'Wade in the water' refers to escaping slaves breaking their scent trail. The words of 'Ode to Joy' from Beethoven's 9th symphony were written to campaign against slavery, and have been adopted by many freedom movements. In 1795, words set to the British National Anthem were written *against* women's right to vote. Shostakovich's 6th symphony was written to mend bridges with Stalin, but it actually included coded messages revealing his true feelings.

We realised that through these pieces God was using music, but not in church.

We then listened to five pop songs, including Michael Jackson's 'Man in the mirror', Queen's 'I was born to love you', and Stormzy's 'Blinded by your grace', and discussed how we felt about them: were we feeling uncomfortable? Would we use such music in church? If not, why not? How would young people react? How would older people react?

I realised there is a vast ocean of music I know vanishingly little about!

The second workshop was much gentler. 'CPR to Dead and Dying Hymns' looked at how hymns can be reinvigorated by using an unexpected tune.

After discussing metre as a means to see what tunes might work, Jenny suggested some examples:

- ~ 'Amazing Grace', sung to 'The House of the Rising Sun'
- ~ 'Hark the herald angels sing', to 'All I want for Christmas is you'
- ~ 'Forty days and forty nights', to 'Great Balls of Fire' (try it!)

We were then invited to come up with more. Many were suggested; some worked brilliantly, others needed more work! One was used in the Sunday morning worship: 'Brother, Sister, let me serve you', sung to 'My Darling Clementine'. Modesty forbids me from saying whose idea that one was!

Peter Harding

Good selection of quality workshops

Brilliant choice of workshops

Loved the range of workshops and activities and opportunities to participate

The ArtServe AGM took place on Saturday afternoon (you can read a brief report on page 2), and on Saturday evening we were treated to a wonderful performance by women's barbershop quartet Something for the Weekend. A group of Festival participants joined them on stage to sing 'Lean on Me' – one of the songs they'd learned at the Close Harmony Singing workshop earlier in the day.



Evening singing with Something for the Weekend was one highlight

Loved the singers on Saturday

Something for the Weekend were amazing!

Member Presentations: Hope and Healing

On Sunday morning, we heard how two creative projects are bringing hope and healing to people struggling with mental health and other issues. First, Caroline Weaver and Jenny Harris talked about Kintsugi Hope Wellbeing. Caroline says:

Kintsugi is the Japanese art of creating beauty through the repair of broken objects using glue infused with gold. Kintsugi Hope Wellbeing uses it as a metaphor for healing and growth, providing resources to enable people to explore mental health issues. Rather than hide our scars we seek to learn from them and discover treasure.



Twelve sessions cover Honesty, Anxiety, Depression, Shame, Anger, Disappointment and Loss, Perfectionism, Forgiveness, Self-Acceptance, Healthy Relationships, Resilience and Review and Celebration, using video clips, sharing experiences, group discussion, coping strategies and creative activities.

Leaders must be Christians and have the backing of a church before embarking on training, although the course is not evangelistic or faith based. We simply aim to create a safe and supporting environment in which to talk about the tough issues we all struggle with, as well as to signpost further resources and help.

The course is designed to help participants accept themselves, understand their value and worth, and grow towards a more resilient and hopeful future. We have found it benefits those who lead as well as those who are brave enough to come along. The feedback is very encouraging. You can find out more at: <https://kintsugihope.com>

Rob Newton then spoke about a project he is involved in at his own church, Sileby Methodist Church in Loughborough:



Joy of Music focuses on musical activities to promote better mental health, and participants can drop in to listen, play, learn, and chat.

Joy of Music provides company and friendship through talking and listening over a cuppa. Participants can learn basic music, creating and playing together, and even learn to play an instrument, such as the ukulele. Joy of Music is a charity, and the group at Sileby occasionally perform concerts to raise money for ongoing activities.

People come with a variety of issues, including depression, social isolation, anxiety, emotional challenges, dementia, and long-term illness, and the sessions offer shared musical experiences to enhance well-being and social engagement.

It was good to hear about these two projects, providing hope and healing in different creative ways. If you're involved in a similar project, why not write a short piece for the magazine – or join us at next year's Festival and tell us all about it?

*The presentations were excellent
Thought-provoking and encouraging*

Between sessions, there was plenty to do. Julie Ann from The Book Centre in Stoke on Trent, once again provided our bookshop, with a range of books, gifts, and resources to browse and purchase. There were two displays for people to peruse: one of articles written by ArtServe for the Methodist Recorder newspaper, and one of ArtServe magazines from the past twelve years.

There was a labyrinth to walk, set up by Jacqui Hicks, with guide-notes and colourful 'stations' to pause and reflect. For those seeking quieter space there was a prayer room set aside, and outdoor space to walk in, and our chaplain Caroline was present all weekend for anyone wanting a conversation or prayer.

On Friday and Saturday evening, many of us gathered in the bar for drinks and snacks, to socialise, and to sing together, led by Gill Barrett and Rob Newton.



Our time together at Festival finished with worship, led by our Festival chaplain, Revd Caroline Weaver. Several people brought their musical talents to the music group leading the sung worship, while others shared writing and drama produced in Saturday's workshops. Earlier in the weekend, participants had been invited to draw, decorate, sign, and cut out a paper hand, and during worship everyone was invited to take a hand (not their own!) and commit to praying for that person – a lovely and meaningful way to create harmony with one another and with God.

*Well organised, have really enjoyed it
Good sessions, worship, and wonderful company
Thank you for an enjoyable weekend – very glad I came*

We hope you'll join us for next year's Festival – see back cover for details! Further information will be in the Spring issue of the magazine, in the newsletter, and on the website and Facebook page.

Photo credits:

Rachel Gallehawk ~ Jac Hicks ~ Gillian Pengelly ~ Jude Simms

Go to <https://www.artserve.org.uk/events/artserve-festival>

for details of our 2025 ArtServe Festival:

