

# Realms

A Phenomenological, Socio-Cultural and Theological- Religious  
Studies exploration of Musical Spaces

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## Abstract

This thesis sets out to explore the ways people use and interpret experience of music, the divine and interaction with other people within discrete musical spaces. This exploration takes place in two sites: a Pentecostal church in suburban Perth, Western Australia, and the West Coast Blues & Roots festival, a well known music festival held annually in Fremantle, Western Australia. I have nominated these two sites as “realms” because they are spaces set up for the performance and experience of music.

My primary questions about these sites relate to how people interact with music, each other and the divine within these realms. This study combines socio-cultural and theological-religious studies theories to illuminate the processes, experiences and interpretations occurring within these musical realms. This has important implications for understanding how people use and interpret music in relation to the world outside the musical realm. People use these experiences to dream and imagine the shape of ideal relationships and communities with each other and the divine presence, and to escape and transform the world outside the musical realm.

In this thesis I compile data from participant observation and in-depth interviews at both sites, as well as published interviews with performers. I construct two case studies of the sites, portraying a “day in the life” of a participant in both realms. For each case study I outline ten different interpretive paradigms, five from socio-cultural theorists and five from theology and religious studies. I analyse the data using the phenomenological method, taking a component of data from the fieldwork and comparing and contrasting it with theory. At the end of each chapter I summarise the process and make some remarks relating to the implications of the study.

The resulting work makes important contributions to understanding how socio-cultural studies and theological-religious studies can work together in an interdisciplinary fashion to illuminate phenomena. The study sheds light on the nature of musical “realms”, as well as “proto-religious phenomena” and “methodological agnosticism”. Further, this work presents useful contributions into the ways churches may understand and interact with spiritual experience that occurs outside of religious settings. Finally, performers and artists and community workers will benefit from the conclusions of this study on the ways in which people use music and realms to escape, transform and imagine community and society.

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