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# *The Adventist Musician Experience*

“A tension of identity realization,  
conflicting values, and an often-  
suppressed vision of excellent  
collaborative service”



# *Inspiration*





## *Questions*

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What is the experience of a professional Seventh-Day Adventist classical musician?

- How has he/she approached the issue of Sabbath observance?
- What are the obstacles, challenges, advantages and opportunities faced by subjects in the interactions between their religious persuasions and career choice?
- What is his/her vision of the potential relationship between the Adventist Church and its professional musician members?





**KEEP  
CALM  
AND**

**REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY,**

**TO KEEP IT HOLY ~EXODUS 20:8**

## *Predicted Themes*

- Sabbath conflicts
- Career as calling
- Values of musical excellence and service
- Overlap of professional and religious identities



# *Methods*

“Unlike quantitative research, phenomenological study is concerned with **experience** in its own terms, and the findings do not claim to have generalizability over the entire population. However, the specific can illuminate the general.”

(Fung, 5)

- Phenomenological research
- Subjects & recruiting
- Interview
- Transcripts
- Data analysis
- Themes



# *Interview Questions*

- Where are you from? What is/are your current job title(s)? How long have you been a professional musician?
  - How did music become a part of your life?
  - How did you decide to pursue music as a career?
  - Were you raised in the Adventist church? How would you describe your relationship to the Adventist church now? Has your relationship with the church changed at all over the years?
  - What has been your experience as a professional classical musician in the community of the Adventist church? What have been the obstacles and challenges? What have been the advantages and opportunities?
  - What has been your experience as an Adventist in the wider (classical) music community? What have been the obstacles and challenges? What have been the advantages and opportunities?
  - Have you encountered any conflicts in the area of Sabbath observance? How have you approached these conflicts?
  - What does it mean to you practically to 'keep the Sabbath holy' as a professional musician?
  - What piece of advice would you give to a pre-professional Adventist musician who wants to make a career in music?
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# *Follow up Questions*

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- Is there any music you are not willing to play because of your Adventist Christian values? What kind and why?
- Are you aware of any networks or associations of Adventist musicians in existence?
- What do you think the church can do to better serve its professional musician members?
- What do you think musicians can do to better serve God, the church, and/or their local communities?
- What can they do to better serve each other as Adventist musicians?
- If there was an organization which brought Adventist professional musicians together for the purpose of furthering the mission of our church, would you be interested in being a part? What would you envision it looking like?



# Subjects



- 3 subjects so far
  - ❖ An Adventist professional orchestral musician, having worked for 30 years in professional orchestra (VJ)
  - ❖ One young pianist and orchestral conductor who has worked for about 10 years inside and outside of the church in the professional music world (PF)
  - ❖ One violinist, chamber musician, and teacher who has been working in a small, liberal arts environment for 20-25 years (AV)
- All were raised in the Adventist church and continue to identify as Seventh-day Adventist Christians.





# *Results*

A tension of identity realization, conflicting values, and an often-suppressed vision of excellent collaborative service

## What is the Adventist Musician Experience?

- Tension of values
  - **Service**, excellence, relationship, community, education, time
- Identity realization
  - 'Music chose me' vs. 'career as a calling'
  - Regular church member vs. music minister
- Caution towards broader church
  - Identity assumptions and education value
- Suppressed vision



# *Tension of values*

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- Sabbath conflicts – a tension of time, community, service and excellence values

“There's nothing wrong with looking to improve. In fact, I think that's very honorable. It's encouraged; but there are six days for that, and on the Sabbath, I look more to have a moment to reflect on God's blessings, when I can play in church, when I can be a blessing to others.” (PF)

In answer to the question, “What advice would you give to a pre-professional Adventist musician who wants to make a career in music?”:

“I would advise...to be flexible—to take the advantages and the opportunities that God gives, and to not feel guilty about breaking Sabbath, as long as it is for God's glory—for the benefit of others.” (VJ)



# *Tension of values*

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- Church music challenges – a conflict of excellence and education with relationship, community and service values

“I certainly feel as a professional that if I get up to play at all, I better have prepared myself well; and sometimes when you need to do something last minute for church, that gets in the way. So I think [there’s] **the challenge of making sure it's always about service**, rather than getting sucked into the other part of my world which is, "How is my reputation?" It's all a "me, me, me" kind of thing, which is sometimes an obstacle, I think, to keeping the true value of what music is to me.” (AV)

“My experience has been that while people value what I do as a musician—whenever I play for church...present a concert, or when I play special music—they always say, “Oh, we're so blessed with what you're doing” and so on; but more than that...in general...**I don't feel like people really trust or value all the training that I [have received] over the years.**” (PF)



# *Tension of values*

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- Individual boundaries

“If a person is doing [music], you just have to be ready to give and give and give and give; there is no boundary automatically placed there, so you have to kind of pre-think out where you're going to set yours, and then think when you're going to flex them a little bit.

I can't get my grading done and prepare my classes and practice 6 hours a day and still have time to see my family. So some of the choices I've made along the way go 'back and forth' in terms of time spent. I'm not doing any recording right now. I do probably one recital a year, but not much of any regional touring right now, because that would take time away from my kids. And I think everybody has different viewpoints on that, and different decisions they can make.” (AV)



# *Identity Realization*

“Very early, probably when I was fourteen, fifteen I already knew I wanted to be a musician. Yes, **it is my passion**. I realize it's not the best paid profession and there were some other options where I could get paid better that I considered in high school. But I realized that **I love music so much, it *had* to be my full-time job. Somehow I *had* to be around and involved in music professionally for the rest of my life.**”  
(PF)

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## ‘Music chose me’ vs. ‘career as a calling’

“But like a lot of careers, I suppose, just an inside window about mine is, I would say, **don't even do it unless you can't help it**. You probably heard that from other musicians. It's not something you can 'kind of' do. There isn't enough money in it to 'kind of' do it; and it's too self-critical to 'kind of' do it if you can't help it. I mean, **I love it and I can't imagine doing anything else**; but I could never 'persuade' people into it. It feels like you have to be pulled in because you just can't imagine some other life, and you can't imagine not getting to do it.” (AV)

“**I realized that, at the core of me, I was a musician**. And I was miserable; I realized that I would never be a good musician unless I did it full time. **I couldn't be the best musician that I could be unless I did it full-time.**” (VJ)



# *Identity Realization*



## Lay member vs. music minister

- Separate identities

"I think just by supporting my church as a regular member, financially, by attending, by welcoming, holding church offices. Those are all things that I do for the church, but that's not necessarily because I'm a musician; it's just because I am a church member." (VJ)

"What I value about participating in the church community is related to the sharing of sacred music, but it's not necessarily related to being a professional or classical musician. So it's interesting to see which people are comfortable with that transition and others which really seem to feel the need to box me in and think "Oh, we have a professional playing for church today!" because **I really prefer just to be bringing what I have to give to the church community like anybody else does.**" (AV)



# Identity Realization



## Lay member vs. music minister

- Overlapping identities

“For the past five or six years, my main source of income has been being a music director at a non-Adventist Church. I've been able to conduct big concerts there with orchestra, with choirs, classical pieces, to do great things with the music program in those churches, but I have never been the music director of an Adventist Church. It has always been someone else. It's not that I want to be the main person there. **If there was someone who was better qualified than me, I would be happy to have that person be the leader or director.** I've always collaborated and played with the choirs, always played the piano and the organ when there's one at the church. **I am involved with the program, but it's always someone else who has little or no [musical] training making the decisions and guidelines.** So I think that as a church, both locally and at large, valuing music more and the input of people who have spent their lives getting trained as classical musicians would be something very helpful.” (PF)



# *Feelings of caution towards the church*

- Gender in-equivalencies in our denomination
  - Sabbath School example
- Not open to questioning or discussion on different viewpoints

"I am extremely grateful for the Seventh-Day Adventist Church; I attend every week, I pay my tithe, and I'm happily a member...**I'm just not your typical Adventist that doesn't question. I have my own ideas as well.**" (VJ)

- Not valuing, respecting, or trusting the opinions of educated musicians

"The ones who make the decisions are people who have less knowledge, less training, less idea of what music is really all about." (PF)





# *Suppressed Vision*

What could be?

- Collaborative service
- Personal encouragement & friendship
- Organization & communication
- Excellence in church musical environment

Suppressed or non-existent because of

- Clash with values of church organization
- Assumptions about identity & roles
- Tiring of church politics
- Limits of time & emotional energy to invest



“A tension of identity realization, conflicting values, and an often-suppressed vision of excellent collaborative service”

## *Conclusions*

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### Adventist musicians

- Will have very different experiences based on their different careers and life stages
- Confirmed my hypothesis to a degree
- Don't see Sabbath as an obstacle
- Highly value service and excellence, and do a lot of thinking about how to balance their other values in relation those
- Tend to be more content, but less visionary (in connection to the church), if they view their 'Adventist' and 'musician' identities as separate
- Feel cautious towards the church
- Have ideas of how they could serve and connect better among themselves and with the church
- Haven't yet realized all of those visions because of various obstacles or other priorities



# *Further Research*

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- Add to database of classical musician interviews with current set of questions
- Further explore the issue of identity formation and expression among Adventist musicians
- More in-depth research on each of my main themes
- Develop and refine interview questions to have a more specific focus
- Similar research on Adventist musicians of other musical genres
- Similar research on other Adventists' career experiences outside of music



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PF (pianist and orchestral conductor) in discussion with the author, February 2020.

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