

RESEARCH ARTICLE

“The influence of Melody upon man in the wild state of nature”: Enslaved Parishioners, Anglican Violence, and Racialized Listening in a Jamaica Parish

Maria Ryan

College of Music, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL, USA
Email: mariatnryan@gmail.com

Abstract

In 1827, George Wilson Bridges, the outspoken proslavery rector of the parish of St. Ann, Jamaica, published a pamphlet of music that he had written to be used as the choral service at his church. The Bishop of Jamaica condemned Bridges’s musical innovations on the grounds that they were not suitable to be heard by “a congregation chiefly composed by people of colour & negroes.” On the Bishop’s orders, Bridges’s music stopped, and by 1828 he reported that his pews were once more empty. The congregation of St. Ann parish church was almost entirely enslaved Africans and Afro-descendants who could choose their place of worship. However, in Bridges’s own household, the people he claimed as property had little opportunity to escape his ministering. In 1829 Bridges came to the attention of British abolitionists for his brutal flogging of Kitty Hylton, a woman he claimed to own. This article uses Black feminist approaches to archival materials to explore the relationship between the music promoted by Bridges, conflicting views held by white religious leaders about what music was appropriate for African and African-descended people to listen to, and Bridges’s violence towards enslaved people; in so doing exploring the inescapable entanglement of religious music, race, and violence in colonial Jamaica.

It is unusual to find printed music in British colonial records. But a printed choral service is bound up in the 1827–1828 collection of correspondence from the Bishop of Jamaica to the Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, nestled between copies of letters, questionnaires, plans for new churches, complaints, and other paper records of the bureaucracy that were required for an imperial state to keep its eyes on a colony four thousand miles away.¹ The choral service bound in the Secretary of State’s letter book in London was created to be heard in the parish church of St. Ann, Jamaica. The printed service, published in St. Ann in 1827 by the Reverend George Wilson Bridges (1788–1863), contains ten short choral pieces and a three-page preface on the value of using choral music to convert Africans and their descendants in Jamaica. However, the Bishop of Jamaica was not convinced by the preface’s rhetoric, as he deemed the music to be unsuitable for the ears of African and African-descended listeners, enslaved and free.

George Wilson Bridges was the most controversial religious minister in Jamaica in the 1820s. He was no stranger to those in Britain who kept up with colonial affairs and the progress of the anti-slavery cause; in 1823 he had published a lengthy defense of slavery attacking the claims of the

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¹George Wilson Bridges, *A Service for the Parochial Church of Saint Ann Jamaica* (St. Ann, Jamaica: Pontine Press, 1827) in Correspondence from the Bishop of Jamaica, The National Archives of the United Kingdom (henceforth TNA), CO 137/268, ff. 30r–43v.

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prominent abolitionist William Wilberforce.² Nor is he a stranger to historians of early nineteenth-century Jamaica. Bridges was an avid letter-writer, published author, and later photographer, whose writings are preserved in archives on both sides of the Atlantic. In comparison, there is a paucity of sources representing the thoughts and lives of the people he kept enslaved in his own household, and the thousands of enslaved people in Jamaica that had the misfortune of interacting with him through virtue of living within the jurisdiction of his parishes. When I have read Bridges's scratchy, difficult-to-decipher handwriting in archives in Kingston, London, and Philadelphia, I have shuddered at the closeness of the hand that wrote and the hand that holds to read, the ease of imagining the man, despite the passage of time that stands between us. Unlike Bridges's messy but weighty scrawl, the majority of written traces of the lives of the enslaved women, children, and men that lived in his parishes can be found in the elegant cursive of state-mandated slave registers, recording only what was deemed useful for the accounting purposes of the British empire.³ Missing from these registers, and beyond what Hazel Carby names as the "concealed horror within the gracious lettering of English calligraphy," are the details of the lives of the listed; their desires, theories, and thoughts.⁴

However, a moment in the life of one of Bridges's parishioners, an enslaved woman that he claimed to own named Kitty Hylton, is recorded in some detail. In 1829 an inquiry was opened to investigate Bridges's brutal flogging of Hylton for the reason that she mistakenly slaughtered a turkey. The inquiry was widely reported and publicized in Britain, adding to Bridges's infamy. As people, especially Black women, from Anna Julia Cooper to Saidiya Hartman have lamented, Black enslaved men, women, and children often go unnamed in archival sources, making any scrap of evidence of enslaved people representing themselves significant.⁵ This archival "silent factor" has meant that historians seeking to attend to the everyday lives of the enslaved have needed to create new frameworks and modes of research and writing to represent the people they are interested in centering.⁶ Although this article focuses at first on Bridges and his ideas about what was appropriate listening for enslaved parishioners, I also consider what our knowledge of Hylton and her experience of Bridges may illuminate about histories of listening in Jamaica.

In this article I consider what Bridges's choral service teaches us about how multiple and competing ideas of how Africans and their descendants could and should listen were circulating among white religious leaders in Jamaica as cries for abolition grew louder from the metropole. First, I lay out the conditions that led to the creation of Bridges's choral service, and how the creation of the See of Jamaica in 1824 led to a shift in Anglican power from distant orders sent from London to a permanent supervisory presence in the Caribbean. This change affected the reception of Bridges's choral service, and ultimately led to the abrupt end of his musical experiment. In the second section, I explore how

²George Wilson Bridges, *A Voice from Jamaica; in Reply to William Wilberforce Esq., M.P.* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1823).

³Hazel V. Carby meditates on the sanitizing order of slave registers in *Imperial Intimacies: A Tale of Two Islands* (London: Verso, 2019), 260–63.

⁴Carby, *Imperial Intimacies*, 261.

⁵Anna Julia Cooper names the "great silent factor" in "The Negro as Presented in American Literature (1892)" as the loss of the creative lives of Black women, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998), 135; a similar theme is explored in Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 26 (2008), 1–14. Recent examples of beautifully generative reparative historical work about enslaved women's lives woven from seemingly hostile or perfunctory sources include Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Mary Caton Lingold, "Tena, Too, Sings America: Listening to an Enslaved Woman's Musical Memories of Africa," June 18, 2018, in *C19: America in the 19th Century*, produced by Kristie Schauraff, podcast, MP3 audio, <https://soundcloud.com/c19podcast/tena-too-sings-america-listening-to-an-enslaved-womans-musical-memories-of-africa>; Sherri V. Cummings, "'They are Delighted to Dance for Themselves': Deconstructing Intimacies—Moreau de Saint-Méry's 'Danse' and the Spectre of Black Female Sexuality in Colonial Saint Domingue," *Journal of Caribbean History* 51, no. 2 (2017): 143–70; Jessica Marie Johnson, *Wicked Flesh: Black Women, Intimacy, and Freedom in the Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020).

⁶As Michel-Ralph Trouillot lays out in his foundational book, silences are inherent in history as some things will always be left out while others are recorded; however, historians have choices in how they engage with the practice of silencing, which is always a process, rather than an absence. See Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015), 50, 58–59.

different ideas about the nature of appropriate listening led to the service being banned. Bridges and his superior Christopher Lipscomb, Bishop of Jamaica, held very different opinions about what was appropriate for Black listeners to hear. In this section I also reflect on the tension between Bridges's public proslavery stance, and his musical impulse that could be considered to be less paternalistic than the official rule of the church. In the final section, I consider those voices that were not recorded in the reams of paper trail created about the choral service. This silencing includes the lives of those that Bridges claimed to own, especially Kitty Hylton. I attempt to read the choral service as historian Marisa Fuentes does, "along the bias grain," in order to both imagine the listening of enslaved listeners, and to name the limits of Bridges's thinking about Black listening.⁷

Bridges's choral service was an anomaly in religious music in Jamaica of the time, as attested to by its vehement rejection by Bishop Lipscomb. One could read the controversy surrounding Bridges's choral service as a petty power squabble between a man used to getting his own way and a man trying to assert his new authority. However, I show that white ideas about the relationship between listening and race, and what was appropriate for enslaved Africans and their descendants to listen to, were not fixed in this period, and were indeed changing rapidly as missionaries and planters alike began to consider the possibilities of a post-slavery future. The ways that men such as Lipscomb and Bridges attempted to control, and perhaps even manipulate, Black listening illuminates the interrelation between circulating ideas about music, listening, slavery, and race in the British colonial Caribbean in the decade before the 1833 Slavery Abolition Act.

"An Objectionable Anthem"

George Wilson Bridges was born in England to a wealthy family, and his parents expected him to join the church. After studying at both the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford, he was ordained into the Church of England in 1812. In 1817 he moved to Jamaica to become rector of the newly formed Manchester Parish on the invitation of that parish's namesake, the Duke of Manchester, governor of Jamaica. Bridges was appointed rector of St. Ann Parish in the North of Jamaica in 1823: at the time, the largest parish in Jamaica.⁸ At some point during his first few years at the parish church of St. Ann, Bridges decided that he was going to improve the music at his Sunday services in order to attract a greater congregation of African and African-descended people, enslaved and free. Anglican parishes had been established in the Caribbean since the seventeenth century, but they rarely made any significant conversion attempts to the enslaved population.⁹ The Church of England was a slave-owning organization, and even if some prominent members of the Church publicly opposed slavery, the Church itself did not.¹⁰

⁷Fuentes reads archival sources "along the bias grain to eke out extinguished and invisible but no less historically important lives." *Dispossessed Lives*, 7.

⁸For more on the life of George Wilson Bridges, see Catherine Hall, "Bridges, George Wilson (1788–1863), Anglican Clergyman, Defender of Slavery, and Photographer," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/109524>; Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Colony and Metropole in the English Imagination, 1830–1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 101–2; D. A. Dunkley, "The Life of Rev. George Wilson Bridges: The Jamaican Experience," in *Readings in Caribbean History and Culture: Breaking Ground*, ed. D. A. Dunkley (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 87–108.

⁹The theological, ideological, and political entanglements between slavery and Protestantism in the Caribbean in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are explored by Katharine Gerbner in her book *Christian Slavery: Conversion and Race in the Protestant Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018). The particular relationship of missionary Anglicanism to slavery is covered in Travis Glasson, *Mastering Christianity: Missionary Anglicanism and Slavery in the Atlantic World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). Mary Turner gives an expansive overview of the impact of missionaries of many denominations in Jamaica in *Slaves and Missionaries: The Disintegration of Jamaica Slave Society, 1787–1834* (Mona, Jamaica: University Press of the West Indies, 1998).

¹⁰The Church of England did not apologize for its role in the slave trade until 2006 when the General Synod passed a motion that they "acknowledge the Church's complicity in the Slave Trade" and "recognizing the damage done to those who are the heirs of those who were enslaved, offer an apology to them." Church of England, Report of Proceedings, General Synod, February 8, 2006, "Bicentenary of the Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade," GS Misc. 808, 236–37.

A missionary branch for the church, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, was founded in 1701, but for most of the eighteenth century it was more active in North America than in Britain's Caribbean colonies.¹¹ Anti-slavery societies, religious groups, and even the pro-abolition lobby in parliament expressed their dismay that for over two centuries there had been few efforts to Christianize enslaved people. There are many reasons that conversion figures were so low in Britain's Caribbean colonies. Many white people in the Caribbean who profited from slavery had a longstanding resistance to official pressures to convert the enslaved population because they feared that the liberatory message of Christianity would spread the idea of freedom and equality to the people they claimed as property, a fear no doubt compounded by their awareness that white people were outnumbered in Jamaica by Africans and their descendants by more than ten to one.¹² As support grew in Britain for missionary efforts amongst enslaved people in the 1820s, dissenting Protestant denominations such as Methodists, Moravians, and Baptists began significantly expanding their missionary efforts in the Caribbean with the express goal of converting enslaved people to Christianity.

The Church of England was the default, if not practiced, religion of the minority demographic white elites in Jamaica, but there were few practicing ministers on the island; certainly not enough to also serve the 90 percent of the population who were enslaved.¹³ But this was not the only reason that enslaved people may have felt that dissenting missionaries offered a more attractive and accessible version of Christianity than the Church of England. A white British visitor to Jamaica in 1834, Richard Madden, observed that a possible reason that Methodist and Baptist churches were often full while Anglican churches were sparsely attended was because of "the entire attention that is given by the clergy of the former to the mode of adapting their instruction to the capacity of the negroes; while in the Protestant church, where the majority of the congregation consists of white people, the clergyman must adapt his language and delivery to one class only."¹⁴ This selective preaching led to a service that was unattractive to those unfamiliar with the customs, language, and liturgy of the Church of England, compared to churches where missionaries actively adjusted their teaching to the African-descended majority of the Jamaican population. Madden also suggested another reason why the Church of England struggled to attract Black congregants was because of "all the adventitious circumstances which enlist the senses on the side of religion, there is none that has greater influence on the devotion of the negro than that of sacred music,—a fact which the sectarians are well aware of, and have evinced their knowledge of, in their selection of simple tunes and familiar language for the hymns they teach the negroes."¹⁵

Bridges had come to a similar conclusion about the appeal of music some eight years earlier. But unlike the rector of the parish church that Madden visited, Bridges decided to do something about what he perceived as an underuse of music and ritual in Church of England services in British Caribbean colonies. There had been music of various forms in Anglican churches in the Caribbean for almost two centuries by this point: wealthier parishes had built and maintained organs in the British colonial Caribbean since at least the early eighteenth century, and many parishes also maintained children's choirs made up of the poor white children of the parish who received a weekly allowance for their musical services.¹⁶ The music that was sung in these churches was referred to as

¹¹Gerbner, *Christian Slavery*, chap. 6.

¹²Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 77. In the seventeenth century many slaveowners expressed skepticism that it was justifiable for Christians to continue to be held as slaves, and feared that their slaves would be eligible to be manumitted if they converted to Christianity, a problem that Katharine Gerbner suggests was ultimately "solved" by the creation of racial, rather than religious, legal categories of personhood. *Christian Slavery*, chap. 2.

¹³For more on the Anglican Church and slave education in Jamaica, see D. A. Dunkley, "Slave Instruction by the Anglican Church and the Transformation of Slavery," in *Readings in Caribbean History and Culture: Breaking Ground*, ed. D. A. Dunkley (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 37–59.

¹⁴Richard Robert Madden, *A Twelvemonth's Residence in the West Indies during the Transition from Slavery to Apprenticeship: With Incidental Notices of the State of Society, Prospects, and Natural Resources of Jamaica and other Islands* (London: James Cochrane and Co, 1835), vol. 2, 7.

¹⁵Madden, *A Twelvemonths' Residence*, vol. 2, 7.

¹⁶Vestry minutes from across the British colonial Caribbean mention such practices. For example, vestry minutes from the church of Saint John in Antigua state that: "Such of the Children as are found to have voice and are learning psalmody do attend

psalmody. The term psalmody originally referred quite specifically to biblical psalm texts sung metrically by a congregation, but by the early nineteenth century its meaning had expanded to cover a variety of congregational singing in protestant churches which included sung psalms but also included hymns.¹⁷ The majority of the service, however, was spoken. Aware that a largely spoken service was not attractive to many enslaved parishioners, Bridges went back to a 1661 religious tract to justify that the music in parish churches hadn't always been so solemn, and that the Book of Common Prayer—the rubric for Anglican liturgy—permitted melodious singing and use of instruments in many parts of the liturgy, not just the psalms.¹⁸ With this justification, Bridges began to reform the music at St. Ann by introducing new harmonized responses for the choir, and replacing parts of the service that were previously spoken, such as the Kyrie and Sanctus, with choral settings of those texts. Bridges also added choral anthems to his services; these were stand-alone pieces that were not liturgical but based on a biblical text. With donations from wealthier parishioners, Bridges replaced the organ and employed a new organist, who presumably was responsible for rehearsing the choir in its new repertoire.¹⁹

For the first seven years of Bridges's tenure as a colonial parish rector, there were few strong links between churches in the Caribbean and the Church of England's authorities in London. Anglican clergymen based in the Caribbean were technically responsible to the episcopal jurisdiction of the Bishop of London, but in reality they were semi-autonomous and far more strongly aligned with planters and slave-owners than any ecclesiastical authority in England.²⁰ The relationship between the Anglican church in Britain's Caribbean colonies and the seat of Anglican power in London changed significantly when in 1824 the Diocese of Jamaica was established and put under the direction of a resident Bishop of Jamaica, Christopher Lipscomb, who took up his new post in 1825. When Bridges began to develop the choral singing at his church in St. Ann in 1826, it did not take long for news to reach the first Archdeacon of Jamaica, Edward Pope—Lipscomb's eyes and ears in the parishes. Pope heard the choir of St. Ann's rehearsing Bridges's *Te Deum*, recalling that "the Singers at St Ann's Bay practiced a part of the *Te Deum* before me in December 1826: and I expressed myself in terms of approbation of their performance and of the Composition. I had then no idea that Mr. Bridges intended to compose a complete Choral Service—to chant passages which the Rubric expressly directs shall be read, or to introduce an objectionable anthem."²¹

Bridges did not agree with Pope's assertion that he was liturgically incorrect in introducing music for parts of the Sunday service that were traditionally read. Bridges consistently claimed that the music he introduced to St. Ann's Parish was valid within the practices of the Church of England as he was following the rubrics of its official guidelines, the Book of Common Prayer.²² Bridges wrote about his liturgical correctness at length in his widely-criticized two-volume *Annals of Jamaica*, writing that he was "following the directions of the Rubric, the *Te Deum*, the *Jubilate*, and the responses to the Commandments" which "were chanted in the sublime strains of Kent and

the Organist and Clerk at the stated times as they shall appoint unless prevented by sickness or some other sufficient cause, and that those who neglect to do so, and to be seated in Church before the service begins, shall be precluded from receiving their weekly allowance upon a representation of their neglect by either the Organist or Clerk, and if repeatedly absent they are to be struck off the list . . . at the discretion of the Church warden." Minutes of the St. John Vestry, St. John's, Antigua, 1806, National Archives of Antigua and Barbuda.

¹⁷Nicholas Temperley and Richard Crawford, "Psalmody (ii)," *Grove Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>.

¹⁸George Wilson Bridges, *The Annals of Jamaica*, vol. 2 (London: John Murray, 1828), 443–44.

¹⁹Bridges himself "added thirty pounds per annum to the salary of the Gentleman who kindly undertook the Office of Organist at my particular request." Although it was not unheard of for white women, or men of color, to be parish organists, the large sum paid to the organist and Bridges calling him a gentleman suggests that this position was held by an educated white man already in Jamaica. Letter from G. W. Bridges to Archdeacon Pope, Dec 18, 1827, TNA, CO 137/268, f. 45v.

²⁰Gerbner, *Christian Slavery*, 29.

²¹Letter from Archdeacon Edward Pope to the Bishop of Jamaica, February 5, 1828, TNA, CO 137/268, ff. 48v–49r.

²²Church of England, "Where the Liturgy Comes From," <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/where-liturgy-comes>.

Handel, and assisted by an organ which was expressly built.”²³ Although such a musical practice was not standard at the time in Britain’s Caribbean colonies, to Bridges it was liturgically acceptable.²⁴

Not only did Bridges reform the music of his church without permission from the Bishop, he also published *A Service for the Parochial Church of Saint Ann Jamaica* in 1827 of his own volition, and on his own press.²⁵ The cover of the publication announced that it was to be sold for the sum of ten shillings “for the benefit of the choir.” This fourteen-page publication was no small undertaking. Along with a preface written by Bridges on the value and potential of music to converting African and African-descended people in Britain’s Caribbean colonies, the printed choral service consisted of ten short choral settings, with the notation for each prepared on lithograph by Bridges himself.²⁶ No composers are listed. The music is on a grand staff that is suitable for reading on domestic keyboard instruments at the homes of those wealthy enough to own and maintain them. The text-setting throughout implies that the choir of St. Ann’s was for higher voices only, suggesting that it would have been a children’s chorus. For example, the last piece in the *Service for the Parochial Church of Saint Ann* is the anthem “Oh! Had I the wings of a dove,” a setting of the 55th psalm. This is likely the “objectionable anthem” that Archdeacon Pope complained about, and is entirely suitable to be sung by children who were regularly rehearsing. The lilting melody is sung mostly in close thirds throughout, supported by a simple bass line that could easily be filled out with chords and embellished by even a moderately experienced organist. The introduction of choral responses and anthems at St. Ann Parish was heralded by Bridges as an unparalleled success story. In particular, he made the argument that once the music was improved, attendance from enslaved parishioners increased significantly, “filling the once empty church benches.”²⁷

Despite this apparent success, Bridges had not gained the permission of Bishop Lipscomb to publish, practice, or sell his choral service. Early in April 1827 someone, perhaps Archdeacon Edward Pope, showed Bridges’s printed pamphlet to the Bishop. This was the first time that Lipscomb had heard about the musical innovations at St. Ann, and the first time he had seen the printed choral service that resulted from it. Lipscomb was less than pleased when he found out about the publication and Bridges’s changes to the musical life of the parish. In particular, Lipscomb objected that he was not consulted over what he considered to be major and incorrect changes to the liturgy. But it was not only Bridges’s theological insubordination that Lipscomb opposed. He thought that the music Bridges was using was inappropriate for enslaved and non-white people to hear. As Bishop of Jamaica, Lipscomb reported to the Secretary of State for War and the Colonies in London, at the time the 3rd Earl Bathurst. Lipscomb thought Bridges’s behavior was errant enough to warrant being reported to the Colonial Office, and in June 1827 the Bishop wrote to Bathurst to report Bridges’s choral service and to ask for further instruction, writing that he:

had no objection to a part of the publication being occasionally introduced into the service but that I decidedly objected to the whole being used at one time, on the grounds that, I considered simple Psalmody, in a small church capable of containing between 300 & 400 persons, better calculated to promote the ends of religious instruction amongst a congregation chiefly composed of persons of colour & negroes, than the laboured & artificial compositions adopted by our cathedrals.²⁸

²³Bridges, *The Annals of Jamaica*, vol. 2, 443. Although Bridges claimed in *Annals* that the choir performed music by James Kent and George Frederic Handel, I have not been able to match the music in *A Service for the Parochial Church of Saint Ann Jamaica* to either of these composers. It is possible that the repertoire of the St. Ann parish church extended beyond the ten pieces printed in the choral service.

²⁴Indeed, what Bridges added to the St. Ann’s Sunday service is in line with the music at ambitious parish churches in England during the same period. See Nigel Yates, *Buildings, Faith and Worship: The Liturgical Arrangement of Anglican Churches 1600–1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 64–65.

²⁵Bridges, *A Service for the Parochial Church of Saint Ann Jamaica*.

²⁶Book historian Roderick Cave discusses how anomalous the pamphlet is in *Printing and the Book Trade in the West Indies* (London: Pindar Press, 1987), 243. Cave suggests that the *Choral Service* may be the earliest example of lithographic printing in Jamaica, created on a small lithographic press that Bridges taught himself to use. Commercial lithographic printing began in Jamaica several years later in Kingston.

²⁷Bridges, *The Annals of Jamaica*, vol. 2, 443.

²⁸Letter from Bishop Christopher to Lord Bathurst. Spanish town, Jamaica, June 5, 1827, TNA, CO 137/268, ff. 24v–25r.

Lipscomb enclosed a copy of the printed service with his letter for Bathurst's attention, which is how the *Service for the Parochial Church of Saint Ann Jamaica* came to be preserved in the Colonial Office records at the National Archives of the United Kingdom.

Before writing to Bathurst in London, Lipscomb had sent a message to Bridges via Archdeacon Pope, ordering him to immediately discontinue the choral service until he received further instruction.²⁹ On April 8, 1827 the Archdeacon Pope read the following message to Bridges:

I am further to communicate the Bishop's directions as to the mode of celebrating Divine Service in your parish Church; where the introduction of Choir Service is entirely inapplicable; and destructive of that simplicity which ought always to characterize our psalmody. And in future you will apply for the consent and sanction of your Diocesan whenever any alterations are meditated in the public service of the Church.

The Bishop does not object to the "Venite Exultemus" and the "Te Deum," one or both being occasionally chanted: but the introductory sentences and the "Jubilate" are to be read. As to the other parts of the service, you had better not deviate from the usual simple mode of officiating.³⁰

Despite protests from Bridges, the choral music stopped and the organist was dismissed. A letter to the Bishop signed by forty-seven parishioners objected officially, with the signees expressing their regret that the Bishop had ended "a form of Divine Worship so successfully perfected and so unfortunately interrupted."³¹ By the end of 1828 Bridges reported to the Bishop in a terse and defensive letter that his pews were once more empty, "relapsing into the deserted State in which it was before the music attracted a congregation from the Dissenting Chapels."³²

Bridges was not alone in seeing non-Anglican denominations, or dissenters, as a threat to the established church. Many planters feared that the egalitarian message of Christianity when evangelized by Methodist, Baptists, and Moravian missionaries risked promoting not only spiritual freedom and individuality, but also planting ideas about political freedom and equality in the minds of enslaved Christians.³³ This fear, that enslaved people converted to Christianity by dissenting missionaries were more likely to advocate for their rights and freedoms, verged on paranoia, and Methodist and Baptist ministers were frequently blamed and prosecuted for slave insurrections. This paranoia often led to violence, and in 1831 Bridges co-founded the Colonial Church Union, an organization which carried out violent attacks on the homes and places of worship of Baptists and Methodists in St. Ann.³⁴ Bridges's assertion that his music persuaded congregants away from dissenting churches was no idle boast, but a re-assertion of the rightful place he felt that the Church of England should have in the parish.

But even if Bridges considered the Church of England to be the appropriate church for enslaved people, he had no way of forcing people to attend. Most enslaved Africans and their descendants working on plantations had limited freedom of movement except on Sundays. This "day of rest" was not kept as a Sabbath day, as for most enslaved laborers on plantations it was the only day they had to tend to their provision grounds where they grew their own produce, the only day they could go to market to trade goods, to socialize in large groups and with people from further afar, and to go to church if they so chose. There was a long tradition of Sunday markets and gatherings such as dances in the British colonial Caribbean, even as both practices were widely criticized by European visitors and religious anti-slavery campaigners as an open desecration of the Sabbath.³⁵ Bridges's pride in the increase

²⁹Letter from Archdeacon Edward Pope to the Bishop of Jamaica, February 5, 1828, TNA, CO 137/268, f. 48r.

³⁰Letter from Archdeacon Pope to Bishop Lipscomb, February 5, 1828, TNA, CO 137/268, ff. 49v–50v.

³¹Letter from parishioners to G. W. Bridges, May 14, 1827, TNA, CO 137/268, f. 27.

³²Letter from G. W. Bridges to Edward Pope, December 18, 1827, TNA, CO 137/268, f. 45v.

³³Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 102.

³⁴Dunkley, "The Life of Rev. George Wilson Bridges," 101; Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, 168. For more on the roots of the strength of Bridges's anti-dissenter sentiment, see Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 101–2.

³⁵The open trading and lack of churchgoing by Black people on Sundays often shocked white people, particularly white women, visiting Britain's Caribbean colonies during slavery, and it was often commented upon in their accounts and used as

in his congregation during the period he had a sung Sunday service illustrates that attending an Anglican church was a choice for his parishioners. He boasted that “the vacant benches of the church were *immediately* crowded; the negroes left the dissenting chapels, and deserted even the Sunday market; [and] their attention was fixed upon the service, and the public registers proved, that during the ten months which followed the renewal of a neglected form of worship, the conversions to Christianity were more numerous than ever, and the rites of marriage more frequently applied for.”³⁶ Bridges’s use of emphatic language—he italicized “immediately,” and used an adverb to emphasize that his Black parishioners “deserted even the Sunday market”—suggests how unusual it was to see the church of St. Ann full of enslaved people who had chosen to be there, and even to convert to the Anglican church through baptism and the sacrament of marriage.

Bridges had previously supported his public proslavery stance with statistics of record-breaking numbers of baptisms and marriages of enslaved people performed in his parish, in so doing arguing that the teachings and faith of the Church of England were compatible with race-based chattel slavery. An 1823 pamphlet Bridges published boasted that during his residence as rector in Jamaica’s Manchester Parish he baptized 9,413 enslaved people, “many of whom attend church.”³⁷ A year later, this number had gone up to 12,000 slave baptisms, with the hope he could perform another 5,000.³⁸ These fantastically high numbers were met with skepticism in British abolitionist publications, with one anonymous writer questioning how Bridges had time to properly convert so many people and wondering “if they were not converted to Christianity, or if they did not understand the nature of the solemn vow and covenant they were called to make, what a mockery of religion, what a prostitution of the sacred initiatory rite of baptism, is here made the subject of boast!”³⁹ Skeptics of the integrity of Bridges’s high number of baptisms also pointed out that Bridges was paid per baptism, with the majority of his income coming from fees received for performing baptisms, marriages, and funerals.⁴⁰ It mattered to religious abolitionists that baptized African and African-descended people became full, practicing members of the Church of England, disavowing previous beliefs and accepting Anglican theology. But the concept of conversion was not necessarily understood as so absolute by the thousands of enslaved and free African and Afro-descended people that Bridges claimed to have baptized and who attended his church, and who would have held a variety of understandings of Christianity and its compatibility with other systems of belief and ritual. Survivors of the middle passage had brought their own religious practices and beliefs to the Caribbean, and these practices adapted and transformed to the conditions of the colonial Caribbean over generations. Christianity was not necessarily understood as contradictory to previously held beliefs, and as Travis Glasson explores, “African and Afro-Caribbean people . . . decided largely for themselves how religion would operate in their lives,” often defying missionary ideas of conversion to Christianity.⁴¹

Making claims about conversion anywhere, particularly in scenes of chattel slavery, is difficult if not impossible.⁴² Afro-Caribbean Christians were not a homogenous group. Some enslaved Africans had already encountered Christianity before they were taken captive and brought to the Americas, for example, those who had experienced Catholicism in the Kingdom of Kongo.⁴³ Those who converted

an argument against slavery by British abolitionists. See, for example, Thomas Cooper, *Facts Illustrative of the Condition of the Negro Slaves in Jamaica: With Notes and an Appendix* (London: J. Hatchard and Son, 1824), 4; A. C. Carmichael, *Domestic Manners and Social Condition of the White, Coloured, and Negro Population of the West Indies* vol. 2 (London: Whittaker, Treacher, and Co. Ave-Maria Lane. 1833), 128.

³⁶Bridges, *The Annals of Jamaica*, vol. 2, 443.

³⁷George Wilson Bridges, *A Voice from Jamaica*, 27.

³⁸Dunkley, “The Life of Rev. George Wilson Bridges,” 94.

³⁹“The Rev. G. W. Bridges on the Effects on Manumission,” *Negro Slavery* No. IV. (London: Ellerton and Henderson, 1823), 30.

⁴⁰Dunkley, “The Life of Rev. George Wilson Bridges,” 94.

⁴¹Glasson, *Mastering Christianity*, 162.

⁴²For a concise overview of the use of the concept of “conversion” in early modern America, see Gerbner, *Christian Slavery*, 6–10.

⁴³Toby Green, *A Fistful of Shells: West Africa from the Rise of the Slave Trade to the Age of Revolution* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2019), 205–13. To learn about influence of Catholic performance traditions from the Kingdom of Kongo

while enslaved did so for a variety of different reasons. These reasons cannot easily be categorized as subversive, or collaborative, but can be considered, as ethnomusicologist Michael Birenbaum Quintero writes, as “maneuvers through the various available forms of sociality and culture [that] were conditioned by what they saw as the means to better, or at least ameliorate, their lot. Their choices exhibit the range of possible human responses to oppression, from resignation to insubordination.”⁴⁴ There was no one way to be Christian in the British colonial Caribbean, and personal religious life was one of the few areas of life in which enslaved people in the 1820s could exercise some degree of autonomy. And even then, their beliefs were scrutinized by men like Bridges, who sought to influence even these most personal choices.

Anticipating African Listening

Bridges was not the first European to use music as a persuasive tool to promote the established church to an enslaved population. One of the earliest recorded instances of Anglican musical proselytizing was the French Huguenot Elias Neau who used prayer and singing to attract and retain enslaved congregants at his meetings of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in New York in the early eighteenth century.⁴⁵ However, unlike Bridges, Neau was teaching people to sing as an active method of prayer and for learning the teachings of the church. This tactic was also used by Baptist and Moravian missionaries, to whom singing psalms and other religious songs was a central part of worship at church and at home. For example, John Shipman (1788–1853), a white English Methodist preacher who resided as a missionary in Jamaica and was a contemporary of Bridges, believed that enslaved people could be encouraged to convert not through listening to music but by making it themselves, writing in 1820:

The Negroes should be encouraged to learn Psalmody, and to practice it in the evenings. This will induce them to attend on religious institutions and impress them with a love for Christian ordinance, for it is well known that they are remarkably partial to singing and in fact to any kind of music.⁴⁶

Shipman’s promotion of singing as a tool for conversion illustrates Methodist belief in the immediacy and centrality of religious experience through singing. His guidelines went on to posit singing not only as a spiritual tool, but as a disciplined and disciplining practice, suggesting that teaching enslaved people to sing psalmody had additional benefits for those that claimed to own them:

how much more preferable it would be, to hear them in the evenings, at their own houses, engaged in such devotional exercises, to their beating the tom tom. Would it not also be better for them to sing praises to God in the fields than to hear them vociferating their heathenish songs, in which they are sometimes inveighing against their Masters, and at other times against each other.⁴⁷

Some Anglican ministers in the Caribbean interpreted dissenting missionaries’ use of singing as a tactic of conversion as a threat, as they could not promise the same immediacy and centrality of religious experience through music. Bridges lamented the advantage that he perceived dissenting churches

being transported to and transformed in the Americas, see Jeroen Dewulf, “Sangamentos on Congo Square?: Kongolese Warriors, Britherood Kings, and Mardi Gras Indians in New Orleans,” in *Afro-Catholic Festivals in the Americas: Performance, Representation, and the Making of Black Atlantic Tradition*, ed. Cécile Fromont, 23–41.

⁴⁴Michael Birenbaum Quintero, *Rites, Rights & Rhythms: A Genealogy of Musical Meaning in Colombia’s Black Pacific* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 62.

⁴⁵Gerbner, *Christian Slavery*, 116.

⁴⁶John Shipman, “Thoughts on the Present State of Religion among the Negroes in Jamaica,” MS vol. 2, 23–24, Wesleyan-Methodist Missionary Society Archive, School of Oriental and African Studies.

⁴⁷Shipman, “Thoughts on the Present State of Religion,” 24.

had over Church of England chapels, noting that “the sectarians of Jamaica, aware of the power of melody over the negro mind, have introduced vocal music among their congregations with peculiar effect: for so susceptible are the Africans of the influence of that art which variously affects the mind by the mysterious power of sound, that they will scarcely give any attention to a religious instructor who possesses a harsh or discordant voice,” reiterating that to him the only way for the Anglican clergy to become more attractive to Black people in the Caribbean was to focus on music.⁴⁸ Bridges even went as far as considering Catholicism to be more attractive to African and African-descended people than Anglicanism, an unusual position for an Anglican clergyman in the generally anti-Catholic British colonies, cynically imagining that although:

the religion of despotism, and the enemy to reason, [Catholicism] often becomes the parent of the arts; and it may be easily imagined that even the splendid vices of the papal church would have introduced more ostensible improvements, perhaps made more converts to the abstract cause of Christianity in this island, than have the more pure, but less impressive, ceremonies of the reformed religion. . . . Mankind is ever prone to embrace a splendid error rather than a sober truth: and the wealthy communities of priests and monks expend their revenues on stately edifices, splendid processions, impressive music, and imposing exhibitions, well calculated to affect the senses, and to make a deep impression on the minds of the ignorant multitude.⁴⁹

This more Catholic approach is the path that Bridges chose for his music program at St. Ann, which involved parishioners not participating through singing, but by silently listening to music sung by a choir. Bridges consistently claimed that novel music was the only way to persuade non-white parishioners to his church, using contemporary stereotypes about African and African-descended people’s innate capacity for music. In the preface to his printed choral service, Bridges shared his belief that “music has ever been found to possess the greatest influence in commanding the passions of the most barbarous; and it has, therefore, been an art of more importance amongst uncultivated, than with civilized, nations. Accordingly, we find the Negroes, and all barbarous tribes in every clime and every age, to have expressed all strong emotions of the mind by Music.”⁵⁰ This idea, that African people and their descendants were innately musical, was a racial stereotype that was broadly, though not universally, accepted at the time. For example, the abolitionist William Dickson wrote that “The fondness of the negroes for music, and the proficiency they sometimes make in it, with little or no instruction, is too well known to need support, from particular instances. Thus their taste for melody and harmony, if it does not demonstrate their rationality, ought, at least, to be admitted as an argument in proving their *humanity*.”⁵¹ This use of musicality to demonstrate humanity was frequent in both travelogues of European visitors to the Caribbean and in abolitionist writing.⁵² However, just a few years later Bryan Edwards, a historian and prominent Jamaica planter wrote, “[an] opinion prevails in Europe, that they [Africans] possess organs peculiarly adapted to the science of music; but this I believe is an ill-founded idea. In vocal harmony they display neither variety nor compass. Nature seems in this respect to have dealt more penuriously by them than towards the rest of the human race.”⁵³ As the nineteenth century progressed the matter of whether or not African and

⁴⁸Bridges, *Annals of Jamaica*, vol. 2, 442.

⁴⁹Bridges, *Annals of Jamaica*, vol. 2, 5–6. Bridges’s monolithic portrayal of Catholic pomp and ceremony may not have been recognizable to enslaved people in Catholic colonies throughout the Americas including the Caribbean, who had multiple investments in and relationships with the rites and rituals of Catholicism, as explored by the contributors to *Afro-Catholic Festivals in the Americas*, ed. Fromont.

⁵⁰Bridges, *A Service for the Parochial Church of Saint Ann Jamaica*, 3.

⁵¹William Dickson, *Letters on Slavery. To which are Added, Addresses to the Whites, and to the Free Negroes of Barbadoes; and Accounts of some Negroes Eminent for their Virtues and Abilities* (Westport, CT: Negro Universities Press, [1789] 1970), 74.

⁵²For more on how European travelogue authors represented African music heard in the Caribbean, see Mary Caton Lingold, “Peculiar Animations: Listening to Afro-Atlantic Music in Caribbean Travel Narratives,” *Early American Literature* 52, no. 3 (2017): 623–50.

⁵³Bryan Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: John Humphreys, 1806), 292.

African-descended people were innately musical would develop into a scientific discourse that could be mobilized both by those who wanted to deny Black people's claim to humanity and equality with Europeans, and those who fought for the recognition of Black people as equals.

Bridges's ideas about race and musicality lie somewhere between those two political causes. Bridges believed in the inherent musicality of Africans, but although he at first makes the claim that music was more important "amongst uncultivated, than with civilized nations," he goes on to draw a line of continuity between European and African ways of listening. Writing to his perceived white audience using the plural first person, Bridges philosophized that:

We always listen with rapture to melodies which we have heard in our youth, because they awaken the memory of our guiltless and happy days. We are often affected by airs which yet appear to possess no peculiar merit or expression in themselves and it is because we have heard those strains at some remote period. . . . Still more powerful is the influence of Melody upon man in the wild state of nature. Those who have but little taste for Music may, perhaps, hesitate a moment, but such as have felt its influence in raising, or soothing the passions, and emotions of the soul, will be convinced that the application of Sacred Harmony to aid, with unison of utterance the pure sentiments of Divine, and Social, Love, would tend, in no small degree, to efface from the minds of the transplanted Africans those early and barbarous associations still so closely connected with their native Music.⁵⁴

Bridges asks his readers to empathize with African listening by reflecting on their own strong, and seemingly irrational, reactions to music from their youth, in order to advocate for a similar musical reverie and strong emotional connection to music to be made available to the enslaved listeners in his parish.

Bishop Lipscomb seemed to have held a more binary understanding of the difference between African and white European listening. Lipscomb's objection to Bridges's choral music was in line with earlier claims he had made about the enslaved population of Jamaica and their relationship to musicality. Only a month into his tenure as Bishop of Jamaica, Lipscomb wrote to Bathurst in London giving his first impressions of "the negro population," observing that "psalmody & organs have great attractions for them & the severity & baldness of Presbyterianism have never yet gained one convert. They seem particularly fond of form & ceremony & greater critics than many persons will give them credit for, remarking every particularity of manner & gesture, & have a great predilection for a powerful sonorous voice."⁵⁵ Despite Lipscomb's initial observation on arrival in Jamaica that Black people to his mind seemed to like and gravitate towards music and organs, ceremony and form, it was "simple psalmody," not "laboured & artificial compositions" that he deemed suitable for non-white congregations in the case of Bridges's choral service.⁵⁶

Lipscomb's "simple psalmody" is likely to have referred to hymn tunes and metrical psalms that could be easily taught by rote to parishioners who were mostly unable to read or write and could be sung in unison without the need for a conductor, at church or at home. In contrast, the music printed in Bridges's *Service for the Parochial Church of Saint Ann Jamaica* required the singers to produce written harmonies, and was sometimes non-metrical, requiring either more rehearsal or to be conducted. Bridges's musical innovations were towards professional choral singing more akin to the musical practices of British cathedrals and away from congregational singing. Most cathedrals had professional choirs who sang parts of the mass that otherwise would have been congregational, leading to a less active role taken by congregants. Bridges's admiration for this model is clearly stated in the opening lines of his preface to the published choral service: "To blend in harmonious expression the fervent aspirations of prayer and praise, is the most sublime effect of the powers of music: and cold indeed

⁵⁴Bridges, *A Service for the Parochial Church of Saint Ann Jamaica*, 3–5.

⁵⁵Letter from Bishop of Jamaica to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, March 12, 1825, Correspondence from the Bishop of Jamaica, TNA, CO 137/267: f. 16r.

⁵⁶Letter from Bishop Christopher to Lord Bathurst. Spanish town, Jamaica, June 5, 1827, TNA, CO 137/268, ff. 24v–25r.

must that heart be which is not warmed by the devotional melodies of a Cathedral Choir.”⁵⁷ Lipscomb’s heart, however, was not warmed. For the Bishop, emulating the “laboured & artificial compositions adopted by our cathedrals” was neither an acceptable nor appropriate form of worship for African and African-descended congregants in Britain’s colonies, despite Bridges’s claim that his music increased congregation size.⁵⁸

What is curious about Bridges is that he appealed to African-descended people’s supposed curiosity and listening skills, and their potential for him to build a congregation, rather than the benefits of singing and music-making themselves, which was what missionaries from dissenting churches did with the same racialized stereotype. In the preface, Bridges wrote that curiosity for listening to unfamiliar music would be enough to draw in Black attendees to the church, claiming that “more especially would the influence of Sacred Music be felt by those whom we here labour to convert. — — Those objects of our solicitude who have yet, unhappily, a religion to adopt, are peculiarly susceptible of the powers of music, and were they but induced to join our congregational worship by motives no better than curiosity, they would be retained by the devotion which a Choral Service would inevitably inspire.”⁵⁹ Here, Bridges shows he was aware of his own novelty in encouraging the choir as a way of getting people through the door in the hope they would then be inspired to devotion. Bridges believed that the musical curiosity of enslaved and free Africans and their descendants was strong enough that if there was new music to be heard, that alone would make them inclined to attend his services. Although Bridges grants his parishioners agency here, he also maintains the racial status quo. For although he implied that his parishioners could listen to, enjoy, and be drawn to the type of European church music that he was promoting, he never demonstrates any commitment to the possibility that Africans and their descendants were capable of learning this music, performing it, or producing something similar themselves.

If we accept Bridges’s claim that when his music began the pews swelled with enslaved and free Black congregants persuaded in by the music, and when the choir fell silent they emptied again, then it is worth exploring why the music may have been appealing. In the absence of testimony from enslaved people in the parish of St. Ann at the time, I am left to speculate from the printed *Service for the Parochial Church of Saint Ann Jamaica* and the paper trail about it, as well as other contemporary descriptions of religious services in Jamaica.

Imagine the scene. African and African-descended people would have travelled from their homes to the church in St. Ann’s Bay. It is likely that many of these people would have walked several miles from the plantations where they lived and labored to attend the Sunday church service. Some of them may have sacrificed other Sunday tasks like tending their provision grounds, resting, and socializing in order to journey to church. Like most churches in the British colonial Caribbean St. Ann’s would have looked superficially similar to an English Parish Church, standing in the middle of a churchyard, having a West and a North door, and perhaps even a tower. Unlike English churches, the long windows had no glass, just shutters that allowed a breeze to flow through the building and cool the congregants within. St. Ann could hold three hundred to four hundred people, and the hierarchies of the outside world were represented within. Like in most British churches of the time, seating at the front was fixed pews assigned to individual families; in the Caribbean wealthier white congregants paid annually for the use of their pew.⁶⁰ Behind them sat poorer white people unable to afford the annual fee. Behind them, if there were pews left, or otherwise on benches at the sides or in the aisles, or on the gallery if there was one, was where free people of color and enslaved people could sit.⁶¹ Even if impoverished white churchgoers were more poorly dressed than the African and African-descended people, which is likely considering the attention to dress of free people of color and many enslaved people in Jamaica, particularly on high days and holidays, they would still sit in front of them. The enslaved

⁵⁷Bridges, *A Service for the Parochial Church of Saint Ann Jamaica*, 1.

⁵⁸Letter from Bishop Christopher to Lord Bathurst. Spanish town, Jamaica, June 5, 1827, TNA, CO 137/268, f. 25r.

⁵⁹Bridges, *A Service for the Parochial Church of Saint Ann Jamaica*, 1–3.

⁶⁰Keith Hunte, “Protestantism and Slavery in the British Caribbean,” in *Christianity in the Caribbean: Essays on Church History*, ed. Armando Lampe (Mona, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2000), 99.

⁶¹Hunte, “Protestantism and Slavery,” 99.

women and children who chose to attend, perhaps hearing about the new choir, would probably have been dressed in their finest white outfits.⁶²

Enslaved men, women, and children may have been drawn to St. Ann through a curiosity about the music, but they were not ignorant of the segregation of the room and the violence and views of Bridges's church and what it represented. The harmonies of the responses and anthem may have brought delight and interest, and the coolness of the church may have brought relief, but this did not override that they were in a house of white supremacy that was committed to the continuation of race-based slavery. Some of the congregants in attendance were almost certainly owned by Bridges, and they may have struggled to reconcile his performance at the pulpit, and his delight in the choir's music, with his everyday violent behavior. After the service had finished, enslaved parishioners may have gathered outside the boundaries of the churchyard to exchange stories, rumors, news, and opinions. It seems likely that at least some of these conversations would have been about the new choral music. Although these conversations are untraceable, it is possible that the musical goings-on at St. Ann's created as much talk among the enslaved and free congregants as it did a transatlantic correspondence between the Bishop and the Secretary of State. Although speculative, the presence of those conversations lingers as a counter-conversation beneath Bridges and Lipscomb's speculation about the limits and desires of Black listening.⁶³

What did Kitty Hynton hear?

Bridges, Bishop Lipscomb, and Archdeacon Pope all claimed people as property. Although British involvement in the transatlantic slave trade had been banned with the Slave Trade Act of 1807, it was not until the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 that British parliament legally pledged to end slavery in its Caribbean colonies a year later on August 1, 1834. However, even this emancipatory act had benefits for those who had long profited from slavery. Former slave-owners were compensated for "loss of property" to a total of over £20 million, and the majority of enslaved people remained tied to their former owners through a period of coerced labor called apprenticeship until August 1, 1838.⁶⁴ At emancipation, Archdeacon Edward Pope was compensated for fifty-seven enslaved people, and his wife held more than 660 people enslaved on her sugar plantation.⁶⁵ The conditions on her plantation were bad enough to come to the attention of British abolitionists, who noted that between 1824 and 1830 the number of enslaved people held there decreased by ten percent due to deaths caused by the brutality of their working conditions.⁶⁶ Bishop Lipscomb's family also still held enslaved people at emancipation, and Bishop's Penn, the home of the Bishop in Spanish Town, Jamaica, was run by enslaved servants. Bridges was compensated for three slaves at emancipation. In St. Ann, in 1826 Bridges reported in the Annual Return of Slaves that he claimed twelve people in his possession, six men and six women. Three years later he claimed eleven people as enslaved domestic servants.⁶⁷ Bumbling vicars they were not. Like many Church of England clergymen in the Caribbean, they were deeply committed to the creation of wealth for themselves and their families through the

⁶²For more on Sunday outfits of enslaved people, see Steeve O. Buckridge, *The Language of Dress: Resistance and Accommodation in Jamaica, 1760–1890* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2004), 158–60.

⁶³I am inspired here by Glenda Goodman's exploration of the potential of holding presence for missing materials in early American music studies in "Joseph Johnson's Lost Gamuts: Native Hymnody, Materials of Exchange, and the Colonialist Archive," *Journal for the Society of American Music* 13, no. 4 (2019), 502–3.

⁶⁴The £20 million the government borrowed to compensate slaveowners (estimated to be almost £17 billion in today's money) wasn't paid off until February 1, 2015 due to the type of consolidated loan used. Her Majesty's Treasury, Information Rights Unit, "Freedom of Information Act 2000: Slavery Abolition Act 1833," Ref: FOI2018/00186. January 31, 2018.

⁶⁵"Jamaica St Mary 33 (Smithfield Plantation)," *Legacies of British Slave Ownership database*, University College London, <http://www.depts-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/claim/view/18565>; "Correspondence between Sir C. B. Codrington and T. F. Buxton, Esq., on the Subject of Slavery," *The Anti-Slavery Reporter*, November 15, 1832, 311.

⁶⁶"Correspondence between Sir C. B. Codrington and T. F. Buxton, Esq., on the Subject of Slavery," *The Anti-Slavery Reporter*, November 15, 1832, 311.

⁶⁷Office of Registry of Colonial Slaves and Slave Compensation Commission: Jamaica, St. Ann, 1826, TNA, T 71/46 f. 96v; Office of Registry of Colonial Slaves and Slave Compensation Commission: Jamaica, St. Ann, 1829, TNA, T 71/47 f. 63r.

continued enslavement and exploitation of people whose skin was darker than theirs. It would be easier for me to remain focused on Bridges, Pope, and Lipscomb's petty squabbles and back-and-forths over the music at services at St. Ann's than the lives of the hundreds of people they claimed to own, because far more ink was spilled over the legitimacy of the singing at St. Ann's than was ever written about the lives of the people that they counted as their property.

However, there is one significant exception to this archival silence: Kitty Hylton, an enslaved woman who worked in Bridges's house. The only reason I can say Kitty Hylton's name is because she made a complaint against Bridges in 1829 to St. Ann's council of protection, an assembly of magistrates and vestrymen who judged cases of improper punishment of slaves after the establishment of the largely ineffectual ameliorating slave codes of 1816.⁶⁸ Hylton claimed that Bridges unjustly and brutally flogged her over a mistakenly slaughtered turkey. Like enslaved Black women throughout the past and present of the Americas, her name and a tiny part of her life story was only made known because of the extreme violence she suffered. Because of Bridges's notoriety amongst abolitionists, her case was of interest in England, and was published first by anti-slavery advocates, and eventually raised in parliament.⁶⁹

Evidence given by Hylton at the court of protection claimed that one Friday after breakfast she asked Bridges what he wanted for dinner, and he said that he wanted a turkey for his meal. However, later in the day when Bridges saw that she had indeed slaughtered a turkey, he took her into the pantry, "nailed her against the dresser," and kicked her severely for over an hour. Hylton recalled that while doing so he said, "he wished he could see her a corpse, as he hated her so." After this kicking, she was dragged to the cow pen, where he made her lie down, not on the grass where she requested, but on the rocks, and flogged her severely. After he had flogged her, Bridges ordered an enslaved man nearby named Charles, also in Bridges's possession, to continue the whipping and to "cut all the flesh off her." Charles did not give evidence at the court of protection. Blood was running down Hylton's back and legs and soaked through her dress, but she did not change clothes until Bridges saw her later that afternoon serving his wife, and ordered her to change. When Hylton said she only had one other dress and it was dirty he brought her another dress and ordered her to change and to then burn the bloodied dress that she was beaten in. Hylton's testimony was corroborated by several witnesses. The white governess Miss Moreland witnessed Bridges beating and kicking Hylton in the pantry as well as the dress burning. Another witness, Thomas Raffington, a white man residing nearby, gave evidence that Hylton came to him and he "never saw a female in such a situation," that she was "terribly lacerated," and he "never saw a woman so ill-treated." The local doctor who examined Hylton when she was sent to the workhouse by Bridges said that the marks on her body were severe, and showed she had received punishment far beyond the thirty-nine strikes that were allowed by law. Bridges did not deny that he had ordered the woman to be lashed; but despite the evidence against him, the council of protection—a council made up of his own peers, many of whom as vestrymen met regularly in his church, and sanctioned the choral service—decided that he should not be prosecuted.⁷⁰

The report of the council of protection does not give us much information about Hylton beyond this scene of violence. She is described as a "quadroon," which was understood at the time as the

⁶⁸For more on the difficulties of enforcing legal reforms made in London in the British colonial Caribbean in the decades before emancipation, see Russell Smandych, "'To Soften the Extreme Rigor of Their Bondage': James Stephen's Attempt to Reform the Criminal Slave Laws of the West Indies, 1813–1833," *Law and History Review* 23, no. 3 (2005), 537–88.

⁶⁹Great Britain, Parliament, House of Commons, "Jamaica. Copy of any information received from Jamaica, respecting an inquiry into the treatment of a female slave, by the Rev. Mr. Bridges, Rector of St. Ann's, in that island," in *Papers Presented to Parliament, by Her Majesty's Command, in Explanation of the Measures Adopted by his Majesty's Government for the Melioration of the Condition of the Slave Population in the West Indies, on the Continent of South America, the Cape of Good Hope, and at the Mauritius*, Parliamentary Papers, vol. 16 ([London]: House of Commons, 1831), 3–13.

⁷⁰All quotations in this paragraph from *Minutes of Evidence taken before the St. Ann's Council of Protection, in the case of the Slave Kitty Hylton's complaint against her Master, the Rev. G. W. Bridges* reported in *The Anti-Slavery Reporter*, February 15, 1831, 140–43. Bridges noted in the preface to the Choral Service that "A liberal, and enlightened, Vestry has enabled me to make the experiment," giving permission for the musical changes in the parish. Bridges, *A Service for the Parochial Church of Saint Ann Jamaica*, 5.

child of a “mulatto” woman (a mixed-race person with one parent of African descent and one of European descent) and a white man. She had only been working for Bridges for three months at the time of his attack. Bridges’s butler called her “a troublesome woman in the house” and said that he had often heard her say “I will do it when I think proper” when she was ordered to do anything. This spark of resistance and self-confidence, paired with her taking the risk of bringing a formal complaint about the man who claimed to own her, points towards Hylton being a woman who knew her rights and was prepared to fight an injustice done to her, despite having experienced the severe and violent consequences of advocating for herself. I have not yet been able to find any more details about Hylton’s life, but, as Saidiya Hartman writes, “the loss of stories sharpens the hunger for them.”⁷¹ I am aware of my desire to imagine Kitty Hylton as a resistive counterpoint to Bridges despite knowing I am unlikely to ever find evidence that fills in her character beyond the ways in which she was represented in the council of protection and to British readers four thousand miles away, or that elucidates her opinions and interpretations of Bridges’s behavior and choices at home and at church.

To readers in Britain, Hylton was presented as a sympathetic case illustrating the need for the end of slavery in the British colonial Caribbean. It is perhaps not surprising that Hylton’s status as “quadronee” is immediately listed in the description of her in the *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, which may have marked her as sexually desirable and part of a long tradition of using light-skinned African-descended women as the face of moral outrage of abolitionists while also being titillating.⁷² In the account of the case in the *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, one witness, J. Harker, claimed that he examined Hylton, finding that “her posteriors were very much cut up; on the inner part of her thigh on each there were several black marks.”⁷³ To the British readers of the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* Harker’s mention of the violence done to Hylton’s buttocks and inner thighs may have conjured up imagery of the long history of sexual violence that white men perpetuated on Black enslaved women that is inseparable from the history of racialized chattel slavery. Harker’s testimony seems to open the possibility of that sexual violence, in the imaginations of readers, if not in the minutiae of the case.⁷⁴ I hesitate to mention the bleeding and bruised back of Hylton for fear of committing further violence by retelling the violence that was done to her, what Hartman calls “replicating the grammar of violence.”⁷⁵ There is a long history of the bodies of Black women being used for the anti-slavery cause; as Diana Paton wrote so clearly, “when abolitionists wanted to convey a sense of slavery’s horror, they told stories about women. They emphasized the violations of women’s bodies that accompanied enslavement—the sexual brutality, the vicious flogging, the enforced nakedness.”⁷⁶ Perhaps one way to redress the use of violence is to imagine other ways that Hylton may have interacted with the world of Bridges.

I do not know whether or not Hylton attended the Sunday services of the man who laid claim to her, nor whether or not she heard the choral service. If she did attend a church it would be unlikely that she would choose to attend another denomination. Because Hylton worked in the rectory, not as a field laborer, it is likely that she would have had to work part of her Sundays in the kitchen, serving Bridges and any guests he might have had. Indeed, in her testimony at the council of protection she mentioned that she would be willing to buy another turkey with her own money and serve it for Sunday dinner. Living in such close proximity to Bridges, Hylton must have heard that at the beginning of 1829 he had a man named Henry Williams, enslaved on a nearby estate, sent to the workhouse where “he was put in chains, and repeatedly flogged, and so severe was the punishment inflicted upon

⁷¹Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” 8.

⁷²Jennifer DeVere Brody outlines this trope, naming it as the “mulattaroon,” in *Impossible Purities: Blackness, Femininity, and Victorian Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 15–17.

⁷³*Minutes of Evidence taken before the St. Ann’s Council of Protection, in the case of the Slave Kitty Hylton’s complaint against her Master, the Rev. G. W. Bridges* reported in *The Anti-Slavery Reporter*, February 15, 1831, 142.

⁷⁴Michelle Gadpaille also wonders about the lacunae for sexual incidents in this account of Reverend Bridges’s trial, despite it not being narrated by Hylton, in her book *The Ethical Atlantic: Advocacy, Networking and the Slavery Narrative, 1830–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019), 33n20.

⁷⁵Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” 4.

⁷⁶Diana Paton, “Decency, dependence and the lash: Gender and the British debate over slave emancipation, 1830–34,” *Slavery & Abolition* 17, no. 3 (1996), 163.

him, that [it was necessary] to place him in the hospital, where his death was expected.” The reason for this punishment was that Williams was unable to persuade other enslaved people on the estate he worked on to attend Bridges’s church rather than the Methodist chapel.⁷⁷ The message was clear: deviating from Bridges’s desires could lead to life-threatening violence.

Hylton was purchased by Bridges after the choral service was no longer being sung, but I suspect that the musical life of the parish would still have intersected with her day-to-day life. As an enslaved domestic servant, she would have spent most of her time in Bridges’s house, and probably also lived there. Other enslaved people in the house would have overheard moments of preparation for the choral service. Perhaps Charles, the enslaved man who was ordered to take over Hylton’s whipping, may have heard parts of the service being prepared on a piano in Bridges’s home when he first had the idea. Perhaps he, another enslaved servant, or even the white governess Moreland gossiped with Hylton when she arrived, warning her that the name of the Bishop was not to be raised with Bridges, as he was still furious about the fallout from the disbanding of the choir. Perhaps Hylton served food and drink when parishioners who had signed the letter to the Bishop complaining about his decision visited Bridges, and overheard them complaining about the lapsed state of music in the Anglican churches of the British Caribbean, and cursing the dissenting missionaries in the area. Perhaps Hylton sometimes overheard Bridges singing on his way to church; perhaps Bridges overheard Hylton singing as she prepared dinner in the kitchen.

And this is why I cannot speak about Bridges without speaking about Hylton, and cannot sing the choral service without thinking about the conditions of the lives of those who listened to it. If, as Michel-Rolph Trouillot asserts, “the past does not exist independently from the present,” then Bridges’s racialized thinking about music must have an intellectual inheritance.⁷⁸ It is easy to condemn and hate a man like Bridges. What is more difficult to acknowledge is that his ability to focus on music and the musical object while minimizing his attention and responsibility to the conditions of the enslaved Black people in his parish mirrors a mode of understanding eighteenth- and nineteenth-century music in Europe and the Americas that neglects to acknowledge the imperial and colonial networks that allowed that music to flourish, in ways that still have impact today.⁷⁹ Bridges attempted to manipulate what he believed to be the natural musical curiosity of enslaved Black people in his parish for his own gain, be that through increased notoriety and readership in Britain, or increased income through presiding over more baptisms of new converts. The amount of work required to recruit an organist, rehearse a choir up to a higher standard, fundraise, and print the choral service lithographically was significant, and yet his efforts were short-lived. But ultimately, Bridges underestimated the sensibilities of the very people he was hoping to inspire by music, who surely must have had a more nuanced understanding of religion, slavery, colonization, faith, entertainment, and music than he was able to grasp. Bridges’s lack of long-term strategies for retaining Black congregants backfired on him; as once the choir was disbanded, there was no longer a reason for people interested in the choral music to continue attending the church of St. Ann.

It is easy to write about Bridges; it is much harder to write about those African and African-descended people who listened to the choral service in the few months it was performed. It is more possible to write a little about the light-skinned Hylton. Although her story is desperately violent, some part of that violence was recorded in print and is recoupable, unlike most of the violence in the lives of the enslaved plantation laborers that attended Bridges’s church. I cannot recover what those enslaved listeners may have thought of the music at St. Ann’s in those months that spanned 1826 and 1827.⁸⁰ But even in the absence of the possibility of that recovery I think we can speculate that Bridges was attempting to train Black people to appreciate and learn to listen to a type of European music that

⁷⁷“Sequel of the Case of Henry Williams, of Jamaica,” *The Anti-Slavery Reporter*, August 20, 1832, 145–51.

⁷⁸Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 15.

⁷⁹I am directly inspired here by Hartman’s reckoning with the slave-owner and rapist Thomas Thistlewood in “Venus in Two Acts,” 6.

⁸⁰For more on the politics, possibilities, and failures of the recovery of Afro-American lives during slavery, see Laura Helton, Justin Leroy, Max A. Mishler, Samantha Seeley, and Shauna Sweeney, “The Question of Recovery: An Introduction,” *Social Text* 33, no. 4 (2015): 1–18.

he didn't believe they were capable of producing themselves. This idea would gain traction throughout the nineteenth century. Bridges's choral service does not offer redress to his violence. However, the exceptionality of its survival in print is an opportunity to attend to the entanglement of music, race, power, and listening—then, and now.

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Maria Ryan is an assistant professor of musicology at Florida State University. She has her PhD in musicology and a graduate certificate in Africana Studies from the University of Pennsylvania. Supported by fellowships from the Society of American Music, American Musicological Society, and Mellon/ACLS, her work explores how African and African-descended people, enslaved and free, engaged with European music in the British colonial Caribbean. She is a Junior Fellow in Critical Bibliography at the Rare Book School at the University of Virginia.

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