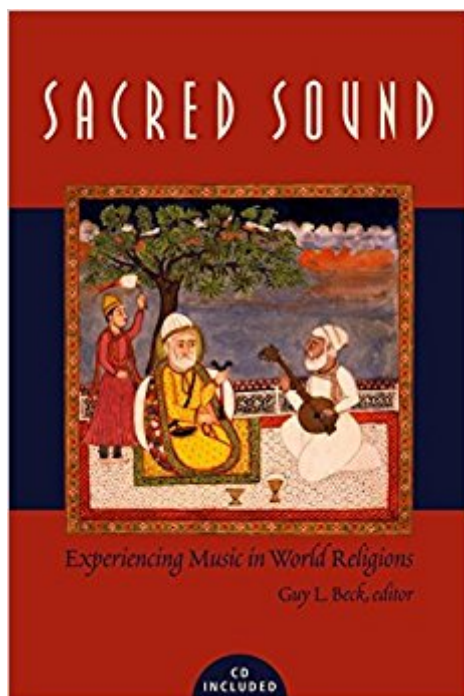


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# Sacred Sound: Experiencing Music In World Religions



## Synopsis

This innovative book explores religion through music, one of the most universally recognized forms of human experience. The only art form named after a divinity, music has been documented from prehistory to the present age in virtually all known cultures. For many, music is a vehicle for spiritual growth and community empowerment, whether it's understood as a gift of the gods or simply a practice for achieving mental states conducive to enlightenment. Traditionally, when religious scholars talk about music, it's as a kind of aesthetic supplement to the important spiritual content of a religion, analogous to stained-glass windows or temple paintings. In contrast, *Sacred Sound: Experiencing Music in World Religions* acknowledges the critical role of musical activity in religious life. Music, including chant and vocal utterance, is not incidental in religious practice but a sacred treasure that is central to the growth and sustenance of religions throughout the world. Musical sound is sacred in most religions because it embodies the divine and can be shared by all participants, enduring among diverse communities of people despite theological differences. Covering six of the major world religions—Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Buddhism—the book is accompanied by a CD of forty selections of music and chant. Contributors are respected scholars in religious studies and musicology and provide insight from both disciplines. The first book of its kind, *Sacred Sound* is a milestone in the growing cross-disciplinary study of religion and music.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A welcomed addition to the fields of religious studies and music.... Highly recommended." (L. Smith CHOICE)"Guy L. Beck's scholarly and innovative book explores religion through music. It elevates and emphasizes the critical role of musical activity in religious life. Rather than discussing music as an aesthetic supplement to religion, Beck's book takes the approach that music is not incidental in religious practice but is a sacred treasure central to the growth and sustenance of world religions. Sacred Sound promises to be a milestone in the growing cross-disciplinary study of religion and music and includes a CD of musical examples." (Greg Hansen BYU Studies (Brigham Young University), 47:1)

Guy L. Beck spent over six years in India researching Indian religions and music. Holding degrees in both religious studies and musicology, he currently teaches at Tulane University, New Orleans, and was recently a visiting fellow at Oxford University. A scholar and musician, he is the author of *Sonic Theology: Hinduism and Sacred Sound* (1993) as well as numerous articles on Indian religions and music and has also released two CDs of Indian vocal music.

This introductory survey on the historical liturgies, hymns, and devotional music of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, and Buddhism helps fill a niche in the classroom study of religious anthropology and ethnomusicology. While a fair number of detailed accounts on each religion's music and liturgy are available, rare is the text that discusses them all. The 40 examples in the accompanying CD, many sung by the authors of the essays, are discussed in addition to the origins, technical development, and purposes of each religion's recitation and music. Of course, each essay varies in quality with the scholar, but they all follow a set organization and length, about 30 pages. Guy L. Beck, the editor, provides a comparatively elaborate discussion of Hindu music. The emphasis on the spiritual or yogic quality of sound in Hinduism contrasts with the verbal power of recitations and poems in Islam. I found Joseph A. Levine's discussion on Judaic music strong on historical aspects. His vocal examples are particularly fine, indeed cantorial. We are well familiar with Gregorian chant, classical masses, and Protestant hymns, but the historical aspects and Martin Luther's musical edict are worthwhile insights. I knew little about the musical traditions of Sikhs; while that essay was useful, indeed thorough, I found little distinction of music from that of Hindus. Although the three divisions of Buddhism do have certain liturgical chants in common, their musical style varies widely with each Asian land, more so than suggested by the examples. Indeed, one of the minor problems I find with this book is the emphasis on the Indian subcontinent. Of course, Hinduism and Sikhism are centered there. Albeit Buddhism arose there also, half the musical

examples are from Kolkata [Calcutta], India, and Sri Lanka. Moreover, Islam is covered from an Indian and Pakistani perspective, and some examples are sung in Urdu. The musical examples are also largely orthodox; the more ecstatic music of Hasidism (niguns), Sufism (the dikhr repetition of "Allah"), Hinduism (prolonged mantras), and Buddhism (dharanis) are scarcely mentioned and some are missing from the examples. I also would have liked to read a final uniting essay with a comparative approach emphasizing the commonality of music and sound among these religions. Still, this collection is merely an introduction and the examples are just a taste. For that, this book is a good start. Provided are the text of musical examples; their English translation; a discography; scholarly references; and a glossary. [My copy of the CD was somewhat defective (tracks froze), and other than my computer's DVD drive, three CD players failed to play the disc properly or fully.]

A very informative and enjoyable text.

music of world religions

I bought this book when doing research for a festival on music in many religious traditions. It was just what I needed--an accessible, succinct overview of music within several belief traditions, along with a CD that allows you to experience the sounds the essayists talk about. The chapters are written by practitioners and scholars of each of the religions discussed, so their views are from "inside"--a valuable perspective for me. The basic beliefs within each religion are explicated, and they are connected to musical or chant practices. I found the book and CD not only informative, but inspiring. It is a great introduction to this topic.

product is exactly what i was looking for, although i do wish it would've arrive faster with the standard shipping. overall it is great, condition of the book was new and CD was included as well. Goodbuy!

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