

The Musical Eulogy and Other Functions of Funeral Music

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Abstract

This article examines the function of music during contemporary funerals in the Netherlands. Using a performance-based approach, this article shows that music adds to the ritual dimension of contemporary funerals, by relating the music to the funeral itself, the deceased person's identity, and to emotions. Zooming in on the music that in contemporary *personalized funerals* is selected because it is—one way or another—related to the deceased, it will be shown that the lyrical content of this music is less important than social and emotional aspects. Theoretically, the concept of the musical eulogy is introduced as a hermeneutic tool to examine music in ritualized contexts.

Keywords

music, funerals, ritual, musical eulogy, identity

Introduction

Contemporary Dutch funeral rituals are characterized as secularized, individualized rituals (Venbrux, Peelen, & Altena, 2009). Now that churches have lost their influence on the majority of funerals, wishes of the next of kin provide the basis for contemporary funerals. Next of kin center funerals “around identity, celebration of life and personal choice” (Adamson & Holloway, 2015, p. 34).

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This becomes among others visible or better: audible in music that sounds during funerals. As next of kin are free to select music for the funeral, the musical repertoire of funerals in the Netherlands has broadened since the end of the 20th century. Especially, the use of pop songs has become a widespread phenomenon.

Next of kin not only select the musical repertoire for the funeral but also decide at which moment during the funeral the music will be played. So, the musical repertoire has become not only very diverse but also very flexible with regard to the specific moment at which it sounds during the funeral. For example, throughout several funerals, the very popular song *Time to say goodbye* by Andrea Bocelli, the *Ave Maria* (in various versions), and the nowadays popular Dutch pop song *Mag ik dan bij jou* (Can I be with you) by Claudia de Breij might be played at different moments, for example, while people look at pictures or while they leave the ceremony room.¹ The broadening of the musical repertoire and its flexibility with regard to its specific moment during the funeral raises the question of how music functions during a funeral. Therefore, the main question that informs this research is: How does music function during contemporary funerals in the Netherlands?

Based on the observation of 44 funeral rituals, the main question will be dealt with in two parts, corresponding to two separate analyses of the data. In the first part, the function of funeral music will be studied by examining music in relation to its specific place in the funeral. This analysis will show that music contributes to the ritual dimension of the funeral. In the second part, the function of funeral music will be studied by examining the announcements of and reflections on funeral music. The concept of the musical eulogy will be introduced as a hermeneutic tool to examine music in ritualized contexts.

In this article, the term funeral music is used to point to music that is played during a funeral. This does not imply that the music was written for use during funerals. Unless stated otherwise, I refer to a piece of music as a whole, including both the instrumental aspects and the—if any—sung lyrics.

The aim of this research is threefold. First, it aims to gain deeper insights into the ways music functions during funerals. Second, and related to the first, it aims to gain more knowledge about music in a ritual context in general. Third, this research aims to introduce the concept of the musical eulogy as a hermeneutic tool to examine music during different, especially ritualized, contexts.²

Previous Research

First, I will describe previous research on funeral music. These studies on funeral music examined the *ways* in which music can be *used*, the *role* of music in funerals, the *meaning* of music for the bereaved, and the *motivations* for choices of funeral music. Although various scholars used different terms to underline their research focus, they all examined music during funeral rituals. In this

overview, the terminology as it was used by the various scholars will be used. Subsequently, it will be shown how the use of *function* in the current article distinguishes itself from the other terms.

One of the previous studies of the function and the use of music was done by Caswell (2011), who examined the ways in which music was used during funerals in Scotland. She selected three sites in Scotland with diverse histories and social configurations to conduct her research: Stornoway, Edinburgh, and Inverness. She interviewed 56 funeral professionals and 10 bereaved individuals and found five specific ways in which music was used during Scottish funerals: the use of music as a means of control, the use of music as a means of inclusion and exclusion, music as a source of collective activity, music as a means of creating or shifting emotion, and music as a means of evoking the memory of the deceased person. The categories of music as a means of control and music as a means of inclusion and exclusion are related to the use of music in the Free Church of Scotland and the Free Presbyterian Churches. There, ministers wanted the music and the mourners to be focused on God and did not want mourners to be distracted by music that stirs up or decreases emotions or music that reminded the mourners of the individual life of the deceased. Within both churches, ministers used music to direct the focus onto the worship. In addition, religious songs included and excluded mourners, as not all mourners were familiar with the religious songs.

In another study, Adamson and Holloway (2012) examined the role of music in contemporary funerals in the United Kingdom. Based on 29 interviews with funeral professionals countrywide and 46 observations in the north of England, they showed that funeral music contributed to both the creation of a ceremonial event and to the process of meaning-making (Adamson & Holloway, 2012, p. 39). On the one hand, “the purpose of music was essentially as a filler, to break up the spoken word, and to cover the times when action was taking place such as entry and exit” (Adamson & Holloway, 2012, p. 43). On the other hand, the research revealed how music was the most common vehicle for the expression of personal meaning, which is important for the contemporary funeral. For example, next of kin had chosen a specific piece of music to express a relationship or because the music held meaning for the deceased. They also found “tentative evidence that for many people, the music chosen and used also evokes and conveys their spirituality” (Adamson & Holloway, 2012, p. 52).

In yet another study, Garrido and Davidson (2016a) investigated “the extent to which tradition is still important to individuals in making choices for funeral music as opposed to music that is personally meaningful in that it relates to personal memories, values or beliefs” (p. 12). Therefore, they interviewed five students and academics at the University of Perth (Western Australia) about their funeral music choice. The researchers identified three overall motivations: the desire to follow tradition, to create a specific mood or atmosphere, and to express something personal. Garrido and Davidson (2016b) also found that for

the participants it was important to minimize the grief of the mourners and to remember the deceased with joy. In addition, they found that the use of personally significant music was of greater weight than following tradition. In two, both quantitative follow-up studies, they added a fourth motivation for the selection of funeral music, namely an aesthetic motivation. Together, the studies revealed that coping styles and music choices were related. For example, people with a religious coping style chose traditional music rather than popular music, and people coping with humour chose popular music rather than traditional (Garrido & Davidson, 2016b, p. 25).

Recurring functions in the described studies on funeral music are the function of music for the ceremony at large and the functions of music for dealing with religion, emotion, memories, and personal meaning. Still, the questions that informed the studies were diverse: Caswell studied the *ways* in which music can be *used*, Garrido and Davidson studied the *motivations* for choices of funeral music, and Adamson and Holloway studied the *role* of music in funerals and the *meaning* of music for the bereaved. All three studies contained interviews with funeral professionals or bereaved individuals, so the answers to the various questions are partly informed by bereaved families or funeral professionals who work with bereaved families on a regular basis. Therefore, the answers were at least partly based on the *intention* of the funeral music as phrased by the bereaved. This begs the question whether actual listening to music during funerals is still related to the *intended* functions of dealing with religion, emotion, memories, and personal meaning. Therefore, in this article, the function of funeral music is distinguished from the intentions, just as ritual scholar Ronald Grimes distinguishes ritual functions from ritual intentions:

Ritual intentions are “in people’s heads.” Sometimes intentions come out of mouths in words; sometimes scholars infer them from behavior. A mom says her intention in putting on a birthday party for her daughter is “for the kids to have a great time,” . . . The function, however, is indirect, needing to be inferred. . . . The function is debatable. (Grimes, 2013, p. 301)

In this article, the focus is on the function of funeral music. These functions are inferred from observations of the actual performance of music during funerals. In this performance-based approach, the intentions, which are in this research understood as the reasons and motivations phrased by next of kin for selecting a specific musical repertoire, are only known if they are explicitly mentioned during the funeral.

So, the functions are discerned through the lens of the researcher. In other words, the functions are based on my own observations and interpretation of what happened during the funerals. They are pointed out by myself: a Dutch PhD candidate in Culture Studies, 29 years old, with a background in both Religion & Ritual (MA) and Music (organ and church music, BA). As I am

an outsider who neither knew the deceased and the bereaved family, nor was involved in the process of preparing the funeral, the focus on the performance of the funeral ritual allowed me to examine the funerals without being influenced by any knowledge about the intentions with which music was selected or any other information about the deceased and the family.

The current research sheds new light on funeral music by focusing on the actual performance of music. This performance-based approach leads to a deeper understanding of music in a ritual context, in this case of music in the context of a funeral ritual. Moreover, this research shifts the focus from intentions phrased by next of kin to functions of the actual performance of funeral music. It also partly shifts the focus from the well-informed next of kin who were involved in preparing the funeral to all people who gathered for the funeral and had different knowledge about the deceased.

Method

In this research, 44 funeral rituals were observed. The questions that informed these observations were what repertoire was played, at what moment in the funeral did the music sound, were there other activities while the music sounded, how was the music announced and reflected on, how were part of the lyrics referred to in other parts of the funeral, and how did the music relate to other funeral elements (e.g., spoken words, lighting candles, passing by the coffin)?

All funerals were observed in three crematoria. The focus on funerals in crematoria in this article is explained by the high number of funerals per week and the high cremation rate in the Netherlands (almost 65% in 2017).³ Another advantage of the crematorium as place of research is the neutral position of the crematorium with regard to the religious background of the deceased: People from all religions and backgrounds can have their funeral ritual in the crematorium. The focus on crematoria does not imply that funeral rituals were followed by the cremation of the body, as the ceremony room was also used for funeral rituals of people who would be buried afterwards or whose bodies had been donated to science.

The observations took place in crematoria located in the south, east, and southeast of the Netherlands. These crematoria were selected because of pragmatic reasons, for example, because of already established contacts with crematoria that welcomed researchers. After being given a description of the research, a representative of the crematorium gave written consent for the observations and the use of the data for research purposes. One crematorium announced the presence of a researcher via a newsletter that was sent to funeral leaders who frequently worked in that crematorium. All observations were made between June 2017 and October 2017.

For every observation, consent was obtained via the funeral leader and, if present, the funeral speaker (e.g., ritual coach or representative of a church).

All people were guaranteed that the data would be anonymized: No real names of the deceased, next of kin, and not even the name of the crematorium would be mentioned. For a careful handling of the data, the exact dates of the funerals are also not mentioned in the outcomes of this research.

In each crematorium, 14 or 15 funerals were observed, each within a period of 12 to 15 days. Funerals were selected to observe based on the time schedules of both the crematorium and myself. At the moment of selection, I was not yet aware of the gender and age of the deceased, except for the case of the funeral of a young girl.

Data and Analysis

During the 44 observed funerals, 236 pieces of music were played, each funeral containing 3 to 17 pieces of music. Although during most funerals four to seven musical pieces were played, some exceptions were found. The variance in the amount of musical pieces during a funeral is dependent and part of the length of the funeral and the number of people attending the funeral. During funerals with a lot of speeches, there were several musical pieces that alternated speeches; when there were only one or two speeches, the number of musical pieces was lower. If there were many people attending the funeral, several pieces of music were played while people left the ceremony room, as it is not common to leave the ceremony room in silence. The funeral that contained an exceptional amount of musical pieces was the funeral of a young girl. This funeral, attended by hundreds of people, took over 2 hours and contained 17 pieces of music: 1 while the family with the deceased entered the ceremony room, 11 between the moments people entered and left the ceremony room, and 5 while people left the ceremony room.

There will be two separate analyses of the 236 pieces of funeral music. In the first analysis, the music is analyzed in relation to its specific moment in the funeral. This first analysis will lead to a reflection from the perspective of ritual studies. In the second analysis, the announcements and reflections of funeral music will be analyzed. Based on this analysis, the concept of the musical eulogy will be introduced. In both analyses, initial and axial coding will be used (Saldaña, 2009, pp. 81–85, 159–163): Parts of the field notes that point in the direction of the function of funeral music will be identified and compared for similarities and differences, resulting in various categories and subcategories.

For the transparency of this research, I will refer to the observed funerals by using codes, for example, A1, B7, and C14. As explained earlier, for reasons of privacy neither further details about the date and location of the funeral nor the name of the deceased will be provided in this article.

The Moment the Music Sounds

In the first analysis, the music was analyzed in relation to the specific moment the music sounded during the funeral. As there was always music while people entered and left the ceremony room and the music during these moments clearly marked the start and end of the funeral, I divided the funeral into three parts: the moment people entered the ceremony room, the period between people entering and leaving the ceremony room, and the moment people left the ceremony room. During the observations, 46 musical pieces were played while people entered the ceremony room: three funerals (A9, B10, and B7) had two pieces played at this moment and only during one funeral (B9) the people entered the room in silence; 54 musical pieces were played while people left the ceremony room: five funerals (A13, A15, B10, A15, and B15) had two to five pieces played at this moment. During the 44 observed funerals, 136 musical pieces were played in the period between people entering and leaving the ceremony room.

Entering the ceremony room. Music that sounds while people enter the ceremony room marks the start of the funeral. During most of the funerals, next of kin and the other mourners enter the ceremony room at different moments: Sometimes next of kin enter the room first and other times the other mourners enter the ceremony room first. The group that enters the ceremony first often enters the room in silence. The music only starts the moment the other group enters. When the next of kin enter the room after the other mourners, the other mourners rise from their seats the moment the music starts and next of kin enter the ceremony room. While the music plays, people are quiet or whisper only briefly and softly. If the music is still playing while everybody has already taken their places, people look around and seem to get used to the environment of the ceremony room including the view of the coffin, flowers, and picture(s), and the often beautiful view of the nature outside. Therefore, I consider the functions of music at the beginning of the funeral as both marking the start of the funeral and as background music during which people acclimatize to the environment of and situation in the ceremony room.

The period between people entering and leaving the ceremony room. During the period between people entering and leaving the ceremony room, music sounds, for example, between two speeches or between a poem and a speech. In analyzing these pieces of music, various categories were found: providing background music, extending spoken words and actions, presenting identities, controlling emotions, and “only” alternating with other funeral elements.

In the first category, music functions as background music during, for example, lighting candles or sharing prayer cards (*bidprentjes*). There were no funerals where background music was added to spoken words. Interestingly, during 58 of

the total amount of 136 pieces of music that sounded between people entering and leaving the ceremony room, people looked at pictures of the deceased. As people reacted to the pictures by nodding and laughing and showed no reaction with regard to the music, looking at (digital) pictures was the main activity, while the music only functioned as background music. For example, during one of the funerals (A12), people were looking at pictures while the song *Imagine* by John Lennon was played. During a picture of a butterfly on the motorcycle of the deceased, two people looked at each other, nodded and whispered *mooi* (beautiful).

In the second category, music extends other funeral elements, especially speeches delivered just before the music. The extending function of music does not imply that the entire lyrics extend other funeral elements. This was, for example, the case during a funeral (B5) where grandchildren of the deceased emotionally spoke about their love for grandma, followed by the song *Ik heb je lief* (I love you) by Paul de Leeuw. Although the song has a chorus in which *I love you* is repeated several times, it also contains the text *your eyes let me melt, heat me like a fire, I only feel it when you're looking at me, and also Rotterdam gives me this feeling*. This part of the song text is not necessarily, and in this case probably not, accurate and applicable to the situation, as the reasons why the granddaughter loved her grandmother probably differ from the reasons described in the lyrics. Still, the title and the repetitiveness of the title throughout the song seem to be enough to extend the core of the spoken words. *Why* the grandchildren loved their grandmother was already explained earlier. The song functions as a musical extension of the core of the speech. Music extends not only words but also other actions performed just before the music: A song about lights after lighting candles (B5) or the song *Ons lieve Vrouwke* (a dialect utterance of *Onze lieve vrouwe*, Our Lady, referring to Maria) by Lya de Haas after praying the Ave Maria (B4).

In the third category, music presents the identity of the deceased. In this research, music is considered part of the identity of the deceased, as contemporary identities are a “patchwork of different specific objects and directions of actions” (Blommaert & Varis, 2015, p. 154). The favorite music of the deceased or the music the deceased used to listen to can be seen as part of this patchwork. So, funeral music that was the favorite music of the deceased presents the musical part of the patchwork of identity of the deceased.

Music can also be found in other parts of this patchwork, such as the part that deals with religion or family ties. So, music not only relates to the musical part of identity but can also relate to, for example, the religious part of identity. When music presents a religious identity, some nuances were found in the ways music functioned. Where music is part of a religious funeral, music is part of the liturgy and is, next to reading from the Bible and saying prayers, one of the ways in which the religious identity of the deceased is presented. When the funeral does not contain any other religious element and the funeral seems to be secular,

music is sometimes the only element of the funeral through which the religious identity of the deceased is presented. This was, for example, the case during a funeral (B12) where an *Ave Maria* by Andrea Bocelli was played, which was announced as “a prayer the deceased undoubtedly prayed more often.” In the secularized Netherlands, it often happens that the deceased was a religious person, while (grand) children are not. Here, music seems to be an acceptable and maybe even the only acceptable way to deal with the religious identity of the deceased.

The fourth category is found on the level of emotions. Especially after emotional speeches, music functions to control emotions. In the already mentioned funeral in which the song *Ik heb je lief* (I love you) by Paul de Leeuw was sung after an emotional speech by the grandchildren (B5), music also functioned as a tool to control emotions. Not only the speakers but also other mourners started to cry softly during the speech of the grandchildren. The music after the speech provided the mourners both time and sphere to gain control of their emotions again. However, music not only controls emotions but also evokes emotions. This was, for example, the case during a funeral where there was only music and no speeches: During *The rose* by André Rieu, one of the mourners started to cry (B4).

In the fifth and last category music alternates with other funeral elements. During one of the observed funerals, *The rose* by André Rieu was played between two speeches about the life and characteristics of the deceased (A8). The music seems to have not any of the functions described earlier: It only alternated the speeches. Here, music is a building block of the funeral, without having another function. Although it might be argued that the music in this category, and partly also in the category of background music, provides a moment of relaxation or is used to cover the sound of crying people, the data do not provide this information.

As already made clear in the example of the song *Ik heb je lief* by Paul de Leeuw, functions sometimes become merged. For example, during one of the funerals (B10), a speech, pictures, and music during the pictures formed a unity: The daughter spoke about her father, followed by pictures of this daughter and her father, while the song *papa* (father) by Chantal Janzen was played. Here, the music not only functions as an extension of what was said but also presents part of the patchwork of identity by expressing family ties.

Leaving the ceremony room. At the end of the funeral, just before people leave the ceremony room, people walk past the coffin and pay their respects. This is always accompanied by music. This music at the end of the funeral marks the end of the funeral. People rise from their seats and listen to the music for a few moments. Then, after a sign from the funeral leader, people leave the ceremony room after they have passed the coffin. When there are a lot of mourners attending the funeral, several pieces of music are played or one single piece is repeated

multiple times, often with a lower volume after the first time. So, music not only marks the end of the funeral but also functions as background music.

So far, the analysis of funeral music in relation to its specific moment in the funeral has revealed several functions. Although the functions of marking the start and end of the funeral are fixed at the start and end of the funeral, other functions are flexible throughout the funeral. For example, functions of presenting identity and dealing with emotions can also be found while people enter the ceremony room.

This functional flexibility should be understood not only from the perspective of the specific moment of the music during the funeral but also from the perspective of the mourners because the functions of music might differ from one person to another. For the bereaved family, for example, the song might present the religious identity of the deceased, while for people who were not aware of the religious identity of the deceased, the music might be an alternation between two speeches. So, a single piece of funeral music might have different and, as already shown, multiple functions at one time.

Reflection: The ritual function of music. The discerned functions of funeral music can be reduced to three main themes they are related to: the funeral ritual itself, the deceased, and the emotions. Music is related to the funeral itself in the functions of marking start and end, providing background music and alternating with other funeral elements; music is related to the deceased in the functions of extending words and actions, and in presenting identity; and music is related to emotions in the function of controlling emotions. In this part of the article, these main themes and corresponding functions will be shortly reflected on from the perspective of ritual. A definition of ritual by Paul Post, professor Ritual Studies at Tilburg University, is used:

Ritual is a more or less repeatable sequence of action units which take on a symbolic dimension through formalization, stylization, and their situation in place and time. On the one hand, individuals and groups express their ideas and ideals, their mentalities and identities through these rituals, on the other hand the ritual actions shape, foster, and transform these ideas, mentalities and identities. (Post, 2015, p. 4)

When music marks the start or end of the funeral, provides some background music, or is a building block that alternates with other funeral elements, music refers to the funeral ritual itself. Music is an important element of the ritual, as it marks (formalizes) the start and end of the funeral and stylizes the funeral by alternating with other funeral elements and providing background music. As such, music adds to the symbolic dimension of the funeral. In addition, music provides a symbolic dimension in itself when the music is used to evoke memories of the deceased: Then, the music symbolizes the identity of the deceased.

When music is related to the deceased, the music extends words about the deceased that were spoken before or presents the identity of the deceased. Within the contemporary personal funeral, music is one of the media that present the identity of the deceased. More nuanced, it presents the identity of the deceased as constructed by the next of kin. The identity of the deceased is no longer constructed by the (deceased) person *in* his or her sociocultural context but is constructed *by* this sociocultural context. Listening to the favorite music of the deceased is one of the ways to present the deceased's identity and to continue bonds with the deceased (Klass & Steffen, 2018). Constructing the deceased's identity together with all mourners present at the funeral also binds the mourners into a community: "Shared listening, exchanging (recorded) songs, and talking about music create a sense of belonging, and connect a person's sense of self to a larger community and generation" (van Dijck, 2006, p. 357); in this case, the community that consists of next of kin and now constructs the identity of the deceased.

The third main theme relates the function of music to emotions: Music regulates and controls emotions. One of the functions of ritual stated by Post is the "discharge function: channelling feelings and emotion" (Post, 2015, p. 5). Although it is hard to show how both music and ritual regulate and control emotions, it is clear that emotions are at play during funeral rituals. Unfortunately, the chosen method does not allow the specification of conclusions regarding emotions (for studies on music and emotion, see Juslin & Sloboda, 2010). Although earlier research on the musical parameters in the playlist of a Dutch crematorium showed that music can be characterized as serene, solemn, and tender (Mollenhorst, Hoondert, & van Zaanen, 2016), further research should be conducted on the topic of music, ritual, and emotion, combining ritual theory and research in the field of music and emotion with observations and interviews.

Announcements and Reflections

In the second analysis of funeral music, the focus is no longer on the music in relation to its specific place in the funeral but on the announcements and reflections of the music. Sixty-eight of the total amount of 236 songs that sounded during the observed funerals were provided with an announcement or reflection that contained more than only the title (and artist) of the song. All 68 elaborated announcements and reflections explained why a specific piece of music was chosen.

The analysis of the content of these 68 elaborated announcements and reflections reveals two main categories: music that is related to the deceased and music that is related to other aspects. As the latter only contains nine announcements and reflections, relating the music to, for example, "an open space for commemoration" and to the moment of farewell, I will zoom in on the first and

biggest category (59 of the 68 announcements and reflections) in which music is—one way or another—related to the deceased. This category contains six sometimes closely related subcategories: Music shows the musical preferences of the deceased (33 out of 59), it reminds others of the deceased (7), elements of the musical piece are related to the deceased (7), the music had a special meaning for the deceased (5), the deceased had chosen this music (5), and it fits the character of the deceased (3). For example, during one of the funerals (A7), *The elephant song* by Kamahl sounded. During this funeral, someone recounted how the children recently found a gramophone record of *The elephant song* by Kamahl, which was the favorite music of the deceased. So, this piece of funeral music clearly belonged to the category of musical preferences of the deceased. Of course, if an announcement only stated that the music “reminded others of the deceased,” the music might as well have been the favorite music of the deceased.

The categories found in the analysis of the announcements and reflections show strong similarities with the function of presenting identities that was found in the first round of analysis. This shows that the function of funeral music is not (only) dependent on the announcements or reflections. Still, the announcements and reflections often make clear why a specific piece of music was chosen for a funeral. I, as a researcher who was not involved in the preparation of the funeral, was dependent on these announcements to be aware of the reasons for selecting a specific funeral repertoire.

Musical eulogy. In most of the announcements and reflections, it is explained how funeral music is related to the deceased. In the context of personalized funerals, this seems to be obvious. In everyday life, on the contrary, people do not easily listen to music that is selected by someone else and that does not necessarily meet his or her own musical preferences. During funerals, the opposite might happen. Whether it is a famous part of Verdi’s opera *Nabucco* “because the deceased loved this music” (C6) or a song from the Dutch popular singer Grad Damen “who was the favourite singer of the deceased” (A2), everybody listens to the music, irrespective of their own musical preferences or aversions to the favorite song of the deceased. As such, the music functions as a tribute to the deceased: For a moment, all mourners gathered set aside their own musical preferences and listen to the favorite song of the deceased. I propose the concept of the *musical eulogy* to deal with this phenomenon. In listening to the musical eulogy, people pay their respects and pay tribute to the deceased.

All funeral music that was played because it was related to the deceased is considered a musical eulogy. This already indicates that the musical eulogy is strongly related to the personalization of the funeral ritual. The personalization of funeral music corresponds to the functions found in earlier studies on funeral music (Adamson & Holloway, 2012; Caswell, 2011; Garrido & Davidson, 2016a, 2016b) and to the characteristics of contemporary personalized funerals in the Netherlands (Venbrux et al., 2009).

The construction of the concept of the musical eulogy is inspired by the spoken eulogy that is part of almost all funerals in the Netherlands; only 2 of the 44 observed funerals did not contain a eulogy. Bailey and Walter (2016) found three aspects that mourners considered important for a eulogy to be successful: accuracy, authenticity, and performance. “While the eulogy’s accuracy is important, even more so—at least for some—is its authenticity, namely that the speaker has personal knowledge of the deceased” (Bailey & Walter, 2016, p. 149). With regard to the performance aspect, the self-control of the nonprofessional eulogist can help other mourners gain control of their emotions, and the eulogist’s loss of self-control can encourage other mourners to stop hiding their emotions (Bailey & Walter, 2016, p. 161). However, as by far most funeral music consists of music records derived from the mainstream music industry, with studio records by famous artists, authenticity and performance are not applicable to the musical eulogy.

In the musical eulogy, accuracy is vital. Contrary to the spoken eulogy, this accuracy is not to be found in the content of the words, the lyrical content. Although neither lyrics were extensively analyzed, nor mourners were asked about their experience of the music, it can be stated that lyrics are not a full and accurate eulogy. The lyrics are not written for the funeral of a specific person—in most cases not even specifically for use during funerals in general—and therefore do not mention the name of the deceased, date of birth, or important moments of the life of the deceased. Still, mourners might still be able to recognize the deceased in the musical eulogy, as funeral music often corresponds to the musical preferences of the deceased or is related to the deceased in another way. For example, during one of the funerals, it was often said that the deceased loved opera and sung in an opera choir. After a eulogist, a member of the opera choir, ended his spoken eulogy with a phrase from an opera, we listened to *Tornami a dir cher m’ami* from the opera *Don Pasquale* by Donizetti (C8). The text of the song was not explained and it is not assumed that mourners knew the translation, as most Dutch people do not understand the Italian language. Here, the lyrics were not the main focus. The song functioned as a musical eulogy; everybody present listened to the favorite music of the deceased, the music he loved and used to sing himself. So, the accuracy of the musical eulogy is not related to the lyrical content but to the ways the eulogy relates to the deceased. This accuracy might be very detailed: It should not only be the right song, performed by the right artist, but sometimes it should also be a specific performance, with the characteristic scratch in the recording the deceased used to listen to.⁴

In addition, and corresponding to the earlier described observation that pictures can force music to the background, it is important that there are no other activities during the music. Only 4 of the 40 musical eulogies that sounded between entering and leaving the ceremony room were played while people looked at pictures.

Altogether, the lyrical content is not the focus of the musical eulogy. Instead, the main focus is on what it recalls, in the case of funerals: a part of the deceased person's identity.

Lyrics and "words against death". The remark on the importance of lyrical content adds a critical comment on Davies' (2017) theory on *words against death*. In this theory, Davies argues that in people's responses to death and grief, they use words in which they do not let death have the last word. According to Davies, people often ask for popular songs because they consider it "an appropriate way of recalling the deceased person's life . . . In these popular items evocative words and music reflect something of life shared together and of the personality of the deceased" (Davies, 2017, p. 233). In response to Davies' theory on words against death Bailey and Walter (2016) argued "that funerals symbolically conquer death not only through *words* delivered by ritual specialists, but also through those who knew the deceased *congregating* and *speaking*" (p.149, original italics).⁵ Therefore, they do not speak of *words* against death but of *funerals* against death. So, Davies, and Bailey and Walter show the power of words and funerals against death and show that "emotional and social are as important as linguistic dimensions in producing funeral ritual" (Bailey & Walter, 2016, p. 162).

The current article partly strengthens the arguments of Davies, Bailey and Walter and also adds a critical comment about words that are part of the lyrics of funeral music, especially of the musical eulogy. Lyrics should not be regarded as true or important too easily. Instead, sometimes only a title, a word, or even nothing of the lyrical content is true or important, as the song as a whole represents part of the deceased person's identity. The context of the funeral forces the lyrics of the song to the background. In the musical eulogy, the focus is not on the lyrical content but on recalling the deceased person's life. In other words, the musical eulogy is one of the ways for next of kin to present the deceased person's identity. In the musical eulogy, linguistic dimensions are less important than emotional and social dimensions.

Conclusion

This article has drawn attention to various functions of funeral music and has revealed how music functions on several levels. The analysis of funeral music in relation to its specific place in the funeral showed that funeral music is related to three main themes: the funeral itself, identity, and emotion. As these themes are also important aspects of ritual, music during funerals adds to the ritual dimension of the funeral: music functions as a building block of the funeral and

stylizes and formalizes the funeral; funeral music is often related to the deceased and therefore presents part of the deceased person's identity; and music regulates emotions.

In the analysis of the announcements and reflections, it was found that by far most of the funeral music sounded because it was the favorite music of the deceased or because it was related to the deceased in other ways. Via the notion that all mourners present at the funeral listen to this music irrespective of their own musical preferences, the concept of the musical eulogy was introduced. In the musical eulogy, the main focus is not on the lyrical content but on what it recalls, which in the case of funerals is a part of the deceased person's identity.

The musical eulogy brings along a direct memory of the deceased, without this memory being captured in the words of the eulogist who delivers a spoken eulogy. Therefore, it might be argued that the musical eulogy is even more accurate than the spoken eulogy.

For funeral music to function as a musical eulogy, mourners need to be aware of the ways the funeral music is related to the deceased. For example, for people who knew that the funeral music was the favorite music of the deceased, the music might function as a musical eulogy, while for people who did not know this, the funeral music might function as only alternating with other funeral elements. The performance-based approach of this research has shown that the function of music is, at least in the context of the funeral eulogy, dependent on knowledge about the musical preferences of the deceased or the *intentions* with which next of kin selected the music.

Already resonating in the background of this article, the function of music is, at least partly, also dependent on its context. For example, singing *Imagine* out loud while driving a car is different from listening to this song during a funeral or at the commemorations of past atrocities. To understand the function of music in, for example, research on cultural identity and cultural memory (Bennett & Janssen, 2015), the concept of the musical eulogy can be used as a hermeneutic tool to transcend the lyrical and musical content and to focus on what music recalls.

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Notes

1. The ceremony room is situated in the crematorium. Although this room is also referred to as chapel, I chose not to use chapel because of the possible religious connotation. To stress the neutral position with regard to religion I chose to use ceremony room throughout this article.
2. This article is part of a PhD research on funeral music (Hoondert & Bruin-Mollenhorst, 2016).
3. <http://www.lvc-online.nl/aantallen>, accessed on February 23, 2018.
4. Interview with employee of crematorium, December 12, 2016.
5. Bailey and Walter refer to “Death, ritual and belief” of Davies that appeared in 2002. This work of Davies is also used in the current article in an updated edition that appeared in 2017.

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