

Spring/Summer 2017

Reflections magazine

From The Episcopal Diocese of West Texas

MUSIC

as

*Spiritual
Formation*





Spring/Summer 2017

Using this issue as a resource for further study:

Because every issue of *Reflections* explores a single topic, the magazine lends itself to further study by individuals as well as small groups or Sunday morning classes.

The purpose of *Reflections* is not to give answers but rather to incite inquisitiveness. The writers and editor of *Reflections* hope the magazine's contents will inspire further exploration and reflection on each topic, especially as the topics relate to daily life. Look for "For further reflection" suggestions at the end of each article.

We invite your feedback. If you have comments on this issue or suggestions for future issues, send a note to Marjorie George, editor, email below.

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Henry Sings

by Marjorie George

Most days, Henry sits quietly in a wheelchair in the common area of the nursing home where he has lived for ten years. He is hunched over, hidden under the ball cap he wears backwards on his head, hands clasped together on the laptop table. He is not an unhappy man, just an empty man, incommunicative, disconnected.

When Henry's daughter comes to visit, Henry does not know her name. The nameless daughter has a memory of her father as a younger man who would walk down the street with her and her brother laughing, singing, swinging around the light poles. "On every occasion he would come out with a song," she says.

There is no song today – and then a nurse puts earphones on Henry. They are connected to an iPod. And when the music starts, so does Henry. His head lifts, his eyes open wide, his arms start moving to a beat he hears, he begins to sing. "He becomes animated," says neurologist Dr. Oliver Sacks, watching Henry. "The philosopher Kant said music is the 'quickening art,' and Henry is being quickened. He is being brought to life," observes Sacks.

When the earphones are removed, Henry is still excited. "Henry, do you like music?" asks an interviewer.

"Oh I'm crazy about music," replies Henry.

"Who is your favorite, Henry?"

Henry pauses then remembers Cab Calloway. "He was my number one guy," and Henry breaks into a rendition of Calloway's "I'll be Home for Christmas."

The interviewer asks Henry: "What does music do to you?"

"It gives me the feeling of love," says Henry. "The Lord came to me and he made me a holy man, so he gave me these sounds."

Music, says Dr. Sacks, brings Henry back to life. "From being inert, unresponsive, almost un-alive, Henry is restored to himself. He remembers who he is

and has reacquired his identity.

Henry's story, and the stories of many more like him, is told in the film *Alive Inside: A Story of Music and Memory*, directed and produced by Michael Rosato-Bennett. The documentary follows social worker Dan Cohen who advocates for the use of music in connecting with memory in Alzheimer's patients. The film won the Audience Award at the 2014 Sundance Film Festival.

Writer Julie Chalk points out in her piece on page 11 of this issue (*The Marvelous Musical Brain*) that the music center of the brain is one of the last affected by Alzheimer's and other types of dementia. Chalk has her own story of her father who suffers from vascular dementia such that he cannot put a sentence together in words. But he still plays the trumpet in church — by ear — every Sunday.

In the Celtic tradition, explains Mary Earle in her article on page 8 of this issue (*The Music of What Happens*), God does not speak creation into being. He sings it into being. "When God sings, sun, moon, and stars come forth," says Earle. "Landscapes are formed. Creatures appear. Humans, who are able to sing this divine song, join the community of the creation."

So deep is that formative connection with the creator God that it becomes most apparent when we who are constricted by our earthly bodies and earthly minds begin to transcend those bounds. And when we fully return to God, we do so with the accompaniment of music. "For even at the grave," *The Book of Common Prayer* tells us, "we make our song: Alleluia" (p 499). *R*



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Singing the Journey

by Sylvia Maddox

Can one make a pilgrimage without a song? I don't think so. At least I can't. Somehow as a little girl I had this vision that everyone I knew was on a grand journey, and that no matter what the loss or the difficulties, it would lead to a magnificent end. I don't remember seeing pictures about this vision. No one actually taught it to me. It came to me from singing the "glory" songs in church and around the piano at home.

What beautiful songs they were. We'd picture the "crystal sea, the evergreen shore, the pearly gates and the streets of purest gold." Canaan's Land, Beulah, the Jordan River were all places vividly marked on my spiritual geography. "Over yonder," we'd sing, and our simple places would be transformed.

There were other songs besides the "glory" songs. We had the "Sunday Morning" songs. These were definitely not traveling songs. One stood

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● *Singing the Journey*

from page 5

When I went off to college, I learned that not everybody went to nursing home hymn sings nor sang in the car or around the piano. Most of my friends didn't even have a copy of Heavenly Highways, the trusted book of pilgrim songs. "Those are the kinds of songs used by people who deny this world and only want a 'Pie the Sky'" they'd say. "Oh," I'd say, and put the books away in the piano bench.

up straight in one's finest clothes and proclaimed, "Lord God Almighty." There were the "near" songs like "Near to the heart of God" that were supposed to be sung with hushed voices and tender feelings. Then there were the "work" songs that reminded us of the working part of our journey on earth which was to "publish glad tidings and labor on."

All these songs were well and good, but the ones that seemed to get everyone moving and on the road were the songs about the end of the journey. There was something in the rhythm of those songs that made them everyone's favorites. They were easy to harmonize. Although dancing was out of the question, toe tapping was not. Once one knew the first or second refrains, the song was one's own. Anyone could join in and sing, and if one had the desire to embellish, that was not only allowed but encouraged.

My first memory of these songs was in my grandparents' little white-framed church in Lone Pine, Texas. Although my grandfather couldn't read a note of music, he was called forth to go to the front of the church and lead the singing. I remember being proud that he stood there with such dignity with his hymnbook in one hand and waving the other hand to the beat of the music. I'd glance at the fireflies outside in the warm summer night, and my grandmother would fan herself with the cardboard fan in the pewback that advertised the funeral home. We would sing "When we all get to

heaven," and the men with the deep voices would come in to echo "Shout the victory." They seemed so sure of where they were going, how they would get there, and what it would be like. Who was I as a child to have any worries?

Maybe that gave me courage as a young girl to march into the nursing home and roll the oily black piano stool round and round until I could reach the piano and wait for some dear old man to say, "Honey, can you play 'The Sweet By and By'?" This was the 1950s, and for me it was the "sweet here and now," but I believed that this was my part in the caravan and besides, I knew the songs by heart.

Soon, like an act of liturgy, one could hear the movement of the wheelchairs and the shuffle of footsteps holding on to walkers as the old folks heard the melodies of the songs of the pilgrims' way. I'd look around and see a crowd gathered. Some older women would nod their heads and wave their hands. Others would try harmonizing, and away we'd go.

When I went off to college, I learned that not everybody went to nursing home hymn sings nor sang in the car or around the piano. Most of my friends didn't even have a copy of *Heavenly Highways*, the trusted book of pilgrim songs. "Those are the kinds of songs used by people who deny this world and only want a 'Pie the Sky'" they'd say. "Oh," I'd say, and put the books away in the piano bench.

The times were calling for new songs for the journey. This time the songs centered on the here and now. If there were to be a better world, then we would have to make it happen here. I was more than ready to join in. Some of the songs had the same religious fervor of

the revivals at the Lone Pine Church. This time we used the guitar. There was wonderful harmony with clapping and dancing. I felt the same sense of anticipation. The only difference was that people would be together and then they would stream out in all directions. The companions on the journey varied from day to day. It also got confusing. Was Gloryland the dawning of peace and justice or was it the Age of Aquarius? People were singing the same songs but were on completely different journeys. Certainly the geography had changed. Now instead of marching to Zion, we were on the road to Marrakesh. Pilgrimage turned into an adventure with who knows what end in sight. What was important was to be on the road and to do one's own thing.

Spiritual geography blended into actual geography. I traveled from Lone Pine to Dallas to Tokyo to Bali to Katmandu to Corinth to London and back. On the way I learned to sing in other languages and tried my hand at new instruments like the anklung and the gamelon. I began to think of the old songs as too nostalgic and the new road songs as too melancholy. As time went by, I became more and more a solitary explorer, and soon I didn't sing much at all. I never was a good solo singer anyway.

It came as a complete surprise the day that the choir returned to sing for me. It didn't happen in a church or around a piano or at a singing. It happened in the unlikely sanctuary of a shopping mall. I had just returned from Indonesia and was suffering from the cultural shock of materialism that strikes nearly everyone who has lived in a developing country. Was it an advertisement that sent me walking through the frenzied crowds. I don't remember. All I can remember is the sense of alienation and loneliness that I felt as I wandered from store to store. "Who am I?" "Where am I?" "Where do I belong?" I wanted to say to someone.

As if an answer came from "glory," I heard the tune and the words of an old hymn we used to sing at home. "This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through." I began to smile. Where did that come from I wondered. Before I knew it, the second and the third stanzas had come to me. My step became lighter. "The saints on every hand are shouting victory." I could feel their presence as they seemed to say, "These things don't mean anything to you. You're part of our traveling band. You know who you are." I left the Highland Shopping Mall with a new sense of freedom.

Today I have a beautiful grand piano in my living room. I use it a lot for singing. I sing by myself, and sometimes I invite others over to sing with me. I wouldn't say that those songs of the evergreen shore are the only songs I sing. I have found other songs that express my path on the pilgrimage now. Songs that somehow express the desire to be here and over yonder at the same time. I will, however, be eternally grateful for that early vision of the journey and the companions who graced the way. I am grateful that I can bring out those words in my moments of loss and darkness. In singing the glory songs I can celebrate my loved ones, both known and unknown, both here and over yonder. You can be assured that I now have several copies of *Heavenly Highways*. In fact, there is a tattered copy on my piano right now.

R

For further Reflection

In the Beatitudes (Matt 5:10), Christ says "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." What does persecution for the sake of the Kingdom look like in your life?

What are the stages of your faith journey?



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The Music of
What Happens



by the Rev. Mary Earle

My maternal grandmother, Golda Willis Kopecky, loved to garden. And I loved to be with her in the garden, watching her as she beheld the roses, lilies, sweet peas, larkspur, and other flowers that bowed their heads as she sprinkled them with water from the hose. Often as not, as Golda did this, she hummed. I don't remember her singing so much as humming. She would hum to herself while cooking, writing, driving.

Over the years, I realized that her humming was partly prayer. A Methodist, Golda came from a strong hymn singing tradition. She was also of a Scots Irish lineage, and had that DNA that predisposed her to see God's presence in and through all of creation.

My mother sang. Mary Kopecky Colbert loved music of all kinds — particularly the big band music of the 40s that she and Daddy courted to. She encouraged her children to listen to all kinds of music, from classical to jazz, from Broadway show tunes to opera. She even learned to love rock and roll as time went on. She made up funny little love songs for our dogs and cats, songs full of silliness and tender gratitude. (It is worth noting that all of her children strongly inherited this tendency to sing to the dogs and cats that live with us.)

I remember my dad, Gene Colbert, at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in San Antonio, singing the canticles for Morning Prayer. I would lean against his chest while he sang the *Venite* slightly off key. I remember and cherish that sense of the sounding, sung prayer coming from within my dad. Well I treasure that gift of knowing the presence of Christ in and through Dad's hearty participation in the service music of Morning Prayer of the 1928 *Book of Common Prayer*.

So, over 20 years ago, when I began learning about the history and tradition of the church in Celtic lands (Ireland, Scotland, Brittany, Cornwall, Isle of Man, Wales, Galicia in Spain), I was taken by the phrase "the music of what happens." This comes from an old Irish legend in which the hero Finn MacCool challenged his warriors to name the finest music of

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For further Reflection

Read again the story of creation (Genesis 1:1-31) and insert "God sang" for "God said." Does that change the story?

When do you hear God singing?

all (it's worth noting that the Irish say, "Never give a sword to a man who can't dance.") The warriors all name various possibilities, trying to please Finn. In the end, Finn MacCool says, "No. None of these. The finest music is the music of what happens." The renowned Irish poet Seamus Heaney would put it this way, in his poem entitled, "Song":

"There are the mud-flowers of dialect
And the immortelles of perfect pitch
And that moment when the bird sings
very close
To the music of what happens."

That deep music, the divine Song that brings all into being, is the very life and breath of God. In our music making and our singing, our humming and our chanting, we embody that divine music.

Another way of perceiving this inherent music, the divine music that plays in and through all that is created, is called "Oran Mor" or God's song. In fact, "Oran Mor" is also an ancient Gaelic name for God. The Oran Mor is the Great Song from which all things have arisen. This is somewhat similar to the Hebrew verb used in Genesis: when God speaks, the creation comes into being. By speaking, the living God calls forth what did not exist before. Or, following the Gaelic, when God sings, the cosmos is called forth, moment by moment. The Oran Mor is an eternal song, profoundly creative, sung by, in and through the Christ "in whom all things hold together" (Colossians 1:17a).

The sense of "Oran Mor" is that when God sings, sun, moon and stars come forth. Galaxies are born. Landscapes are formed. Creatures appear. Humans, who are able to sing this divine song, join the community of the creation. We are both

sung into being and we participate in the living song of the Trinity. We sense this sometimes when humming with those we love, or chanting the psalms during our liturgies. We may know it in the strong chords of rhythm and blues, or in the long-loved music of our courting. The key is this: to listen for the music of what happens. To be attuned to the song of God in and through everything. To seek to be sung and to be part of the song. As the Welsh poet Waldo Williams put it, "The Chief Bard of Heaven seeks us to be words in his ode."

R



The Rev. Mary Earle is a retired priest, author, and retreat leader. Her latest book is *Marvelously Made: Gratefulness and the Body*, available from Church Publishing, and from Amazon. Reach Mary at mcearle48@gmail.com.

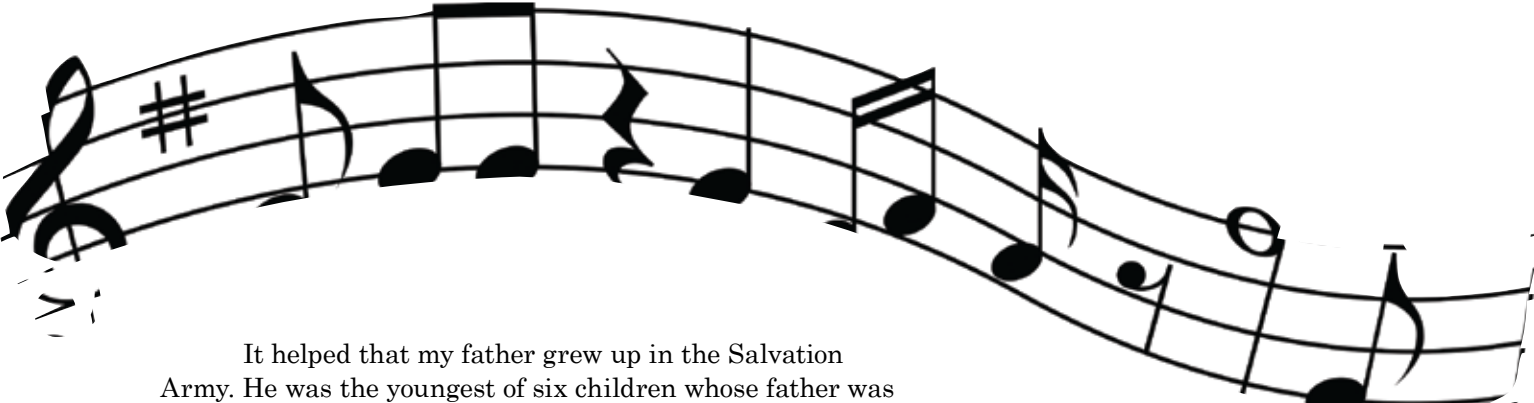
The Marvelous Musical Brain

by Julie Raymond Chalk

At the beginning of our lives and at the end, music is the language by which we communicate.



I grew up in a singing family. We sang our graces before meals. We sang in the car, on walks, and before we said goodnight. And at family gatherings we always sang, in parts, and rounds, and canons, and never with songbooks. Sometimes these would be accompanied by a ukulele, and later a guitar, when, as a teenager, I learned to play. Singing was in our family blood, never questioned, always present. It connected us in ways that just being together could not.



It helped that my father grew up in the Salvation Army. He was the youngest of six children whose father was the band master for their local Corps (parish) in Boston, Massachusetts. His parents and all of his siblings played different brass instruments. My father joined the group when he was just four years old, playing a bass drum which was attached to his older brother's back. As they marched along the streets in Boston, inviting the neighborhood to come in to sing and to pray and to hear the message, my dad followed his brother, beating the bass drum all the way. When he grew old enough to play a horn, he quickly learned the brass instruments from his older siblings.

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And when I was growing up, we had a cornet, trumpet, trombone, and French horn in our home, all of which Dad would play with me when I practiced the piano as a child, and later, when I took up the French horn myself in junior high school. When I was a teenager, struggling to get along with my parents, playing instruments with my dad was often the only time that we could enjoy each other's company. It

broke down walls, brought us together, and created memories which we can still enjoy today.

My father became an Episcopalian when he married my mother, who came from an Episcopal family who was equally musical, and who brought singing into the activities of daily life. Being raised in the Episcopal church, my favorite hymns as a child included "All Things Bright and Beautiful" and "I Sing a Song of the Saints of God." These hymns, along with "Jesus Loves

Me," were rooted deep in my soul from childhood on. When I was away at camp as a fifth grader and again in ninth grade when I traveled to Europe with a school group, singing my familiar "heart songs" to myself was a comfort when I struggled with homesickness. When I was married and a family quilt was made, my cousin embroidered the actual music (with staff and notes) of "All Things Bright and Beautiful" onto one of the squares. When I

had children, I added new songs to sing to them at bedtime, some of which my adult daughter still asks for today. Truly, the songs planted in us as children, provide a spiritual reservoir from which we can draw throughout our lives. They become comfort when we are in pain, light when we are in darkness, and living water when the drought seems unbearable and unceasing.

When my children were in preschool they began their musical training. Their music teacher explained that music develops like language; when it is introduced early in childhood, kids have the greatest capacity to learn, however that ability decreases with age, when those parts of the brain go unused. He said that playing a musical instrument is one of the only activities that we do which uses both halves of the brain simultaneously, and that the younger the age at which a child begins, the further they can go with their musical aspirations. After age 10, that natural ability begins to decrease, which explains why older children and adults have a more difficult time learning new languages as well as new musical instruments. This teacher encouraged expectant parents to sing to their children while still in the womb, and suggested that families listen to all kinds of music as much as possible, to sing, play, attend concerts, participate in a musical church, and to move to music from birth on. In addition to helping a child develop an appreciation for and the ability to make music, all of these activities nurture the soul and plant seeds of strength and knowledge and enjoyment which can be drawn upon throughout one's entire life.

As a geriatric social worker, I've worked with older adults in a variety of settings and have been amazed to see the impact



of music in improving a person's quality of life at later ages. Because the music center of the brain is one of the last to be affected by Alzheimer's Disease and other types of dementia, many people can enjoy music and even sing long after they've lost their ability to speak. When my mother was at the end of her life, her local hospice group had a small choir, who came to sing to her in her last days. They surrounded her bed and sang several acapella hymns in parts, and, while unable to speak, she opened her eyes and smiled. And now, at age 83, and despite having advanced vascular dementia, my father is still able to play his trumpet (by ear) in church every Sunday. He loves to reminisce about playing "This Little Light of Mine" on Epiphany and "All Glory, Laud, and Honor" every Palm Sunday while leading his congregation from the garden

into church. He played "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling" at my wedding, complete with trumpet descant. And the seeds of all of those activities were planted on those Saturday nights on the streets of Boston playing with his family Salvation Army band encouraging everyone to come in to worship, love, and accept Jesus into their lives. From birth to death, the gift of music is there for everything, and can truly, carry us through. Alleluia! *R*



Julie Chalk is a geriatric social worker who lives in Canyon Lake and attends St. Francis by the Lake. She is also one of the facilitators for Community of Hope in her parish. Reach her at jfrchalk@gmail.com.

For further Reflection

If there is an Episcopal school near you, visit one of the chapel services just to hear the children sing.

If one of your friends or family members suffers from dementia, bring music to him

Singing Over the River: The Gift of Music at The End of Life

by Sylvia Maddox

The last year of my grandmother's life, our family would often gather round the bed and sing well-known hymns. Her favorite hymnal was *Heavenly Highways*, and those hymns at the end of life gave comforting images of the "shining River" where we would all gather when our earthly pilgrimage would cease.

I have never been a great singer, but I hear a blessed harmony when I sing with people at the end of life. At this time of life, spoken words do not always express the tenderness of the human voice singing. A song of one's culture or religious background is the place where one feels most at home. I have also seen that singing around the

bedside not only comforts the dying but also brings peace to the circle of family and friends gathered. Even if loved ones don't know the song, or don't share the same faith, there is, as John O'Donohue says, "a shelter of music." How many times have I seen all the anxiety and worry in a room change when we enter this shelter of music.

Recently I visited a person at a hospice facility who was agitated and could not communicate easily with his voice or with his eyes. When I began to sing, "Abide with Me," everything stopped. His whole body became calm as he reverently put his hand over his heart and began to receive the words of the abiding presence of Christ. The image of his moment of peace stays with me as I carry in my heart all the precious memories of singing with loved ones as we gathered at the river "that flows by the throne of God." *R*

The Sounds of (Church) Music

Choir? No choir? Organ? Guitar? Praise band? Classic hymns? Newly written songs? You say tomato. I say tomahto. Debates over how to incorporate the human love for music into spiritual practice have long preoccupied the world's oldest religions, including Christianity. The Christian faith has endured passionate opinion about the nature of music in its services since its establishment.

Today, in the Diocese of West Texas, churchgoers have certainly been known to hold opinions (or two!) about the way music is performed in their church on Sunday mornings. Such tensions are nothing new. From Antiquity and the Middle Ages onward, disputes have roiled the Christian community on every conceivable topic, from the most minute details of liturgical practice to serious theological and political concerns.

Just this month the *Journal of the American Musicological Society* published a wonderful article by medievalist Henry Parkes, a faculty member at Yale University. Parkes recently rediscovered an 11th-century manuscript, *De varia psalmodia*, originally produced in the Frankish region in northern Europe. In this manuscript, Berno of Reichenau, a diplomatically-minded abbot writing in the late 1040s, attempts to reconcile the liturgical singing practice he knew with alternate practices then found in other monastic communities. (In the Middle Ages the correct translation of the Psalms and Divine Office texts into Latin was a scholarly preoccupation for many religious men and women. Standardization was a frequent if futile concern in an age when every book was handwritten.)

Berno noticed friction in the 11th-century church over correct chant procedure, the problems stemming in part from singers diverging from Roman or Gregorian practice. Also, he noticed the overenthusiastic literary minds of his day making grammati-

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sic



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cal corrections of the underlying texts, compounding the confusion and straying from authority. Discussing point by point the differences in practice between Cistercians and Gallicans and other communities of believers, he pauses to observe, “Wise reader, always beware superstitious intelligence, so that you do not adjust the scriptures to your sense, but bind your sense to the scriptures.”

No matter what you and I sing on Sunday mornings in Texas, it’s safe to say that 95 percent of it wouldn’t have been allowed by the founding generations of the Church of England. Even if a hymn melody was known at the time, it was eliminated on principle “to render the divine service more agreeable.”

Exactly so. Centuries later, the Protestant Reformation would use a similar rallying cry to justify its wholesale rethinking of Christian theology. The century that gave rise to the Church of England witnessed extraordinarily bitter battles over the role of music in Christianity. The Protestant Reformation of the early 1500s was about many things, and in the more Calvinist branches it often resulted in zealous purges of music.

In England the glorious choral polyphony and chant traditions of the Renaissance Christian church were thrown out overnight. Services in

the new Anglican faith were to allow for the metrical singing of psalms by the congregation: biblically sanctioned music practice was condoned. But nothing else.

A rather charming summary of the thinking that led to the elimination of most music from the Church of England’s liturgy can be found in the preface to the

1841 *American Book of Common Prayer*. By the 19th century enough time had passed that the authors of this preface could distill the actions of several generations of church founders into several tightly worded pages. They place music squarely in the category of “gross corruptions” of the Roman church service that had needed to be eliminated. The certitude of this passage, written three centuries after the fact, still carries the pungent tang of reformers’ zeal:

“But when the nation in King Henry VIII’s time was disposed to a reformation, it was thought necessary to correct and amend these offices; and not only have the service of the Church in the English or vulgar tongue . . . but also to abolish and take away all that was idolatrous and superstitious, in order to restore the service of the Church to its primitive purity. For it was not the design of our Reformers (nor indeed ought it to have been) to introduce a new form of worship into the Church, but to correct and amend the old one; and to purge it from those gross corruptions which had gradually crept into it; and so to render the divine service more agreeable to the Scriptures and to the doctrine and practice of the primitive Church in the best and purest ages of Christianity. In which reformation they proceeded gradually, according as they were able.” (Preface, 1841 *American Book of Common Prayer*)

No matter what you and I sing on Sunday mornings in Texas, it’s safe to say that 95 percent of it wouldn’t have been allowed by the founding generations of the Church of England. Even if a hymn melody was known at the time, it was eliminated on principle “to render the divine service more agreeable.”

The music we now enjoy in our church services, in other words, has been built up from scratch over the past 450 years. Most of that expansion took place in just the past 200 years. As bishops, rectors, poets, and musicians accelerated the process, each in their individual ways for their communities, further dissent and division naturally followed. I'm reminded of Robert Kennedy's famous dictum, "Progress is a nice word. But change is its motivation. And change has its enemies." When the human yearning for innovation collides with tradition and authority, tension naturally emerges. Religions are famously not immune from this endless, and endlessly human, process.

Church music scholars love to track the history of our hymns. A vast literature of books and articles covers the history of Christian hymn texts and hymn music. If you train yourself to look at the end of each entry in our hymnal, you'll see listed on the page the origins of its text and music. It's a habit for me. And I know it's a habit for many Episcopalians.

By the early 19th century it became increasingly evident that many congregations liked singing hymns, too, and they liked singing hymns with more emotion in their words. In response to changing desires in their congregations, bishops and theologians gradually loosened the centuries-old strictures against singing anything other than psalms in a church service. ("Psalmody" refers to the practice of singing the Psalms by the congregation in church services.)

A remarkable transformation soon took place. After 1800 the Anglican faith would absorb in successive waves the best of the German Lutheran hymns, one of the great repertoires of Protestant hymns. It also absorbed the best of the Welsh hymns, and even new American hymns written by singing school masters on the East Coast like William Billings ("When Jesus Wept"). Even some of the new Methodist hymns with their evangel-

ical poetry and strong emotional content eventually lost their sting for Anglican church leaders. Those Methodist hymns were the praise band music of their day, written in a new poetic style that inspired strong adherents and strong detractors in equal measure. "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing," whose words were written by Charles Wesley himself in 1739, gradually nudged its way into Anglican hymn compilations; the stroke of genius generations later was to set those words to a newly adapted melody by German composer Felix Mendelssohn. (Those Germans and their great melodies again!)

As the market for new hymns expanded in the 19th century, the crafting of hymn texts became a cottage industry for English poets and composers. Dozens of new hymnals were published. The Oxford Movement (1833-45) at the same time encouraged the church to restore some of the beauty to its services. Robed choirs were seen again in English cathedrals for the first time since the Renaissance. Chant began to be heard again in the church.

The good news is that the explosion of interest in singing hymns in the Episcopal Church in the last 200 years has given the church a welcoming quality. The music is more appealing now on its own aesthetic merits. (Psalmody, let's admit, is not exciting or interesting as music. Its appeal lies in the words.) The many attractive newer Anglican hymns



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● *The Sounds of (Church) Music*

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written in the 20th century add further appeal.

The 1982 Hymnal pointedly aims for diversity in its selection of hymns and service music. People notice these qualities. I grew up Lutheran, in Sioux City, Iowa. Lutherans take their music very seriously, and in many ways my career as a music historian goes back to the high cultural value placed on singing that I absorbed as a child at Trinity Lutheran Church in my hometown. Many of those same venerable Lutheran Christmas, Easter, and devotional hymns are also found in the 1982 Hymnal – Lutheran imports and ancient German chorale melodies that the Anglican faith embraced in its search for beautiful music capable of stirring the spirit. “Valet will ich dir geben,” the traditional Passion tune, sends me right back to my Scandinavian Lutheran heritage every time I hear it, and to Bach’s many reverential settings of the melody in his choral

music. Sung in English as “All Glory, Laud, and Honor,” it’s now a cherished hymn for Episcopalians, too. Rightly so. Its presence in the Episcopal hymn book is like a welcome mat to Christians of all Protestant backgrounds. It stitches all of our experiences together when we sing it.

To many Christians in modern America, of course, these church hymns are nothing but “old fashioned” music . . . written in a style they no longer find appealing or relevant. They find spirituality instead through the singing of contemporary popular styles, including songs imagined through newly written words harmonious with Christian sentiment. Most of us in the Episcopal faith cherish our hymns in all their variety – and even find ourselves drawn in to the church through them. Spiritually enriching experiences, it turns out, can be had while listening to all sorts of music. You say tomato. I say tomahto. And the music plays on:

R

For further Reflection

Visit a church, Episcopal or other denomination, where the music is much different than that of your home church. Reflect on the differences and how each speaks to you.

Select one of your favorite hymns and do some research. When and where was it written? By whom? Under what circumstances? Does the information add or detract from the beauty of the hymn for you?



Carl Leafstedt, PhD, is on the music faculty of Trinity University, where he teaches music history courses. He attends St. Mark's Episcopal Church in San Antonio.

Supporting Role

Russell Jackson, Director of Music at St. Luke's Episcopal Church, San Antonio, was Director of Music at All Saints' Church, Northampton, England from 1988 to 1993. All Saints' has had a Choir of Men & Boys since 1388. "The music is what you would expect to hear in any English Cathedral, and the elevated choir stalls are surrounded by history, art, and gilding," says Jackson, "but despite its wonderful dome it has pretty dry acoustics."

Acoustics, like height, space, and beauty, add tremendously to the experience – not just of music but to worship. "Most of us have realized babies love to cry out in church. It's because they can hear their voices reverberating, much as we often sing in our bathrooms – they have good acoustics due to the tile and impervious surfaces which encourage our voices," he adds.

The physical space of the music setting is one part of the entire production of an inspiring worship experience, and the purpose of Sunday-morning music, says Jackson, is to support that. "The music never wants to entertain, never wants to push itself, but always to support the liturgy."

Jackson likens it to a good movie. "If you have a solid script, excellent actors, a brilliant director, a John Williams soundtrack, and a sensitive editor," he says, "you will likely produce a hit. The same goes for liturgy in that each aspect supports all the others, not trying to compete but complementing each other. With such awareness we can produce liturgy which transforms us all and creates a new level of consciousness and beauty." The music should never distract from the theme of the day, not be a feature, but should seamlessly support the liturgy.

The use of music at particular moments in the liturgy can also heighten a special moment, such as singing a *motet* (a short piece of sacred choral music) during communion as people are receiving, says


Jackson. "Obviously there needs to be great sensitivity so that the music enhances the action and doesn't detract from it." In the context of the communion, the mind is on other matters, and the music can support and heighten that moment.

Jackson is aware that church music has the power to change from inspirational to transformational. "The music can take on a sacred nature," he says. "This changes us as beings; it moves us but it elevates us to the horizon of heaven where we can glimpse the divine." It is, as choir trainer and organist Barry Rose once said, not only the "beauty of holiness," but also the "Holiness of beauty."

In great music, says Jackson, people can experience beauty without thinking about why. *R*



Choir stalls at Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, England, are typical of the cathedrals of Europe.



Praying in the Vernacular

by Marjorie George

The song that opens worship at Grace Church, San Antonio, on a recent Sunday morning could have come from the court of King David: “I will not forget you are my God, my King; and with a thankful heart I bring my offering . . .”

That’s because, explains Andy Rodriguez, music minister at Grace Church, the group (Enter the Worship Circle) that wrote the song bases much of their work on Psalms. “When they write songs they will gather in a secluded spot, turn off all their electronics and technology, read the Psalms together, and pray,” says Rodriguez. They disconnect with everything to connect with God, says Rodriguez, who, with his wife, Lisa, has been leading the contemporary music team at Grace Church for seven years.

As a somewhat non-traditional Episcopal church, Grace Church was founded intentionally several years ago to draw people who may have never had a church home or who may be alienated from their former churches. For them, organ music and 18th century lyrics make no connection to their lives. Meeting in All Saints Chapel at TMI - The Episcopal School of

Texas, the Grace Church Sunday-morning congregation is lively, engaged, and full of young families with children.

Connecting with God is the primary purpose for the music at Grace Church, says Rodriguez. “We are not performing” he insists. “We are the available vessels. We extend a hand and invite the congregation in.” He considers the music team to be the messengers of God’s presence — whether that is for one person in the congregation or the entire assemblage.

To do that, says Rodriguez, he has to empty himself. His mantra is “All of me, none of God. None of me, all of God.”

“There can’t be any of me, of us, in our music,” he adds.

For Lisa Rodriguez, who plays flute, music is a form of prayer. “I’m not very good with words,” she says, “but when I play my instrument, that articulates my prayer.” Everyone has a different way of learning, says Lisa, different ways of praying. “For me it’s music.”

Along with Andy on guitar and Lisa on flute, the Grace Church music team includes two or more guitars, an African style drum called a djembe, a violin,

keyboards, and one or two flutes. The team has built slowly over the past several years, says Rodriguez, as God has drawn them together.

As exemplified by that Enter the Workshop Circle song, much of Christian contemporary worship is based on Psalms and Proverbs, explains Rodriguez. Makes sense, as the Psalms are the scripture that most expresses man's relationship with God, the one biblical book in which man speaks to God. "Everything we do is scripture-based," says Rodriguez, emphasizing that it is God's message they are delivering. A heavy dose of the Holy Spirit also guides the music at Grace Church. As team members, individually and collectively, consider the music they will offer on an upcoming Sunday, Rodriguez might ask each of them, "What's going in your life this week? Where do you see God? What is the Spirit saying to you?" During the Sunday morning service, Rodriguez take cues from the congregation. "I sing with my eyes open," he says. "If they are engaged in a song we might sing another verse, or if I am not seeing that connection we might cut it short." He adds he and the vicar communicate with each other during the music, often with just a look or a slight hand signal.

Rodriguez doesn't like the term "praise band." "That sounds like performance," he says, "we want our music to be simple and vulnerable. We get our-

selves out of the way and follow Gods lead." He calls it staying in the lane. "We don't want to get ahead of what God is doing, but we are shining a light on what God is doing."

Rodriguez' heart's desire, he says, is that the worshipping congregation will come together for God. Basically, says Rodriguez, "We are teaching the body how to pray through music."

The phrase, "He who sings prays twice" is attributed to St. Augustine, a fourth-century church Father. In contemporary music at Grace Church, those ancient words are still expressed in the vernacular. *R*

For further Reflection

The next time you sing in church, whether it is contemporary or traditonal, listen to the lyrics. Where might God be asking you to pay attention?

Andy Rodriguez (far left) and the Grace Church music team.



A Thousand Tongues

by Diane Thrush

Music is an important part of our spiritual journey and often changes as we grow and mature in our spiritual formation

nifies our relationship with God often doesn't remain static.

One of my professors, Dr. Dorothy Fouillard, OP, developed a schema for spiritual growth that included seven stages of relationship with God. Stage seven was

ultimate prayer. After becoming a more mature and formed person spiritually, she still loved lighting candles, but the act was defined by a more developed spirituality, not the be all and end all as it had been before. For me, such it is with music and my own spiritual development.



with God. Over the course of a lifetime our musical tastes often change and vary, as well as they should.

Just as our prayer life does not remain static, so too the music which shapes our faith and mag-

a fully relational, theologically formed union with God. Once one had gone all the way to stage seven, she believed we could then go back to stages that had been meaningful along the way. For Dr. Dorothy it was lighting candles. Early in her faith development lighting candles had been the

As dualistic people who find security in either/or, right/wrong, and good/ bad, we are always looking for categories in which to sort things. Unfortunately that is true with music. We can have a definitive idea of what "proper" music should be and we lump all the rest as "wrong." My eldest aunt on my Baptist side of the family was like that. In her later years she was sure what proper music was. Her children told how she reacted when her church began incorporating the youth into the worship. They said she loved hearing the youth give their testimony to the Lord, but that when they picked up their guitars to sing, she was appalled! She told the pastor they needed to sing the proper hymns.

In the summer of 1965 I worked on staff at Camp Capers. The music was the same old, tired camp music that had been around for decades. Chapel services were accompanied by organ and the Hymnal. Some of the clergy taught us camp songs from their youth — oh brother, was that boring! There was not much inspiration in our worship music.

But on the slab at night, that was another story; Harry Mitch-

ell, the assistant camp manager, was playing Bob Dylan and the Rolling Stones. There was a music revolution going on and Harry was bringing it to us each night. The music was upbeat and inspiring, and we danced a thousand miles that summer. Harry also woke us up every morning with Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs. Now that got us up and out of bed.

None of this was Christian music. Yet it had life and rhythm which stirred our souls, and our hymnal did not provide that for campers and young adults at that time. Nobody had even thought of Christian music played on a guitar in our neck of the woods. Yet, “the times they were a-changin.” These days to experience a closing service at camp and watch the energy, vitality, and joy of the Lord on display is exhilarating. I don’t choose it for my Sunday worship experience, but I love seeing the campers celebrating in such a way.

My own music preferences are very eclectic reflecting many years and stages of my own spiritual growth. I have lived through the 60s folk mass period, the Fisherfolk music, my own discovery of Bach, Mozart, Handel et al, Gregorian and Anglican chant, Cursillo music, Taize, Mariachi mass, the Wesleys, classic southern spirituals, and of course, the traditional Baptist hymns of my father’s family. He and his siblings grew up singing in harmony around the piano while their mother played. We always sang at family reunions. Those hymns are deeply soothing to me at certain times. Blessed Assurance,

my grandmother’s favorite is just that- “blessed assurance, Jesus is mine.” My grandfather’s favorite — How Great Thou Art — fills my heart with hope: “then sings my soul my Savior God to thee, how great thou art, how great thou art.” I believe those hymns are part of my DNA.

Just as Dr. Dorothy explained, we can pick and choose spiritual practices that we have learned along the way and that fit what we need when we need them. So it is with music. I am in and out of my music preferences as the mood or need strikes me. Neither phase of my music preferences is right/wrong. My music choices are not more “right” than anyone else’s choices. They are all part of my lifelong spiritual journey and formation accompanied by growth and change. I have been willing to learn from each stage to become more of who I am today.



Diane Thrush is a retired chaplain and a member of St. Luke’s, San Antonio. Reach Diane at dianewt@aol.com

I have drawn nearer to God in each and every phase. Above all, then, I choose to respect that same development in those around me and understand that their music is their music and part of their spiritual story too. *R*

For further Reflection

Have your music preferences changed over the years? What can you identify in each type of music as adding to your spiritual formation?



Getting Intentional

about

Contemporary

The bright and swelling sounds of my dad's 12-string guitar backing him and a few dozen singers at gatherings of people who had been to Cur-sillo are some of the earliest memories I have of what you'd call "contemporary worship music." I remember sneaking away from the childcare workers and up the hallways of Trinity Episcopal Church in Victoria to try and hear my dad and the likes of Jim O'Neil and Jim Friedel harmonizing and leading music together.

I have no doubt that my eavesdropping on those Sunday evening sing-a-longs played a huge part in my desire to learn to play guitar myself.

Several years later, just before my freshman year of high school, my dad started teaching me chords and finger positions and soon I was hacking away on my own guitar along, with the Mass Music Team at my Roman Catholic high school. Throughout that time, I helped lead music at diocesan youth events. When I went off to college, I played for contemporary services at Sewanee and then at Texas A&M. I led music teams at diocesan summer camps and for the youth group at St. Thomas Episcopal Church in San Antonio.

But I was never officially trained or taught how to effectively lead music. I began reflecting on this odd reality last year when, while serving as chaplain for a session at Camp Capers, I learned that the staff didn't have a music director. The diocese hadn't had a good pool of applicants for that position, so counselors and other staff members were called on to step in and lead music here and there. The absence of a consistent musical leader at camp and my own recollection that I'd never myself had the benefit of any training, led me to wonder about our intentionality around this style of music in the Diocese of West Texas.

I began conversations with friends and fellow musicians from across the diocese – those who have led music in different contexts for our church. I asked them two questions:

How are we raising up music leaders?

And how are we equipping them to lead music in these settings?

Across the board, the answers to both questions were the same: “We’re not.” Not really, anyway. Most of them, even those who are professional musicians, have stories similar to mine when it comes to leading music for a worshipping community: No real training on how to do it. Lots of making it up as we go along.

Now, this may not seem like that big of a deal. But think about the role of music in many of our diocesan formation offerings, like Camp Capers and Happening for our youth and events like Cursillo and Council for adults. Think about how important music is in the contemporary worship services that many of our churches have each week. What we sing and how we sing it has the potential to shape our spiritual journeys just as much as the liturgy does. If we expect an organist to have some formal training, and if we demand that our lectors and chalice bearers be trained to fulfill those roles in our liturgies, why wouldn’t we expect our guitarists and keyboard players who lead music in many different contexts to have at least some training in how to do it?

While asking these questions, I gratefully fell into an ongoing conversation among some colleagues about the challenges of this style of music and how it fits into our Episcopal identity. Together, we began to imagine how we might become more intentional in this critically-important ministry in our diocese.

With the endorsement and financial support of both Bishop Reed and St. Mark’s Church in San Antonio, we invited musician and worship leader Fran McKendree to lead a workshop for contemporary musicians. McKendree has a distinguished musical career, having shared the stage with performers such as Fleetwood Mac, Elton John, and Van Morrison, but he’s also devoted his life to music ministry and empowering other music ministers in the church. And he is an Episcopalian. He’s led music for conferences, retreats, and national gatherings, including The Episcopal Church’s General Convention and Fresh Start.

On the Sunday evening following Diocesan Council this past February, an inter-generational gathering of clergy and camp staff and college students and praise music leaders all gathered at St. Mark’s and spent the evening learning from McKendree. In his totally disarming and easy-going style, McKendree led us through challenges like choosing appropriate songs for

different settings, finding theologically-sound music, teaching new songs to a congregation, and encouraging everyone in a gathered group to sing.

We spent a few hours making some incredible music together (you can hear some rough recordings of it at the online version of *Reflections* at www.reflections-dwtx.org) in every style from contemplative Taizé to modern tunes heard on Christian radio. We worked together, honing the craft of musical leadership.

It was a wonderful way for 14 of us to more fully live into our shared love of music. It was an opportunity for us to claim the importance of this ministry that we each feel called to, and to be more intentional about how we are equipping one another to carry out these ministries well. And it has sparked the desire for our diocese to begin hosting an annual retreat that will focus on the training of new and seasoned music leaders as well as creating a space for us to share our best practices from the various contexts in which we are called to lead. For now, we are calling ourselves the Guild of Contemporary Musicians and our hope is that everyone who leads these styles of music throughout the diocese will join us on retreat next fall (dates still TBD). Fran McKendree will likely be with us again as part of the teaching faculty, and this time I’m inviting my dad. *R*

For Further Reflection

If you want to know more about the Guild of Contemporary Musicians, contact Matt, email below.

The Rev. Matt Wise is the Associate Rector for Family Ministry, Outreach and Parish Life at St. Mark’s Episcopal Church in San Antonio. Reach him at mwise@stmarks-sa.org.



Spiritual formation online

This issue online

Read more on "music as spiritual formation" from other gifted writers, including

- The Rev James Derkits on "All Music is Spiritual"
- Jennifer Wickham on "The Music of my Life"
- and Fran Torres-Lopez on "Worship Eclipses Performance."

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- **Their Eyes Were Opened** (Easter Season 2016)
- **God Claims Us all** (Epiphany 2016)
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- **Mary, Mother of God** (Advent 2015)
- **Practicing Lent** (Lent 2015)
- **Watch and Pray** (Advent 2014)



Questions? marjorie.george@dwtx.org

Why We Sing

My Uncle Jim was a gospel singer, the bass voice in a quartet that sang on Sunday afternoons in the small rural churches of central Louisiana. Some Sundays, my daddy would manage to catch a bit of his brother's singing on the radio, and we'd listen. While the piano may have been a bit out of tune, the voices were robust, suited for a robust faith, not afraid to sing about sin and salvation, lost and found.

Unlike my uncle, neither of my parents had the gift of a pleasant singing voice, nor am I a songster. I struggle a bit to stay on key. My vocal range hardly stretches beyond an octave. The sounds I make will never be great contributions to worship, but I sing anyway. I sing to rejoice. I play for solace. At times when the rest of my family has left the house, I take out a well-used songbook and begin playing the piano. In those hours, a peace settles upon me, and I steep in the pleasure of hearing melodies made as my fingers press keys, hammers move, and strings sing. I am attentive as the moments pass, and I feel an oneness about me, as if in prayer.

Most people who attend Sunday services with regularity will say that they best sense the presence of the Holy One in the Eucharist. For me, though, deeply felt moments in worship have most often come through the music we share: old hymns and new hymns, Taize chants and camp songs, bell choirs, trumpets and tambourines. In these celebrations, we are formed — together — into one instrument, or as Paul similarly writes, we become one body with many parts, many losses and gains, talents and opinions, hopes and fears. One song, hymn, anthem at a time, we sing together, whether or not we can read the notes or reach the correct pitch, despite our differences, our politics, our statuses, our histories.

When that happens, we can't be far off key. We are formed and re-formed, a part of heaven and earth's grand chorus. We gather in song, lamenting transgressions and negligence, and then in song again,



celebrating the days ahead. We sing, as my Uncle Jim did in those country churches of Louisiana. We sing as Jesus and his companions did at their last supper together, as Paul and his companions did inside and outside prison walls, as the followers of MLK did on those brave walks for justice.

We sing because we too sense that the song is being heard and that we will be part of the chorus rejoicing in the presence of God, and as we sing the hymns, anthems, chants, and prayers regularly, the words and their trustworthiness become a part of us, not just the words themselves, but the everyday power they have to nourish us with hope, courage, and joy. And finally, we sing, believing that others too will catch a bit of the song, take it up, and sing their own tunes of God's love and mercy. *R*



The Rev. Lera Tyler is a former priest of the diocese. She now lives in North Carolina and Toronto, dividing time with her children. Reach her at lera.tyler@gmail.com.

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