

CHOOSING MUSIC IN A CHRISTIAN COLLEGE

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Creation and Creativity

"Thou art worthy, O Lord to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure are and were created;" sing the twenty-four elders around the throne of God. (Revelation 4:11) To creative Deity belongs praise and humans were created in the image of God to join in this anthem. Through the fall, humans prostituted the privilege of partaking in some aspects of God's creation by searching for fulfillment beyond the Creator's benevolent boundaries. But redemptive creation suggests that mankind may be renewed in Christ thus becoming the "new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." (Ephesians 4:23) Humans continue to derive creative nourishment from God through a redemptive relationship with Jesus Christ, for only through Christ does all creation hang together or consist.

Three cardinal traits characterize the Christian artist. First the artist values individuality. Indeed the gospel confirms the dignity of each individual and the creative artist takes seriously the freedom in Christ to be artistically active. Since Deity imagined the vast variety of our world into existence; why cannot God's creatures creatively synthesize these infinite possibilities into newly imagined combinations? Christian philosopher Arthur Holmes affirms this concept in the book, The Making of a Christian Mind. "Human creativity, finite though it is, still images God's...God has entrusted his

creatures with these powers."¹

Second, the artist fruitfully multiplies. Combining materials such as words, tones, shapes and colors, the artist's mind forms an aesthetic conception which has to be expressed. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, while acknowledging the Lordship of Christ, the artist creates to the glory of God. "An art work can be a doxology in itself."²

Third, the artist recognizes that he or she is not God nor is the work of art to be worshipped. The human mind must not be allowed to construct a universe in its own image. Only stupid ingratitude would cause humans to attempt to usurp God's domain. With Isaiah the redeemed artist exults, "The Lord was ready to save me: therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of the Lord." (Isaiah 38:20) In this sense each follower of Christ may perform artistically and glorify God through music.

Scripture Encourages Music

Music is one of the ways which God and humans communicate with each other. One of the great Trinitarian affirmations of the Scriptures suggests that the Holy Spirit inspires, that God the Father hears the music, and that God the Son lends His Name and worthiness to the audible offering. "Let the Spirit stimulate your souls. Express your joy in singing among yourselves psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, making music in your hearts for the ears of the Lord! Thank God at all times for

everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Ephesians 5:18-20)³

Music is a Biblical art. William Smith asserts that "A survey of the Biblical references to musical performance involves to a very large degree a survey of the history of revelation and redemption, for the former is significantly related to the latter"⁴

The Old Testament is replete with examples of music as an integral part of Hebrew life, and the New Testament espouses music as praise to the Creator God. Indeed the "Anthem of Creation" referred to in Job 38:7 billowed through the celestial spheres "When the morning stars sing together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy;" the ransomed saints enthusiastically will sing "The Song of Moses and the Lamb" on the sea of glass in the recreated world. (Rev. 15:2-4) These hymns reveal who we are, children of God. The first anthem reveals our origin by creation and our relationship to Jesus Christ the Creator; the final anthem reveals God's loving relationship with the Redeemed ones through His plan to reconcile us to Himself through Jesus Christ. What a panoramic view!

Between these transcendent boundaries stretches a continuum of musical practice, as witnessed by both Testaments. For example, the Song of Hannah (I Samuel 2:1-10) parallels the Song of Mary (Luke 1:46-55); each directs praise to God for the gift of a child of promise. Christ and his disciples, according to the custom of the Passover, sang the "Great Hallel" together at

the close of the Last Supper. (Matthew 26:30 and Psalms 117-119) Both the Hebrew and the early Christians associated music with times of spiritual enlightenment. Samuel encouraged the newly anointed king Saul to join a band of instrumentalists who were prophesying, (I Samuel 10:1-6) and Paul was determined to pray and sing with both spirit and mind. (I Corinthians 14:15)

Beauty and Meaning in the Arts

How then, can the searching Christian know what is beautiful? Is all beauty God's beauty? Ellen White's statement glows. "The Author of all beauty, Himself a lover of the beautiful, God provided to gratify in His children the love of beauty."⁵ Money cannot buy it nor genius reproduce it, but it is proper to spend resources and to apply intellect in pursuit of this heavenly gift.

Art and religion have much in common. They are not interchangeable; they are complementary. Although religion does not require music as a partner, the two work well together.⁶ Through the medium of music the transcendental religious experience is heightened and imaginativity enhanced, and through spiritual understanding musical experience is made more meaningful. Both music and religion need to be rooted in correct theology, and each needs to find cogent expression in language understood by the indigenous culture.

The quest for adequate principles to evaluate music for inclusion in college courses is arduous. When a person calls any

experience "beautiful", whether it be artistic, religious or philosophical, we are usually thinking of the extent to which the construct it presents is humanly pleasing.⁷ Music continues to be an individual expression and people are not reticent to express personal opinions. Aestheticians, music psychologists and music therapists do not agree, even within their disciplines, regarding the definition of beauty, the nature of music or the meaning of art. Opinions range all the way from "Music has no moral meaning, no theological or philosophical meaning."⁸ to "Music assumes meaning, both designative and embodied, as performers and listeners understand the style."⁹

Noted composer Roger Sessions confirms the notion that music is inextricably bound up with human experience.

Certainly, we must include among the musical issues not only matters of vocabulary--by which term I include the constructive elements. These matters are themselves products of the musical imagination, and thus derive from causes that lie deeply embedded in human sensibility, awareness, and experience. Like every other product of the imagination, music is ultimately rooted in human attitudes, and interacts with these.¹⁰

On the basis of experience and the following of evidence, the author accepts that music has both meaning and value.

Music and Behavior

Aestheticians, music therapists and psychologists study the relationships which exist between music and behavior. Of all the arts music is the most abstract. It can be demonstrated that music may enter a person's brain quite directly without necessarily going through the cerebrum. Since music may be

perceived through the subliminal portion of the brain, it does influence and condition behavior whether we are consciously aware of the music or not.

Aestheticians study music from a philosophical point of view. Although various aesthetic theories have many things in common, there seems to be no general agreement regarding the way in which music influences moral behavior or communicates value. In an influential group of readings in aesthetics, John Hospers divides artistic expression into three categories; namely, process, evocation and communication; i.e., in musical terms, composition, performance and meaningful enjoyment.¹¹ Hospers would concede that there is an inexact communication between the composer, the performer and the listener. On the other end of the spectrum is a thoughtful article by Alain Danielou asserts in a thoughtful article titled, "Ethical and Spiritual Values in Music"¹² that a close affective relationship exists between the performer and the listener especially if the performer is also the improvising composer.

Music therapists are convinced that music not only communicates mood but also influences persons by physiological and psychological means. From the Biblical record of David playing before King Saul to the contemporary paramedical discipline, music is being used therapeutically, and there are proven results even though music therapy is a recently developed inexact science.¹³ Sensory reactions include alteration of metabolism, pulse, breathing, and other motor responses. These

responses may be conditioned by previous musical experiences, the influence of authority figures who have interpreted these experiences and the behavior of peers.

Psychologists also study how music and behavior relate. As a group, psychologists agree with ethnomusicologists that music is part of all cultures, primitive and civilized. Group involvement increases the potency of music to influence behavior. Although there is meager evidence of exact correlations between specific musical ideas and precise responses, "laymen, musicians, psychologists, and philosophers agree that music can reflect moods and evoke mood responses in listeners."¹⁴ It seems clear that the musical language is acquired more by cultural exposure than by intrinsic qualities of the musical syntax.

Concepts of Moral Value

Through the history of western culture each generation has postulated in some way that music has moral value. The spiritual character of a culture or an art was referred to by the Greeks as ethos. The moral nature of music is recognized by philosophers and many subscribe to the view that music affects or modifies behavior. Irwin Edman summarizes his view on the senses and the imagination.

For better or worse philosophers have had to find a place in their economy for the arts they have exiled or condemned. The senses continue to seduce and the imagination to persuade. Moral philosophers have thus found it the part of reason or discretion to reinstate both, and on moral grounds.¹⁵

It is interesting to peruse the writings about music in

Christian literature from the Bible writers through Augustine. Although some of the remarks are loaded emotionally, there is no question about their sincerity of belief in the character bending quality of music. John Chrysostom (c. 347-407) from Antioch wrote and spoke voluminously about music. James McKinnon in the introduction to his annotated anthology entitled, Music in Early Christian Literature, comments,

John Chrysostom, for example, refers to musical instruments along with dancing and obscene songs as the devil's garbage, and on another occasion declares that, "Where the aulos is, there, by no means, is Christ."¹⁶

And to quote him further on the spiritual benefits of music, Chrysostom rhapsodizes,

For nothing so arouses the soul, gives it wing, sets it free from the earth, releases it from the prison of the body, teaches it to love wisdom, and to condemn all the things of this life, as concordant melody and sacred song composed in rhythm.¹⁷

Throughout the Middle Ages Christian artists purposefully attempted to influence behavior by vividly portraying moral values. Especially, the visual arts developed a specific iconographic symbolism.¹⁸ Thus the faithful were edified and instructed. Both the vast quantity of religious art and the considerable theological debate which it engendered demonstrate the central position architecture, music and the visual arts occupied. Even the rediscovery and resurgence of ancient philosophy and pagan art during the Renaissance period did not succeed in overshadowing the Christian message in art. Both the reformation and the counter-reformation in Europe enhanced spiritual viewpoints and inspired the believers through the

effective medium of art.¹⁹

Contemporary artists continue to stimulate the audience reaction to the music and the message. They both lead and reflect trends of thought and modes of living. As a twentieth century aesthetician, Monroe Beardsley enumerates seven significant propositions in answer to the question, "What good does the finished aesthetic object do to those who experience it?"

1. That aesthetic experience relieves tensions and quiets destructive impulses.
2. That aesthetic experience resolves lesser conflicts within the self, and helps to create an integration, or harmony.
3. That aesthetic experience refines perception and discrimination.
4. That aesthetic experience develops the imagination, and along with it the ability to put oneself in the place of others.
5. That aesthetic experience is, to put it in medical terms, an aid to mental health, but perhaps more as a preventive measure than as a cure.
6. That aesthetic experience fosters mutual sympathy and understanding.
7. That aesthetic experience offers an ideal for human life.²⁰

Value is the relative worth or importance which humans assign as individuals or as a society to things or ideas. "Values are not just feelings", asserts Arthur Holmes in his book, The Idea of a Christian College. "A value judgment is the application of an individual case of aesthetic or moral or political or religious principles."²¹ Whether we acknowledge it or not, it appears that everyone exercises some value judgments. "Life and art are too complex to lay down legalistic rules. But

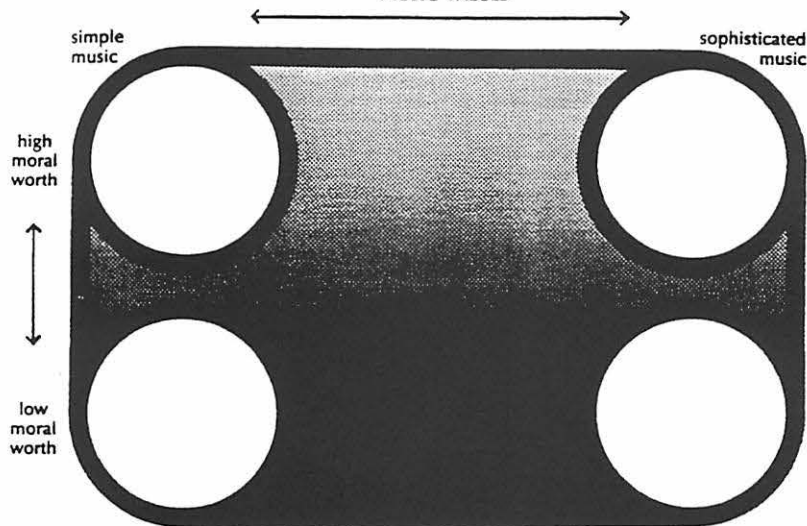
that does not mean that there are no norms," correctly observes H. R. Rookmaaker.²²

Christians in an academic setting have a responsibility to search for value and to choose educational materials according to their perceived value. Even the experience of making reasonable value judgments can be an important educational experience. Professors play a leading role in guiding students to address issues of morality, reason and principled activity.²³

Does this mean that they ought present all alternatives with equal emphasis? Individual instructors have the privilege of not only choosing appropriate music to study but also producing evidence helpful to the students in forming their own value judgments.²⁴ It is a practical impossibility to remain neutral particularly in an area so akin to the total involvement of a person's psyche. In the setting of a college classroom or rehearsal room or teaching studio values are caught. The thoughtful professor is an effective leader who details valid viewpoints honestly and who expresses personal opinions candidly."²⁵

Artistic Attributes in Relationship to Moral Merit

The relationship between music values and moral worth can be expressed in a heuristic model. Sophisticated music is not necessarily music of high moral worth, and simple music is not necessarily music of low moral worth. The following chart suggests that these are two different dimensions:



For the sake of illustration consider examples of music for each quadrant of the above chart. On the upper left hand corner place simple music of high moral worth. The gospel song, "Shall We Gather at the River," possesses no real literary excellence nor musical competence. Even though it is the result of an amateur's honest effort, this gospel song portrays a significant religious event. Its message has blessed many.

Towards the lower left side of the chart the reader may locate music of the night club or disco. In this music incessant rhythmic and harmonic repetition at high decibel levels are coupled with poor quality lyrics. Hard rock and heavy metal rock with their depictions of sex, drugs, suicide, satanism and violence belong at the extreme lower left hand corner of the chart.

Stravinsky's The Rite of Spring serves as an example of sophisticated music with low moral worth. There is no doubt about its musical brilliance. Many musicologists consider this ballet to be a pivotal influence in the development of twentieth century art music. The dance and the music depict scenes from

pagan Russian history. The most beautiful virgin is chosen, spoiled sexually and danced to death. This choice does not imply that music in contemporary idioms expresses ideas which are immoral per se, for Stravinsky also composed The Symphony of Psalms which reverently set several Psalms from the Latin vulgate Bible.

J. S. Bach's St. Matthew Passion belongs on the upper right. There is no greater theme than the crucifixion of Christ and the events which immediately preceded it. Bach dramatically portrays the scenes by assigning roles to the solo singers and occasionally the choir. For the most part, the choruses and the chorales encourage members of the congregation to respond spiritually. Musicians agree that this music embodies consummate greatness.

Having illustrated the four corners, consider placing South Pacific in the center. Middle class persons enjoy this Broadway musical as a light classic! The story thread hovers around a moral middle ground. However, it is doubtful that most Christians would like to have their daughter meet her lover "Some Enchanted Evening" in a bar only to want to "Wash That Man Right Out of My Hair".

This model serves as a framework for many thoughts. For example, musicians have a responsibility to relate to people of differing cultural backgrounds. Many persons who enjoy sophisticated music belittle anyone who does not like their kind of music; the danger lies in the fact that these people may feel

they are more righteous than those who prefer simpler music. On the other hand, many whose tastes and background prefer informal folk music accuse people with formal artistic music preferences as being snobbish and unspiritual. Here lies some of the tension between cultural preferences and concepts of moral worth. Persons with keen appreciation for complex music and with spiritual perceptions have a decided advantage because they can enjoy more profound aesthetic experiences and because they can influence a larger segment of society.

There are dual responsibilities for the Christian music educator. As a Christian one is compelled to choose music which expresses high moral worth. As an educator one is obliged to increase the comprehension and enjoyment of more complex and meaningful music. As a Christian educator one begins where the student is and encourages growth.

Criteria for Selecting Music

Thus, curriculum selection becomes a paramount concern. From the kaleidoscopic array of textbooks in the humanities and from the vast literature of music a choice must be made through the prism of Christian values. The student has only a limited amount of time, so why not study the best!

The following criteria are presented as suggestions which may prove helpful in choosing music to include in the curriculum of a Christian college. No one criterion is pivotal; they must be considered as an interdependent group. In no way do these

criteria constitute a censorship formula but rather they serve as guidelines to encourage thoughtful reflection about a complex cultural scene. They are not arranged in order of priority.

1. Technical excellence. Whatever the artistic medium, the musician needs to handle the composition and performance materials well. Music worthy of serious study has technical merit which commends it as one of the better examples of its type. This is one reason why the music of Mozart is more likely to be included in the syllabus than his contemporary Salieri; yet it may be intriguing and valuable to compare the two composers in order to understand the nature of musical genius.

2. Cultural expression. As far as possible, the music should relate in some way to religious, social and historical backgrounds of the students and faculty. Such ties make the comprehension of the music more accurate and more enjoyable. While the mainstream group of compositions for study will probably be part of the Western (European) cultural tradition, the music of various ethnic and national groups should be considered. Although it is not possible to give equal exposure to the music of various sub-cultures, an affirmation of the musical heritage produced by an individual student's cultural roots is appreciated.

3. Stylistic integrity. An accurate and effective performance presents an authentic feel for the music in context. Whether live performance or recorded example, the music thrives on historical accuracy and skillful performance. In this century

the discipline of musicology has changed our views of performance praxis. For example, an urtext edition and the use of a harpsichord lends historical perspective to a presentation of Handel's Messiah. However, a practical balance between audience receptivity and historical integrity needs to be achieved.

4. Appropriate wedding of text and music. Confusion results when a musical style is chosen which contradicts the message of the words or title. Some sacred texts are set to music which is currently coupled in the minds of most listeners with overtly opposite meanings. Some Contemporary Christian music presents such a dilemma. It is naive to assume that either the words or music can outweigh the message of the other unless the performer intends a parody which thrives on this incongruity.

5. Imagination and freshness. The best music of its time and location pushes at the frontiers of musical expression. Hackneyed expressions will not do. Some composers such as J. S. Bach were somewhat eclectic in their time, but in such cases they breathe new life into established forms and tonal language. Debussy, for example, imaginatively describes sea and clouds in the impressionist manner using newly imagined pictorial techniques.

6. Portrayal of moral good as attractive. Good and evil exist side by side in society, and they often are mixed together in culture. This tension cannot be eliminated in the arts, but the question important to ask is, "Does this particular composition glamorize sin or does this musical work embody an

ethical perspective?" In his book, The Christian and His Music, Paul Hamel points out that many operas revolve around a plot which constantly accents illicit sexual activities and other questionable intrigue.²⁶ In the struggle between virtue and vice, the operatic villains often gain the sympathies of the audience because the "bad guys" grab the limelight and have most of the fun while the "good guys" sing the more ponderous roles and miss the entertaining edge. Because a majority of operas lack compellingly redemptive motives, oratorio rather than opera ought to be emphasized on a Christian campus.

7. Emotional expression balanced by intellectual control. It is difficult to conceive of a valid work of art without some rational organization to balance the emotional content. Edvard Hanslick in his classic study, The Beautiful in Music, asserts that "mental activity is a necessary concomitant in every aesthetic enjoyment."²⁷ With the possible exception of some aleatoric or chance music, classical music has a formal structure which guides the musical expression. When emotion gets out of control, as in some rock concerts, emotional hysteria may result in rioting and even death to persons in the audience.

8. Associational factors. To a large extent the performing venue, the record jacket, any audio-visual display, the accustomed audience reaction and the total happening are indicative of the content of the music involved. The behavior of the performers with their stage props and the audience with its baggage provide clues to the meaning of the musical event.

Tipper Gore, wife of Senator Gore, quotes a newspaper account of a San Antonio rock concert, "Both reporters emerged with horror stories of a crowd that [had] to be frisked for firecrackers, drugs, liquor and knives, or performers who prance on stage with their backsides naked; of stabbings outside the concert hall."²⁸

9. Expert witness. Persons close to the composer or to his milieu may express opinions; and these critics, musicologists, aestheticians, performers and other knowledgeable persons need to be heard. Composers also write and speak about the message intended in the music and they leave content clues by titles or annotations. Should the sanctified imagination avoid music picturing the devil and his domain; i.e. Liszt's "Mephisto Waltz" or Berlioz' "Witches Sabbath"?

10. Serious intent. A desire to express something beyond mere entertainment characterizes music worthy of intensive study and focused practice. Serious music includes capricious, playful and humorous moods. Dohnanyi's Variations on a Nursery Rhyme for piano and orchestra cleverly exploits "Twinkle, twinkle Little Star", however, a duo-piano set of variations on "Yankee Doodle" by an unnamed composer degenerates into a supercilious entertainment. Symphonies, cantatas and music in other complex forms elicit profound reflection, and simpler music such as black spirituals, often has serious intent deserving careful consideration.

11. Repertoire balance. A wide selection of styles, technical difficulty and periods encourages a balanced view of

cultural development. Emphasis should be given to masterworks which have significantly influenced the course of music history. Even though the conductor or professor may have a specialty, he or she owes it to the campus to give a broad exposure to many styles of music. Further, the music ought to provide an educational challenge appropriate to development of the performing resources. Music majors need to have opportunities to rub shoulders with greatness and to be technically and artistically challenged. Practical does not necessarily mean less professional. Wide participation by students of varied capabilities is also a desirable goal.

12. Meaning to the Christian heritage. Far from being a concession, this criterion could bring a relevance to the music course or musical organization. Why not choose Haydn's oratorio, The Creation, with its opportunity to emphasize the wonder and the playfulness of God's world? Or wouldn't it be appropriate to select J. S. Bach's cantata, Sleeper's Wake, because of its significance as an Advent presentation of Matthew 25? Advent hymns and works by Adventist composers might also be fostered.

13. Consonance with college objectives. Institutions of higher learning have a stated philosophy. Within these commonly agreed upon objectives reasonable flexibility and artistic freedom exist in choosing music for teacher training, for church musicians, for concert tours and for campus fun. The Board of Trustees, the administrative officers and the music faculty have a joint responsibility to uphold the objectives reflecting them

throughout the constituency of the education institution and to the surrounding community.

14. World view. The total effect of these criteria is more than the sum of the parts. When placed in its cultural context, an overall impression of the music comes through. Does this music make a positive statement confirming Christian values? At some point in the educational process every student deserves to confront important ideas in the arts. Harold Hannum appeals to Christians to search for beauty.

In order to be great the subject matter must be of some significance. It must be expressed with originality of interest, competence of technique, and it should make a meaningful impression on one.²⁹

In an area so complex as choosing music in a Christian college there are not always concrete answers. The principles underlying the enunciated criteria will point towards cogent and moral decisions. Together professors and students are privileged to select from the vast delicatessen of music literature, vocal and instrumental music suitable for performance and contemplation on a Christian campus. Christian teachers with spiritual insight will continue to exert tolerant and expert leadership which inspires trust in their professional and specialized leadership.

"Soli Deo Gloria"

FOOTNOTES

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