

for which I would wish some serious attention. In our increasingly violent society, does the anger in so much popular music merely reflect what is already present in the people who listen to it, or does it have some causal function? Do those who listen to it even hear it as angry, or does the language of music shift in the same way that verbal language does? We in the church have a message of joy and hope and salvation to proclaim. I believe that it is critically important for us to evaluate the medium which carries the message as carefully as we evaluate the expression of the message itself.

Nola has observed that many of our traditional Moravian hymns are very dense theologically. I think we could take much greater advantage of the possibilities for engaging the texts of those hymns than we generally do. My dear friend, the songwriter Carolyn McDade, has mentioned to me that she thinks most worship services don't give enough time with any one hymn for the congregation to really absorb what it is teaching us. She suggests that on occasion it might be appropriate to sing the same hymn three times, instead of three different hymns. When she leads singing during a retreat, she will frequently ask us to sing a song two or three times in succession. By the third encounter with the text, we are much more likely to be singing with heartfelt understanding. Or she will say, "Now turn around and pray the song when you sing it this time." I wonder how many times we actually pray our hymns during worship? Here is a challenge for those worship leaders who would take advantage of the immensely rich resource that is available to us in our Book of Worship.

Finally, I want to affirm the six steps required by "intentional identity with integrity." We as Moravians have a unique musical legacy with which to proclaim the gospel. We have a strong commitment to community. We value education and service. These are precious gifts to bring as our portion in the well-being of the body of Christ. Years ago in Church Music class I learned that "liturgy is the work of the people of God." We Moravians are challenged by our tradition to do our work carefully and with excellence. May it ever be so.

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### **Sam Gray**

Let me begin by saying that in music, as in other areas of our church life, our biggest difficulty seems to be in being able to really listen to each other. We are divided into musical camps (and I'm not referring to places that we go in the summer to improve our musical skills!) and neither camp seems to be willing to listen to the music of the other "side." We end up making assumptions that are not always valid. A person on one side says, "praise choruses? All they ever talk about is a high and mighty God who is always fighting a battle and never cares about the poor and the humble." And the other side is quick to respond, "wake me up when you're finished singing that dirge that you call a hymn."

So, it is very refreshing to read an article that seeks not to ignore these assumptions and sides, but rather to cut through them and seek a faithful center. I find myself in agreement with most of the principles that Nola presents, and I am grateful to her for her thoroughness and clarity on the important issues that she identifies. Instead of responding "no," I will be responding to her with several "yes, and furthermore..." and a few "yes, buts." My response will focus on the central issues that she identifies: the styles, usefulness and quality of music we should use in our worship:

### STYLES

Please allow me to take great liberties with a familiar passage from John chapter 4:

Jesus and his disciples were headed from Winston-Salem to Asheville. And "he must needs go through Davie County." Then cometh he to Advance, and, since he was tired, he decided to stop at the local laundromat to get a Dr. Pepper. One of the local women came to do her load of laundry, and, as she and Jesus conversed, she realized that he was a prophet. So she said unto him, "as long as I've got you here, there's something that I've always wanted to know. At my church, we use an electronic keyboard and guitars and drums in worship.

But now, y'all say that pipe organs are the appropriate instruments that people should use in church. Which style is right?"

Jesus saith unto her, "Woman, believe me, the time is coming when neither keyboards nor organs will be around anymore. Those are non-essential things. This is what is essential: God is a spirit; and the 'right' way to worship God is in spirit and in truth."

OK, forgive me for making Jesus say what I want to say (though that's certainly a good way to win an argument). But I would be willing to speculate that the Samaritans of Jesus' day may have had very "spirited" worship, though their theology was incomplete (they only used the Pentateuch as their Scriptures). The Jews, on the other hand, were big on truth, but their worship may have lacked "spirit." I believe that Jesus was saying that true worship requires a balance of both of these things: it must be "spiritual" (wholehearted, from the very depths of our being) and it must be "truthful" (Biblically grounded, theologically sound).

Unfortunately, in the Moravian Church in America today, I think we tend to fall into the same divisions that the Samaritans and the Jews had. Nola recognizes these "sides" as they exist today: "lighter music" vs. "high art," "contemporary" vs. "traditional," "praise choruses" vs. "hymns," and I appreciate the fact that she herself doesn't seem to take sides. I believe that our tendency to take sides based on musical styles has less to do with our "taste" in music and more to do with the baggage (theological, social, and political) that these musical styles carry with them. Let me offer a personal example:

When I use my portable electronic keyboard and sing "All In All," I may think that what I'm communicating is: "Lord, you are my strength when I am weak, you are the treasure that I seek, you are my all in all." This is a similar message to what I would be conveying if I would sing "Jesus my highest treasure" accompanied by a Tracker organ. But, believe it or not, the fact that I am using a keyboard, and singing that particular song, may actually be saying to some people: "I'm a conservative, fundamentalist, NRA-supporting,

KJV thumping, Republican, Rush Limbaugh fan who hates homosexuals and knows that all Buddhists are going to hell." Our assumptions make it difficult for us to listen not only to each other's musical styles, but to each other.

Sacred music, as Nola implies, must transcend this type of baggage. It must be, as in the Hebrew concept of what "sacred" or "holy" really means, set apart from these things. So I agree with Nola concerning the danger that exists in too close of a relationship between sacred music and the music of the popular culture. Yet, sometimes I think we need to be reminded that music is not necessarily any more sacred just because it sounds more like Tchaikovsky than like Shakira.

Nola suggests that the first steps toward developing a sacred musical style of integrity are first of all to know our tradition, and then to shape our worship style to it. Yes, but how do we define "our." Who is "we?" I'm reminded of the many times, at New Hope Moravian Church in Miami, a small congregation with seventeen countries represented! I have said, "let's pray together our Moravian blessing," and the response is usually either "our?" or else "whose Moravian blessing?" I think we have to be careful about selecting a particular period in history, or a particular part of the Moravian world, and calling that "our."

There is a lot of power present in this "our." Very often the people with the power get to determine who the "we" is. I'm sure that it is quite frustrating for many Moravians to visit a "contemporary service" where the worship leader says, "let's sing this song that we all know," and then proceeds to lead the song, with no printed or projected text. The visitor realizes that he or she is not part of the "we."

I believe that we must work toward developing styles of worship that are not dictated by popular culture (of any time or place) nor by the current "we." I think that all of us on both "sides" need to examine our preferred style of music and ask, "does it proclaim the truth? Is it Biblically grounded and theologically sound? Does it, like the Samaritans, only represent part of the truth? Does it, as far as is humanly possible, give a full picture

of God's character, or does it tend to focus only on our favorite attributes of God? Are we singing this style of music with "spirit," that is with all of our mind and heart and being? Do we believe what we are singing?"

#### USEFULNESS:

In the fall of 1972, at a retreat in Pennsylvania, Sister Carol Foltz sang a song that not only touched my heart – no, I can say in all sincerity that it actually changed the course of my life. Carol accompanied herself on the guitar. The song didn't even have the normal 3 chord progression of most "camp songs." It was one chord played in 3 different positions. But it served its purpose because it struck a chord in me. Does that elevate it to the level of "high art?" Of course not. However, could Carol have used a more appropriate song for God's purposes? I doubt it. Thanks again, Carol!

Nola mentions the purpose and goal of sacred music – worship – and then addresses the issue of choosing appropriate music for worship. I agree that the primary goal of sacred music is to bring honor and glory to God, but I also believe that different types of sacred music have different functions. Even in New Testament times, the apostle Paul spoke of "hymns, psalms and spiritual songs," with the implication being that the three of them were not necessarily the same thing or the same type of music.

A song that touches the heart of the untouched may do very little to inspire the worshiping community of faith. Yes, the music for evangelism ought to be different. Furthermore, the appropriateness of sacred music needs to be determined by how well it does that which we are asking it to do. Sacred music can teach, touch, reach, and preach; it can allow us to say something to God or give us an opportunity to listen to what God has to say to us. I believe we need to evaluate the usefulness and even the quality of the music within its intended context.

This may come as a surprise to those of you who know me, but I don't really like the idea of planning and celebrating a worship service that is classified as "contemporary." Why? Because that implies that the purpose of the service is to use music from a particular time period, which doesn't seem to me to be a purpose

worthy of much time and energy. What I would prefer is to plan a service that has a more significant purpose (evangelistic; healing; instructional; opportunity for praise, and so forth) and then look at all of the musical resources that are available in any century and from any cultural context and see which ones serve that higher purpose in the best way.

#### QUALITY

Nola advocates an insistence on integrity and quality in whatever styles of music we embrace. Yes, but is it possible (or even desirable) for us to agree on the definition of, and the guidelines for, quality in sacred music? Who decides? I'm afraid that often we try to evaluate the quality of sacred music by accepted Western secular musical standards.

Music is a means of communication. I know that is alike to calling a Rolls Royce a "means of transportation," but songs, to me, don't exist on paper or even in the mind of the composer. Corny as it may sound, I do believe that not only is "a song not a song till you sing it," but it's not really a song until it has been heard. A song is something that was born in the mind or heart of a "sender," taken audible form (or even visible, "signed" form), and has entered into and touched the heart of a receptor.

The quality of a particular musical work can be determined (or at least affected) by the quality of each one of these elements of communication: the composition of the work itself, the presentation of the work (the choice of instruments or voices; the quality of the "performance;" the context in which it is presented); and the receptiveness of the hearers. This last element includes the hearers' degree of musical training; their comfort in the present context; their willingness to hear the music; the "filters" through which they hear the music such as prejudices, assumptions, positive or negative feelings toward the presenter or composer, memories or feelings that are evoked by the music itself, and countless other filters. It gets complicated!

But maybe, again, the criteria for musical quality needs to be based on the two guidelines that Jesus gives us: spirit and truth. Worship music must

begin with God. What matters is who God is and what God wants, not our own likes or dislikes, our personal preferences concerning style or our culturally determined standards of musical quality. Brother Sydney Hooker, a born and bred Moravian of 75+ years, puts it this way when he hears the youth singing in church: "I can't say that I like it, but I know that God does!"

Finally, thank you, Nola, for putting all of this in perspective with your final statement that we must be faithful first to Jesus and then to his gift to us. In the midst of the discussions and debates and disagreements of the past year, it has truly been a blessing to be reminded in song that what brings us together and joins our hearts is not always our music, or our traditions, or our interpretation of Scripture, but rather "the pardon which Jesus our High Priest imparts; 'tis this which cements the disciples of Christ, who are into one by the Spirit baptized."

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### **Jan Harke**

It is somewhat comforting to know that our modern struggles with music in worship aren't new. I suspect that as long as the church is comprised of human members and continues to strive to witness to each generation with vitality, the issues surrounding music and worship will never be resolved. Rather, they will be part of the ongoing struggle to retain that vitality and meaning in an ever-changing world.

Michael Kinnamon, in his opening address delivered to the delegates of the Northern Province Synod in 2002, described Moravians as a "both - and people" (as opposed to "either or"). We are a local group of people who treat each other as family, with all that may mean (both good and bad). At the same time we are a global community including very diverse cultures. Moravians are ecumenical and evangelical. While we recognize and affirm with pride our own unique heritage, we also affirm the heritage and ministries of our Christian brothers and sisters regardless of

denominational affiliation. In short, we recognize and want it all.

This "both - and people" identification can easily be applied to the discussion of worship and church music. It would seem that our history of recognizing that there is no one "right" way would be very affirming in the current struggle of how to "do" church music. It is rather the insistence of doing what we do with integrity that would be the most important issue. Whatever we choose to do, however we choose to express who we are as Moravians in a specific congregation at a specific time, must be done to the absolute best of our ability using the best resources possible. I can only underscore Dr. Knouse's affirmation that "our music is not ultimately responsible for someone's salvation but the integrity (or lack thereof) is a significant witness."

The ultimate question for me as a church musician working within a Moravian context is how? How do we put these ideals and goals into practice?

How do we instill a sense of our "both - and" identity in our congregations? How do we stretch very limited resources to include something few people see as an essential? How do we teach an appreciation for the "core repertory" whatever that may be?

How do oftentimes poorly trained and underpaid church musicians begin to work together with an oftentimes musically illiterate clergy who have the final (and perhaps only) say in the selection of congregational music for worship? How do we train our clergy musically when theological seminaries already complain of inadequate time to include all the necessities?

Simply being faithful to Jesus Christ and to the gifts of community, heritage and tradition are not enough by themselves. We also need intentional and concrete ways to implement an educational process for all: clergy, musicians and congregations.

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