

enjoying and wanting a particular style of music in worship or searching for it. But when a style is seen as THE standard or the ONLY one that is truly spiritual/biblical, then it is no longer a matter of responding to God, but a matter of personal preference that has more to do with personal taste or familiarity than corporate worship. I know of churches that are just as rigid about “contemporary” music usage as others are with “traditional.”

Performance as opposed to participation is another complicated issue. Nola’s citing of Otto Dreydoppel’s work on worship speaks to this distinction, but there is still a wide gray area in the middle. When does worship music leadership slip over into performance? When does a worship music leader’s enthusiasm and inspiration move a song (be it instrumental, solo, praise chorus or hymn) from being offered/led to being performed? I generally look for where the attention is. The greater visual attention given or drawn to the music leader, the more likely it is to be performance oriented. And in the same vein, while a fine rendition of a song should be appreciated by the listeners and/or the singers, the desire or need for applause at its conclusion moves it closer to a performance.

In our visual, big screened, TV oriented age; it seems to me that we have moved MUCH closer to the performance/spectator end of the spectrum in worship that in my view puts the attention away from God. In fact, some modern worship services appear to me to be mechanically the same as secular rock concerts, the main difference being the use of religious language.

Being a guitar player and an advocate of the use of modern instruments and music in worship, I am very conscious of and strive hard to make sure that when I lead music, the focus is on worshipping God, and not on me, my guitar or the type of music. That doesn’t mean I always succeed, and it can be difficult to achieve when the instruments or the songs are not what the worshippers are used to. I am not trying to pick on modern music and instruments, because traditional can also be performance oriented. A spirited organ prelude, anthem solo or violin piece can just as easily become a performance instead of an offering.

As Nola indicates, these discussions only scratch the surface of all the issues involved in music and worship. There are many ways of looking at them, and few are truly cut and dried. Music for many is like life-blood; it isn’t a disposable commodity in worship or anywhere else! Like most other areas in church life we cannot wall ourselves up around whatever our particular perspectives are if we want to be effective followers of Christ. And we must do everything we can to offer music in worship that is real, meaningful and true to the good news of Christ that speaks to those who hear it, sing it, as well as play it, whatever the style or instruments used. With openness, dialogue, education, practice and attention, I believe we can. I’m still waiting on guitars to make it into the Easter band.

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Marian L. Shatto

It is indeed an honor and a privilege to be invited to write one of the responses to Nola’s excellent lead article concerning Music at the Heart of Moravian Faith and Life. Since I am in essential agreement with the main points of her thesis, I want to expand on several of her remarks and raise a few questions of my own.

If singing our faith is one of the primary mechanisms which bind us together as a worshipping community (and I fully believe that it is), then it is incumbent upon us to ask how the maximum possible number of the gathered congregation can be invited into joyful and willing participation. There is, in my opinion, no one foolproof answer to this question. Rather, a number of sometimes competing considerations must be addressed.

It might seem that staying with the familiar is the best way to encourage participation in worship. This is true only to an extent; then the boredom factor takes over. The congregation that hears only the same two or three-dozen hymns soon finds its worship stagnating. Praise, awe, and wonder are lost in a sense of the “same old, same old.”

While a mix of familiar and unfamiliar hymns is appropriate to counter this ennui, it is important to present unfamiliar ones in a way that makes them accessible. Sometimes a teaching session prior the beginning of worship is appropriate to introduce a new hymn that will be used later in the service. The choir might sing an unfamiliar hymn as a call to worship or prayer response one week, with the congregation invited to join in subsequent weeks. Some congregations focus on a “hymn of the month,” so that by using the same song in four or five successive services familiarity is gained.

One of the great strengths of the Moravian tradition is our emphasis on four-part singing. In four-part harmony, every voice range can find a line that it can comfortably sing. This is not always the case with unison hymns. Much as I love the text and tune of “Be Thou My Vision,” I find it difficult to sing with full attention to its meaning because it lies so low. I’m sure that altos and basses would have the same complaint at the opposite end of their register were it to be transposed to a higher key. The genius of the German chorale and other four-part songs is that everyone has a place within them, so that by our singing we witness to our community. As Paul observed in a different context, we have different gifts but are all part of one body.

Let me tell a story to illustrate the joy of inclusion that our musical tradition can provide. About five years ago I met a string bass player, a woman in her mid-sixties who loved music but was convinced she could not sing. After sitting beside her during worship at a retreat, I finally said to her, “Ann, you can sing. You are matching pitches just fine, an octave below me. You’re a tenor.” It was a revelation to her. In all her years of church involvement [not Moravian] she had never been given permission to sing in her own range, and the concept of being a female tenor was totally new to her.

With my encouragement she registered as a tenor to sing in the chorus at the 1999 Moravian Music Festival. By the middle of the week she was ecstatic. She was learning the music with increasing confidence, and one of the men near her indicated that he was following her

lead on the more challenging passages. Her delight at having found a voice was a joy to share.

Part-singing requires some basic musical training, however. A number of societal shifts over the past half-century have resulted in a populace who are much more specialized than was previously the case. Children who choose formal musical training have far more opportunities today than they did when I was in school. My observation, however, is that music education for the general student body is not nearly as extensive or thorough as it once was. With the prevalence of numerous forms of electronic entertainment, family music making as a common evening activity is also a thing of the past. Thus churches cannot assume musical literacy among the majority of their members. How this lack can be addressed is a conversation in which few congregations of my acquaintance are engaged. It is one that will soon become necessary, however, if we are going to retain general use of our traditional hymns and anthems.

Another ongoing concern of mine is the tension between worship and performance. As Nola makes clear, this is not by any means a new issue. I especially appreciated the quote from Carl Schalk regarding avoidance of music in worship “that reflects cheapness, superficiality, banality, shoddiness...” While I fully understand the impetus behind the point of view that insists that music in worship should not be a performance, as a trained musician I am always uncomfortable with that statement. For me “performance standard” is the best that I can do, and I refuse to do less than that in service to God.

Counter to this is the attitude that I have heard expressed by several professional musicians over the years, that they do not have to practice very hard because “it is just a church job, not a performance.” Clearly such musicians have the understanding that a church congregation will be content with a level of musicianship far below what is demanded by a concert audience. Somehow we must make clear to them that we expect nothing less than the best of which they are capable, while at the same time giving encouragement and appreciation to the timid fourth grader sawing out “Jesus Makes My Heart Rejoice” on her ‘cello.

It seems to me that education is a significant key to meaningful worship practice. Thus I especially appreciated Nola's emphasis on rigorous training for both pastors and church musicians, and her inclusion of the congregation in the educational process. At a time when many public schools have reduced or eliminated their commitment to education in the arts, the church needs to decide whether it will provide the training required to maintain comfortable acquaintance with our rich tradition of hymnody and liturgy, or abandon the complexities of that tradition in deference to an increasingly musically illiterate populace.

Over the years I have encountered more than once the charge that striving for excellence in the construction of worship and preferring classically-based music to that arising from popular culture is elitist and contrary to the Christian ideal of including all of God's children in the gathered congregation. It is a charge with which I struggle. As one who is strongly committed to social justice and full inclusion for the marginalized, I try to be very sensitive to ways in which my actions might exclude others. Yet I must acknowledge that my own voice lifts far more fervently in praise and joy in the Lord when a pipe organ supports it with full, rich chords than when I am straining to discern the melody amidst a collection of electric guitars.

The Moravian tradition of music requires intention, education, and a certain amount of hard work. What would happen if we were to take seriously Nola's observation that we "must expect our members to study and grow in their knowledge of our tradition"? Is it elitist to have such an expectation, and to convey it vigorously to new members? Would we, as some fear, lose members who were unwilling to take responsibility for the own education and growth? Or are we offering the musical equivalent of "cheap grace" if we are content to permit the majority of our members to remain in ignorance of the range and depth of our hymnody and liturgy? "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so," may indeed be the heart of the Gospel, but in my opinion the mature Christian should be eager to grow beyond that simple statement.

A question over which I have puzzled for years is that of the function of the music apart from the text to which it is set. Frequently eighteenth and nineteenth century composers used music to reflect and reinforce the meaning of the text. For example, in the Credo section of Puccini's "Messa di Gloria," which I had the opportunity to sing last November as a member of the Lancaster Symphony Chorus, "descendit" (He descended) is set to a descending musical line that pushes all voices to the lowest part of their registers. This kind of tone painting is of course much more possible for "through composed" songs and anthems than it is for chorales, where the same musical phrase sets a number of different lines in successive verses.

Some hymns with refrains exhibit this same technique. I fondly recall from my youth the stirring exuberance of a favorite Sunday School Easter hymn, as we sang first in subdued minor "Low in the grave he lay, Jesus, my Savior," then a triumphant ascending major arpeggio on "Up from the grave he arose!" Quite apart from the text, the music itself spoke to us of lying low in grief, then rising in joy.

Having said that, my puzzle is this – does the music of so-called "Christian Rock" and "Christian rap" preach a message contradictory to the gospel text of the lyrics? Or do the lyrics baptize and redeem a style of music which to my ears speaks primarily of anger and violence? Put another way, what I am asking is whether the emotions evoked by a particular form of music are universal and independent of any verbal expression? Or is the meaning of music a function of our enculturation, dependent upon how we have learned to interpret it?

I am aware of several studies on the effects of music on physiology and on cognitive ability. Several years ago much was made of the "Mozart effect," a theory that playing classical music for young children measurably increased their brain function. And I recall reading of a medical study that indicated that prolonged exposure to disco music had a deleterious effect on heart rate and rhythm. I have not, however, seen any report of a controlled psychological study of the effect of different kinds of music on the emotions. It is an area of study

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.