

"A Heritage of Christian Music"

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Singing and music need to be a vital part of the life of a growing Christian. The Bible teaches that all things have been created, not only by God, but also for Him and for His pleasure (Rev. 4:11). This applies to the realm of music. The Bible has much to say about Christian music. In fact, there are over five hundred references to music in the Word of God. When in Ephesians 5:18 we are commanded to be filled with the Spirit, we are also commanded to speak to ourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in our heart to the Lord. Christians, then, are to sing to themselves with a melody in their heart.

Colossians 3:16 says, *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."* We are to sing to others and sing with others!

Psalm 89:1 *"I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever."*

2 Samuel
22:50 *"I will sing praises unto thy name."*

Psalm
119:54 *"Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage."*

Job 35:10 *"But none saith, Where is God my maker, who giveth songs in the night?"*

Hebrews
2:12 *"I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee."*

Revelation
5:9 *"And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book and open the seals thereof..."*

Revelation
14:3 *"And they sang as it were a new song before the throne..."*

Not only should we speak to ourselves in psalms and hymns and sing to others, but Psalm 98:1 tells us, *"O sing unto the Lord a new song; for he hath done marvelous things."* And Psalm 100:1,2 says, *Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands. Serve the Lord with gladness: come before his presence with singing.* The book of Psalms is the national hymnbook of Israel. It contains 150 poems to be set to music for worship. The Hebrew title of this book is "Praise" or the "Book of Praises."

Fifty-three of the Psalms are addressed to "the chief musician," and Psalm 7, 30, 48, 83, 87, 88, 92, 108 are listed as "songs."

THE HISTORY OF MUSIC

God is the Author of Music

God Himself is the originator of music. The Bible speaks of Christ's singing and of God's blowing a trumpet. Man, made in the image of God, is also musical. Everything about you is rhythmic. There is order and timing in your steps and your walk. Your heart beats in regular time and rhythm. God placed in man alone the ability to understand, develop, and appreciate this unique gift of music. Man has two choices: he can either use this gift for the glory of God and the blessing of his fellow man, or he can exploit it for sensual gratification and the debasement of others.

Satan is the Destroyer of Music

Music has as much potential for evil as it has for good. Ezekiel 28:13 says, "The workmanship of thy tablets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created." These words are in reference to Satan. This means that Satan was originally created to be an angelic being of praise and adoration to God; he was a veritable musical instrument. But he turned all that potential for beauty inward and fell victim to his own pride and ambition. Perhaps this explains why many people are so easily enthralled by sensuous music or a fleshly expression of it. The result is that, rather than being a blessing to mankind, music often becomes a curse-- "noise" that God refuses to hear!

Let me state very clearly that there is no such thing as Christian Rock. You might as well speak of a sincere hypocrite, or a truthful liar, or an honest crook, or a pure harlot as speak of Christian Rock. If it is not Christian, then it is certainly not pleasing to God.

In response to worldly music on the part of Israel, God said through His prophet Amos, "*Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols.*" (Amos 5:23)

THE FORM OF MUSIC

Music is made up of three major parts: melody, harmony, and rhythm.

Melody

The melody is the main tune of a song and usually the top line of music. The word "melody" means "to praise God."

Harmony

Harmony is that which appeals to our soul or mental processes. It is usually known as the alto, tenor, and bass. Harmony is always to be subject to the melody.

Rhythm

Rhythm is the beat that appeals to the body. The body is full of rhythm. Your heart beats in rhythm; you walk in rhythm. Rhythm is the life and movement of music, and it is that which gives order to music if it is controlled.

THE HERITAGE OF MUSIC

Music in the Bible

Music has accompanied the worship of God ever since there has been corporate worship. There are some outstanding Biblical accounts of the public use of music in praise to God.

When Moses and the Israelites crossed the Red Sea on dry ground, there was music involved; they sang a song of victory (Exodus 15:1-21). When God provided water for them there was music involved (Numbers 21:17). At the climax of their journey, Moses gathered the people together to sing of the mercies of God, before going up into Mount Nebo to die (Deuteronomy 32:43).

Deborah and Barak sang a song of victory. This song was composed and sung after the great, miraculous defeat of the forces of Sisera when the stars in their courses fought against the power of evil (Judges 5).

Singing is also associated with the birth of a child. When God gave a son to Hannah, she sang at the birth of Samuel (I Samuel 2:2-11). When Mary heard of the coming of the Christ Child, she sang (Luke 1:46-55).

Psalm 45 is a song which was used to celebrate a wedding.

Music was used in connection with the Temple and with worship. Music was used in connection with the establishing of worship at Jerusalem. Music was played during the removal of the ark from the house of Obed-edom (instruments - II Samuel 6:5). Music was played at the dedication of the Temple (II Chronicles 5:11-14). Music played a part in the return, when Hezekiah cleaned out the Temple and re-established the offerings (II Chronicles 29:25-30). The Jews, in their journey toward the Temple for the feast days, would sing. In establishment of the New Temple under Ezra, praises were offered to God while the foundation for the Temple was being laid (Ezra 3:10-13).

The Song of Solomon is a beautiful love song. It is called "The Song of Songs," possibly indicating that Solomon considered it the choicest of all of the 1,005 songs which he wrote (I Kings 4:32).

Before they went to the Mount of Olives, our Lord and His disciples sang a hymn together (Matthew 26:26-30). This hymn is believed to have been the Hallel, a name associated with Psalms 113-118.

The Scriptures make it clear that music is to play a very important part in the life of a Christian. Many times in the Psalms, believers are told to *"make a joyful noise"* unto the Lord. Psalm 98:1 commands, *"O sing unto the Lord a new song; for he hath done marvellous things."* And Psalm 100:1,2 says, *"Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands. Serve the Lord with gladness: come before his presence with singing."* The idea here is that believers should spontaneously burst into song of praise to our Lord.

Now, do not raise the objection that you cannot sing very well! God is not asking that you give a public concert. And no one is asking you to sing in the choir. In this case, talent is not required--only that your heart be filled with the joy of the Lord. I think the Lord enjoys hearing the croak of a frog and the screech of a hoot-owl because He made them. If your heart is not filled with joy in the Lord, then something is wrong. We should always be able to praise the Lord.

If I were to say to most believers, "God has put a new song in my _____," they would more than likely fill in the blank with the word "heart" unless, of course, they had just finished reading Psalm 40:3. Psalm 40:3 says, *"And He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord."* This verse tells us a new song has been put in our mouths! This means that the joy of salvation that is down deep in our hearts ought also to come out in our songs of praise. There is no doubt about it...God has given us a new song!

This new song is different from the old song of the world. It is not a song that glorifies man or self. It is not a sensual or carnal song. It is a spiritual song that gives honour and glory to our King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE WRONG KIND OF MUSIC

Music has a great influence upon us.

Dr. Howard Hansen wrote, *"Music is a curiously subtle art with innumerable, varying emotional connotations. It is made up of many ingredients and, according to the proportions of these components, it can be soothing or invigorating, ennobling or vulgarizing, philosophical or orgiastic. It has powers for evil as well as for good."*

In 1920, Lenin spoke at the third all-Russian congress of Young Communists Leagues and said, *"If we are going to spread our doctrine, we're going to have to rework our culture. We'll have to change the culture of a nation of it is to go communistic."*

One hundred and fifty years ago, Henry David Thoreau said, *"Music may be intoxication. It has helped cause the destruction of the Greek and Roman empires and it will sooner or later destroy America and England."*

Plato said, *"The introduction of a new kind of music should be shunned as imperiling the whole state."*

Paul Kantner of the "Jefferson Airplane" said, *"The new rock music is intended to broaden the generation gap, alienate parents from their children, and prepare young people for revolution."*

Frank Zappa of the "Mothers of Invention" said, *"The loud sounds and bright lights are tremendous indoctrination tools; it is possible to modify the human chemical structure with the right combination of frequencies. If the right kind of beat makes you tap your foot, what kind of beat makes you curl your fist and strike?"*

Cheetah (magazine) quotes a New York musician as saying, *"If the establishment knew what today's popular music is saying, not what the words are saying, but what the music itself is saying, they would just turn their thumb down on it. They'd ban it. They'd smash all the records and arrest anyone who tried to play it."*

Nothing reveals the condition of a nation quite like its music and art. Not only does music reveal what we are, but more than we realize, it makes us what we are!

Adding a few religious words to the satanic beat of jungle rites does not make the music "Christian" music. Some people say, "Well, the words are good words." Music itself, has an influence all its own. For instance, on television, you know a certain scene is coming by the "spooky" musical background. Band music makes one want to march. Beautiful, well-played music can make people laugh or cry. Dentists even play music that is supposed to make you think that you are not hurting.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RIGHT KIND OF MUSIC

Many people think that our choice of music doesn't really matter. It's just a matter of taste. Music is neither good nor bad; it's how you use it that matters. This simply is not so. Music (even without lyrics) contains a message. Just as an artist conveys a message with his painting, so a composer with his music. The paint, of course, is neither good nor bad (morally speaking), but the picture could be quite bad. Even so, musical notes are morally "neutral," but arranged in a musical composition, their harmony, rhythm, and melody can tell quite a story. Christians must be careful to choose to sing and listen to music that conveys a proper message. The message must not be prideful, sensual, or carnal.

So the question that demands an answer is simply this: "Is this song right or wrong?" Perhaps the best way to answer that is by asking a different question such as: "What music is the best?"

In heaven, the angels sing praises unto God. That music would have to be the best of all music. We also know that there is satanic music. The same principles of melody, harmony, and rhythm that govern godly music, also govern satanic music. Our earthly music will tend to be pulled between the pull of the world's music and the truth of heavenly music. We should be constantly asking ourselves if our music could be closer to that which Jesus Christ would approve, and it is reasonable to assume that God would show us how the basic components of music should be arranged to glorify Him.

In Colossians 3, we find four concepts by which we can judge all music. Now in context, the Christian is admonished to seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. The Christian is first to set [his] affection on things above, not on things on the earth. Secondly, he is to mortify (put to death) [his] members which are upon the earth; and thirdly, he is to put on a new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him. Fourthly, he is to let the Word of Christ dwell in [him] richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in [his] heart to the Lord; and last, he is to be sure that whatsoever [he does] in word or deed, [he does] in all in the name of the Lord Jesus giving thanks to God and the Father by him. From this passage we learn four things that

are necessary for godly singing unto the Lord and each other.

First, the man must be right. The composer and the performer must be right with God. An unsaved person cannot sing unto the Lord nor can he properly teach a believer. Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel (teaching, advice) of the ungodly (Psalm 1:1). A musical performance may be beautiful and full of truth, but it must be performed by people who are right with God. Although the music is wonderful, it is blasphemy for the Mormon Tabernacle Choir to sing about Jesus Christ whom they resist. Can we really be blessed by the singing of apostates or blasphemers and Christ-rejecters?

If a person is lost, he cannot sing unto the Lord. If the person does not know God's Word, his music may be superficial, or even heresy. The first principle is that the man must be right. If the man is not right, the result is mere entertainment.

Secondly, the message must be right. The singing is to "teach and admonish" truth. A message that teaches false doctrine is heresy. If your preacher preached the same doctrine that many songs teach you, you would be looking for another church. Many modern, as well as old, songs contain messages that are contrary to the Bible. And what does God think about false doctrine? Paul wrote in Galatians 1:8,9, *"But though we, or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I again, if any man preach any other Gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed."* False gospel is to be accursed, not played on the CD player. If the message is not right, the result is heresy.

Thirdly, the music itself must be right. We have previously noted that the three major aspects of music are melody, harmony, and rhythm. Let me quote from a secular writer about these three components. Joseph Machlis, in his book *The Enjoyment of Music* says this: *"Melody is that element of music which makes the widest and most direct appeal. It has been called the soul of music...The melody is the plot, the theme of musical work, the thread upon which hangs the tale...For melody is the essential unit of communication in music: the direct bearer of meaning from composer to listener."*

Based on this secular definition we see that when melody is dominant, so is the message of the music. Ephesians 5:19 says, that we are to sing and make melody in our heart unto the Lord. The melody of a song is that which touches man's spirit. Music affects every part of man: his spirit, his soul or mind, and his body. Music that touches the toe before it touches the heart is not based on Christian principles. Jesus said in Matthew 6:33 that we are to *"seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness."* Music is to do the same.

Joseph Machlis also said, *"We are accustomed to hearing melodies against a background of harmony. To the movement of the melody, harmony adds another dimension depth...harmony is to music what perspective is to painting...It introduces the impression of musical space."*

An example of harmony found in Ephesians 4:16 where the phrase *"fitly joined together"* comes from the same word from which we get the word *harmony*. Harmony literally means, "something that is fitly joined together." It is the most complex aspect of music that appeals to the mind of man. It is the alto, tenor, or bass; these are the parts that appeal to our soul or our mental processes. It adds interest and variety; but, since it is not necessary to impart the spiritual content, it must be subject to the melody.

This concept is taught in II Corinthians 10:5 - *"Casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ..."* This clearly shows the importance of having the mind in subjection to the spirit. Melody without harmony will lack depth and interest, but it will get the point across.

Rhythm, as Joseph Machlis put it, means "flow in Greek - denotes the controlled movement of music in time...Rhythm is the element of music most closely allied to body movement, to physical action. Its simpler

pattern when repeated over and over have a hypnotic effect on us. For this reason rhythm has been called the heartbeat of music, the pulse then betokens life...Rhythm releases our motor reflexes even if we do not respond with motion...Rhythm is the most important element in primitive music, projected in marvelously complex patterns by the tribal drums. It is primal energy unleashed motion controlled."

Now rhythm is that which moves the body, so it ought to be easy to determine its role in biblical music. The word "rhythm" is derived from the Greek word HAREO meaning "shall flow" found in John 7:38.

Rhythm is necessary to life. A human body without rhythm is a dead body. Music without rhythm is dead music. A human body in which the rhythm is messed up is a sick body. A music in which the rhythm is messed up is a sick music.

Just as the heart determines the body's pulse, so the music's pulse is determined by the rhythm. A heart that goes wild in pulsation is a sick heart, which will produce a sick body. The same is true of music. Music with uncontrolled rhythm is sick music.

In godly music, there are biblical principles to follow in determining the place of rhythm in our music. Notice I Corinthians 9:27. Paul says, *"But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should become a castaway."* The principle is simply this. The body is to be under the control of the believer. The body is to be in complete submission to the mind and the spirit of man.

When we follow this principle, it is obvious in music that the element that appeals to the body should be in control of the mind and spirit. In other words, the rhythm is to be in subjection to the harmony and melody. Any Christian music that has rhythm which is dominant is contrary to Biblical principles.

Frequently, in primitive, tribal situations, the music is rhythm first, often to the exclusion of the melody. You see, when the melody is destroyed, so is the message. It will affect only the mind and the body, but not the spirit. When both melody and harmony are destroyed, the only thing left is the body.

Carnality is having the flesh control our lives. When our music, even if sung by Christians with a Christian message, is such that it appeals to our body but not to our spirit and mind, we have carnal music.

Am I saying that it is wrong to have music affect our bodies? No, but it must be in perspective. Music should lift our spirits to God first, then appeal to our intellects; then, lastly, it should cause our bodies to respond in the proper way.

Just as our hearts quietly pump away giving life to our bodies, so also our rhythm should quietly pulsate away giving life to our music. If our heart beats so loudly that we cannot pray, then obviously, we are sick. If the music is not right, then we have compromise.

The fourth and last thing necessary for right music is that the motive must be right. Colossians 3:17 says, *"And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him."* Why we do things will be judged at the Judgment Seat of Christ. When a singer sings to glorify himself, that is a form of hypocrisy. The question we must continually ask about our music is this, "Is God saying 'Amen' or just the congregation?"

Some would say that we are using what is called "worldly music" to bring worldly men to the gospel and to Christ. But that is an unbiblical motive! Does God need the methods of Satan to draw men to Himself? What did Paul say in Galatians 1:10? *"If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ."*

Are there any passages in the New Testament where we are told to use worldly means to draw men to Christ? Are we even told to use music to draw men to Christ? The question must always be, "**Would Jesus Christ endorse this method if He were on earth today?**" If the motives are not right, then it amounts to hypocrisy on the part of the singer. Music is important! God wants us to sing--but in spirit and with understanding. Look with me at Colossians 3:15. "*Let the peace of God rule in your hearts.*" God is a God of order and peace, not disorganization and chaos. God wants His peace to "umpire" in our hearts with regard to music. It does not matter what the world thinks. It does not matter what this preacher thinks. It does not matter what some famous entertainer thinks. It does not even matter what you think. My opinion or your opinion means nothing. We need God's Word on it. Let me encourage you to begin to evaluate music in light of His standards.

Now, would you be willing to give up or change our music if God wanted you to? If not, music has become your idol in your life.

Would you be willing to admit that the reason you desire music where the rhythm is dominant is really because you are living after the flesh, not after the Spirit?

Would you be willing to admit that the reason you like worldly music isn't to draw worldly people to Christ, but because you are worldly?

If you can answer yes to any of these questions then you need to...

Choose music that is pleasing. *Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not bear the melody of thy viols.*

Choose music that is pure. *Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. Psalm 24:3-5.*

Choose music that is praising. *Praise ye the LORD: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely. Psalm 147:1.*