

DEVELOPING MUSIC AND WORSHIP IN A CHANGING CULTURE

Talk to Salisbury Dioc Music Day Nov 10th 2012: ¾ Hr

Say something about myself...

In this talk I want to

- give a little context of the changing culture we live in,
- make some points about the essence of church and music's function within it,
- and then look at two areas of challenge -
 - coping with music in small situations,
 - and how we relate to younger people.

We live in a profoundly changing world and that rate of change is either exhilarating or frightening, perhaps in equal measure.

We like to look on the church, however, as a place of security, stability, timelessness - but to do so is a mistake.

Jesus didn't spend his time preserving institutions.

He was a disruptive influence initiating the most profound of changes.

Change is par for the course, and, as the author of the letter to Hebrews reminds us, 'Here we have no abiding city'.

We're a pilgrim people, we're on the move, we're on a journey!

Music continues to have a very significant place in our culture.

Thinking back over the last four decades or so, one could say that music has been one of the most influential agents of change.

With the musical revolution of the 50's and 60's groups like the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan and so on, developed an alternative musical stream often in opposition to classical presuppositions, changing the musical landscape of ordinary people in Western society.

But also significantly changing their outlook, values and lifestyle.

Music is such an important ingredient in people's lives. People groups in our society, and the sub cultures they create, are hall-marked by the kinds of music they focus around.

Younger people use music like a sound track to life. It creates an atmosphere, a mood in which they live out their daily lives.

But these days it applies to all of us whatever our age-group.

Just for interest, let's take a poll - Classic FM, Radio 3, Radio 2, Radio 1, Radio 4...?

The music we listen to can represent much more than just a purely musical interest.

Classic fm for example promotes a whole lifestyle with holidays, insurance, recipes, even on-line dating for an older generation!

The music we listen to is expressing a life-style, a cultural view which accords with our background, our social status, ethnicity, or age-profile.

If that's how people are using music in wider society, how does that compare with how we use music in the church and the values and cultures it represents?

What do you think the kind of music you use in your church is saying about you...? Take a moment to DISCUSS that with your neighbour...

Bishop Graham Cray, once my vicar, used to say:

'Church music is one of the most effective 'keep out' signs I know!'

Who are you keeping out? Or, maybe more positively, who are you attracting?

These days, with the factor of ageing and often declining congregations, we are being called to be much more mindful of the wider community in which we're placed and of our connections with them.

What the outsider makes of us is therefore of crucial importance.

Archbishop Temple is often quoted as saying

'The church is the only institution that exists for the benefit of those who are not its members.'

The kind of music we offer is sending out some important signals:

- what culture or cultures are represented in this place?
- what age-groups are reflected here
- are they playing my kind of music, and therefore are they interested in me?
- what kind of words is the music carrying - an inclusive or exclusive message?
- is the music fishing for a more engaged or emotional response than I am ready or prepared to give?
- does the music reflect my personality, the stage of life I find myself in, the issues I'm struggling with at the moment?
- does it have any currency for contemporary life and experience, or is it just reflecting a past age?

The thing is, music is an extremely powerful and emotive communicator operating at a very deep and often subconscious level. I don't think we realise what an effect it has.

Just think of the cinema for a moment. How many films have you seen that haven't had a musical soundtrack? Not many I bet!

The music is prompting our reaction to the action on screen.

It's telling us how to feel about what's going on.

And that's what's also happening in worship. In many ways the music is called upon to 'do the business', to be the element of transcendence which lifts us out of the mundane and into the presence of God.

When I first went into St Cuthbert's church as a student in York where David Watson was an excellent and very popular preacher, it wasn't the address that moved me, although it explained things very clearly, it was the quality of the singing. These people weren't just 'singing about' their faith, they communicated an inner conviction, something which I lacked at the time, and it made a deep impression on me.'

It communicated something deeply about the presence of God in ordinary people's lives.

But it was also in the context of a gathering - the music powerfully expressed the corporate voice - the community of God's people.

These two elements - a vibrant spirituality, and a sense of community, present in that congregation, get to the essence of what church is about.

Listen to the end of Ephesians Ch 2:19

¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

In that spiritual building of living stones:

- we encounter God who dwells in the midst of his people - a profound and transforming spiritual experience
- and we encounter one another in the gathering of those people - a living community, a living body.

These two elements are profoundly attractive when they are realised, and have amazing potential!

After university, I went away for a year, but then came back to the church in York at a time when the charismatic movement was beginning to affect the life of many churches across the denominations.

The early 70's was also a time when some, like St Michael's, began experimenting with small communities or households inspired by visits of a music group called the Fisherfolk from the Church of the Redeemer in Houston Texas. I became a member and lived in a community for 7 years.

During this time, a new and personal encounter with the Holy Spirit, combined with an experience of living out one's faith in community, became a powerful witness to the presence of God. During that decade 100's of people would come to the church in York for 'renewal weeks', from all over the UK and beyond, to get a taste of that experience. It was so unusual. There were many imperfections and problems, but shining through them was an authenticity which changed lives.

One of the most profound expressions of that life was its worship. And of course, one of the chief means of expressing it was through music, because music can mediate both those essential elements - spirituality and community.

PLAY 'SHALOM'

Shalom, shalom, peace to his people.
Shalom, shalom the grace of God
be with you, now and for-ever.

1. The love of God be with you,
a boundless love with no measure,
a love you daily must treasure,
now and for ever.
2. The grace of God be with you,
a loving grace with no measure,
his grace and favour we treasure,
now and for ever.
3. The peace of God be with you,
a quiet peace with no measure,
God's loving peace you must treasure,
now and for ever.

Elaine Davies © Sovereign Music CCLI 272442

The Holy Spirit inspires worship - without the Spirit what we do becomes mere entertainment - it might be the finest we can offer, or rather 3rd rate - but for it to become worship, the Spirit needs to inspire it, and the Spirit deals in human hearts.

In Romans 5:5 we read 'that the love of God is poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit'. Later in ch 8:15 Paul tells us that it is by the Spirit that we cry 'Abba, Father' - the cry of belonging of a small child.

Often the simplest things are the most profound. And that also applies to music. Let's sing a simple prayer - an invocation of the Spirit:

SING 'LET IT BREATHE ON ME'.

Let it breathe on me, let it breathe on me,
 Let the breath of God now breathe on me.
 Let it breathe on me, let it breathe on me,
 Let the breath of God now breathe on me.

Music has within it, an echo of the Holy Spirit.

It only exists in the present moment. You can't save it or store it up in a bottle. It's not the dots on the page, nor the instruments that make it - it needs the living human breath to bring it alive.

Jesus said the Spirit was like the wind, you don't know where it's come from or where it's going. It's in the moment, and the Spirit sings God's song through our lives.

Singing music, especially when unaccompanied, can help us find our own unique voice and our place in the midst of the community.

But that experience of spiritual connectedness and one-ness with our fellow Christians is not just the preserve of large enthusiastic gatherings such as the Greenbelt or Spring-Harvest Festivals.

The elements are so simple and fundamental that they can be experienced '*wherever two or three are gathered together in my name*'.

No doubt many here are from small congregations, whether in towns or out in the country. We may lack numbers and musical resources, but engaging a congregation with simple but effective music can still help facilitate a spiritual and communal response in the people.

In a smaller setting, you can know and be known in a way that is impossible in a large gathering where it's very easy to feel lost.

In a small situation it can be challenging to work out our relationships within the Body of Christ. It's 'up close and personal' as they say, and it can be hard to avoid someone with whom you are out of sorts.

However, there can be much more authenticity and a truer representation of the Christian community in a small gathering.

Jesus after all, spent most of his time with just 12 followers, and they were a pretty challenging bunch!

From what I've picked up, much of the excellent musical and liturgical provenance from the Wild Goose Resource Group of the Iona Community was created in small and unglamorous settings. So maybe we could borrow one of their short songs which has got that earthed feeling about it, like so much of what they have produced.

SING 'WE WILL TAKE WHAT YOU OFFER'

We will live by your word,
We will love one another
And be fed *by you Lord.

Just this last week, the readings from the CofE Daily Prayer have been from the beginning of the Book of Revelation - the letters to the 7 churches. They don't make comfortable reading.

From Rev 3 to the church in Sardis:

'I know your works; you have a name for being alive, but you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is at the point of death...'

The Church at this time seems to be going through a massive deconstruction. Could it be that God is in the process of dismantling what we've built over centuries in order to reconstruct us in a leaner and more effective form?

If that's true of the church as a whole, it must also be true of its music.

We need to get back to the essence of what music in worship is about, and that is to serve those two essentials of spirituality and community.

Here I think we can take a lesson from our RC colleagues.

One of the pronouncements of the Vatican II process with regard to worship and liturgy, was that the most important role of the church musician was to call forth the song of the people.

In consequence, many RC settings of the Mass or psalmody, put at their centre, a congregational refrain, which choirs and instrumentalists may enrich and embellish, but which remains at the heart of the music.

Whatever denomination or tradition we belong to, engaging a congregation in song remains the priority.

Unfortunately, musicians being what they are, the temptation is always to make things just that bit more musically satisfying, and consequently, just that bit more obscure for the congregation!

Choirs and organists have done their bit on this. Now it's the turn of the worship band.

In the 60's and 70's a great democratisation of church music began. More popular styles began to change the musical language of congregational singing. We'd always had the hymns, but they were in an old-fashioned style. Simple choruses of praise and worship swept people up in a new vibrant corporate expression of musical devotion.

But what's happened decades later? Worship songs have become performance items with complicated rhythms, complex arrangements and contorted melodies! What's new?!

But the Quaker hymn says:

'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free
 'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,
 And when we find ourselves in the place just right,
 'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.
 When true simplicity is gain'd,
 To bow and to bend we shan't be asham'd,
 To turn, turn will be our delight,
 Till by turning, turning we come 'round right.

So if you're in a small situation, without a choir or a worship band, what an opportunity and what potential you have 'to come 'round right'!

We began by thinking about change and the different cultures that now make up our diverse society. We looked at what is at the heart of church life and particularly the music which serves it. We've touched on some of the simple musical skills church musicians need to rediscover to truly engage congregations in corporate singing.

But a major challenge for us now in the life of the church is the engagement of younger people. Here the significance of cultural styles assumes an even greater importance!

I've heard it said that if you're not playing the music that young people can identify with, they are very unlikely to hang around long enough to listen to your message. Music is such an important element in their lives. You may know of the experiment in the days of British Rail when they were having problems with vandalism at a station in Kent. Someone hit on the brilliant idea of playing classical music over the speakers. Problem solved!

When a young person goes to a pop concert, they don't go to sit in hushed silence, nor do they really go to sing. What they will probably do is dance!

Compare that with church culture - pews, serried ranks, don't move about, don't interrupt, sing (largely an unnatural process for many teenagers, especially boys) a selection of very strange hymns, not to mention psalm settings, or perhaps some very naff and dated choruses, played by an awkward and very 'uncool' group wearing woolly jumpers and looking like refugees from another decade!

Maybe the traditional choir has an advantage here - it's so far away from their normal culture, that the cringe factor of dated musical fashions doesn't come into play.

But what can the old people in woolly jumpers, like me, do about it? It's not easy - so much depends on peer groups at that age. And if we're not close to their age-group we may well have difficulty identifying with them.

However, much will depend on our attitude and our willingness to listen to their preferences and point of view, and accommodate what they identify with in musical terms.

If we have no young people in the church, then it's very difficult to know where to start. But if there are still some coming, there are a few things which we could begin to consider before they drift away.

One is to begin properly engaging them in the design and preparation of worship. So much of children and young people's involvement is token. We roll out the youth group to do a drama, or play in a band for a special service, and then we never see them involved in anything for another year.

At one time, my youngest daughter helped in designing some more creative services which we mounted at various seasons at a local village hall. She, like many young people was full of ideas and great to work with.

If they are able to have some involvement in the planning and shaping of corporate worship, then they will gain some personal investment in it, and will be much more committed.

Often children are separated off in the service to have their own dedicated programme in the church hall. They may come back to join the latter part of the service with the adults, especially if it's communion, but otherwise they remain separate.

When they reach their teens however, they are flung out to sit in the alien environment of a normal service, often appearing disengaged and under sufferance. Soon sleep and changing hormones keep them in bed for the duration, and that's the last we see of them!

In the case of my own children, music was a very important factor in keeping them engaged in the church's life in childhood and through their teenage years.

I was able to employ their instrumental skills in little all-age orchestras using simple arrangements of the hymns and songs we used. And later, they participated in various youth bands which helped to lead all-age worship and youth services in the evening.

It was very interesting with the youth band, how the music attracted a group of followers who draped themselves over pews and hung around.

In our church at the moment, the evening services are now focussed on youth. The worship is contemporary pop styles and through our youth worker a significant number of young people are coming to faith through hanging around the church on those evenings.

And one more thing - an obvious involvement in worship, where young people have finely developed skills is in the area of technology

- setting up and running PA systems (from experience with local bands),
- setting up screen presentations,
- using film clips, downloading Youtube videos,
- creating collages of image and music,
- and graphic design. etc...

So some final thoughts on how music for worship might develop in the future:

1. A greater emphasis on truly engaging the congregation in singing - employing the skills of the cantor, or song leader - skills that can be used at any level.
2. A different view of how we use music in worship. For too long it has had an over-dominant a role, often being the thing a whole church tradition is judged by. Let's cultivate a more imaginative and varied use of music: music to listen to, to create atmosphere, to accompany film, dipping into secular music to convey a theme where there are resonances with Christian experience, and thereby making subtle connections between faith and the world beyond. 'Are they playing my music...?'
3. Giving music a more equal place on the palette of worship - it's just one of many ways in which worship can be expressed. Music is actually very divisive - it's used to identify competing cultures in our society. Your kind of music may not be mine. If the whole worship experience is based on music, we really have problems if it ends alienating some in our midst! I'm involved in an alternative worship gathering in Exeter Cathedral once a

month. The younger people who come are actually quite anti singing - and that's something I find at the Greenbelt Festival too.

4. We need to develop a greater variety of style - it's time to move away from musical monocultures - whether W coast Californian worship songs, or narrow traditional models of church music. Let's cultivate an openness to every kind of musical expression which will enrich worship.
5. A re-framing of choral music, taking a lesson from Gareth and the community choir movement, and rediscovering the roots of music in spiritual inspiration and the expression of community. One of the reasons for the decline of church choirs must surely be the culture that they represent. Take a look at the RSCM Millennium Youth Choir. What are they wearing?? There is a growing interest in choral music - how can we seize the opportunity?
6. Original composition. The spiritual and communal life of the St Michael's congregation in York issued in great creativity, especially amongst some of the untrained people involved in the music. There are hidden gifts among us - for example, many YP are in bands and making up their own songs already. What opportunity is there for them to share those within the church?

Finally, why bother? It's fine as it is for me thank you, and it'll see me out! Really, because the Church must be involved in mission.

Like two blades of a pair of scissors - one worship, one mission - the two must operate together to be effective. The mission of the church is to reach out with its message of God's love so that all may come to worship. But worship that becomes inward-looking and self-indulgent forgets that at the heart of God is his love for all people. I think we have seen that music has a vital role in both.



FINISH (if time) GATHER US IN - Marty Haugen:

1. Here in this place the new light is streaming,
Now is the darkness vanished away.
See in this space our fears and our dreamings
Brought here to you in the light of this day.
Gather us in, the lost and forsaken,
Gather us in, the blind and the lame.
Call to us now and we shall awaken,
We shall arise at the sound of our name.

2. We are the young, our lives are a mystery,
We are the old who yearn for your face.
We have been sung throughout all of history,
Called to be light to the whole human race.
Gather us in, the rich and the haughty,
Gather us in, the proud and the strong.
Give us a heart so meek and so lowly,
Give us the courage to enter the song.

3. Here we will take the wine and the water,
Here we will take the bread of new birth.
Here you shall call your sons and your daughters,
Call us a-new to be salt for the earth.
Give us to drink the wine of compassion,
Give us to eat the bread that is you.
Nourish us well and teach us to fashion
Lives that are holy and hearts that are true.

4. Not in the dark of buildings confining,
Not in some heaven light years away,
Here in this place the new light is shining,
Now is the kingdom and now is the day.
Gather us in and hold us for ever,
Gather us in and make us your own.
Gather us in all peoples together,
Fire of your love in our flesh and our bone.

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