

Chris Pountain – 14 June 2020

I think I have always been aware of a relation between music, worship and faith.

My father was a keen singer, and used to sing hymns to me when I was a small child (my mother always claimed to be tone deaf), and I have a clear memory of feeling that hymns as sung prayers were in colour while said prayers were in grey. Homespun music was a part of Sunday School and just about all church services, a conspicuous exception being the 7.30am Sunday Communion, for those who “liked it quiet”. But even this congregation felt the lack of music on Christmas Day, and part of my Christmas at home was getting up in the dark to go and play hymns at this service (also slipping in voluntaries before and afterwards).

So music for me has always been an integral part of worship, I think in two ways. It ‘colours’ my own participation, but as a musician (and this is something I know also to be felt by many other fellow church musicians) it provides a medium of worship. There is nothing I love more than playing hymns for a congregation (the larger the better), hopefully helping everyone to sing together naturally and painting the phrasing and meanings expressed. I also like selecting suitable music, although I know the subtleties on which such choice is based sometimes elude the listener. This morning, for instance, I chose Bach’s Great C major Prelude to introduce Music Sunday: it’s based on the simple C major scale and arpeggio with which every keyboard learner becomes familiar very early on, but Bach transforms it into an amazing work.

Talking of Bach, many of his compositions were headed *AMDG* (*Ad maiorem Dei gloriam* “to the greater glory of God”), and that’s what I hope music in church is for, emphatically not primarily for the entertainment of the congregation, however much I might hope music will help us.

I find it more difficult to talk about faith, but with music I don’t need to, since I can project what I feel about God through it: music, as we know, transcends words. More practically, it also transcends and unites generations, makes us more sensitive to and forcibly more tolerant of one another (most of the time). It allows us to make an offering of a gift God has given us. And such sublime experiences as the Agnus Dei of the Byrd four-part Mass, sung by a distant choir in a large cathedral, in my view gives us a vision of heaven and the “equal music” I would hope to enjoy in eternity.

Catherine Blydenstein – 14 June 2020

“Musical sound acts directly on the soul and finds an echo there because, though to varying extents, music is innate in man” (quote from Emile Jacques-Dalcroze, a Swiss pianist, composer and educator)

For me, music has been a constant in my life. Faith also crept into my life and took up residence gradually but persistently. An early musical memory is of my mother playing piano, Debussy, Schumann, Faure’s Dolly Suite, Gerald Finzi’s Eclogue. Interesting that many of those pieces are among my favourites now. Being captivated by Benjamin Britten’s Ceremony of Carols, had a profound and lasting effect on me. Then the Beatles, John Lennon, Pink Floyd, Bowie, Joni Mitchell. The list goes on... and not forgetting jazz of course.

Singing in the church choir, enjoying the harmonies set within most hymns. The seeds of my faith were nurtured around this time. When I think about my faith, I think of a journey of being wooed, drawn, and captivated by Christ’s love, because God is love (as we’re told in 1 John Chapter 4).

Music is a motivator in my life. It has often kept me afloat through challenging times, brought solace, ushered in healing, joy and strength. I view it as a lifeline, and when I’m asked about my guitar playing I refer to it as my personal therapy. Therefore not always suitable for other ears! Music is borne at the heart of our human experience, but can also enable us a glimpse into the mysterious realm of God’s Spirit. I know there’ve been times when I’ve felt that God has spoken to me through music, not in words, but rather directly to my heart through a feeling of surety or elation for example.

Psalm 42 tells us **“Deep calls to deep, in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me. By day the Lord directs his love, at night his song is with me - a prayer to the God of my life”**

Will Harmer – 14 June 2020

As a musician, the big thing I have come to realise is that music is a gift from God. It is very easy for musicians and artists of all kinds to make what they do very self-centred and all about bettering yourself. Being a Christian means I can enjoy and pursue music wholeheartedly without having to prove myself or my identity, because that is something secure in Jesus. I struggled when I was younger with feeling that I wasn't good enough at music or comparing myself to others. Music is competitive and this can sometimes get too much. I have learnt more recently, mostly through conversations with people much wiser than me, about how God gives people different gifts. Realising that music was something God had given me to use to glorify him and to enjoy has meant that music feels less like a very self-centred thing. It is still difficult to remember that God loves you no matter what you achieve, and as a bit of a perfectionist myself I forget this a lot, but my eyes have definitely been opened recently to just what a magnificent gift music is from God to humanity and it feels more of a blessing now.

Music is also a place to encounter God. In worship, music is something beautiful and it's often the way I engage with God most easily. There is a real sense of purpose in using your gifts to glorify God in this more direct way, but God's presence isn't just found through music in worship or in church. We find God's created beauty in all sorts of music, or at least I certainly do. I might be slightly biased, but I think music is one of the most glorious and precious things in God's creation. If I could say a couple of experiences of God's presence in music that I've felt, one would be visiting Taizé a couple of summer's ago and thousands of people all singing in the church there. There was a similar time in my choir at university, albeit with slightly fewer singers, when the music suddenly washed over me and I really felt God's presence at that moment. There are many other experiences like this and I'm sure many of you have felt touched by music in this way. These both also show to me the power of music for community and fellowship and this is something I would love to explore more in the future as a musician.