

Andrea Zuercher
Morning message @PMC
17 August 2008
“How Can I Keep From Singing?”

Note: If you want to listen to any of the music or would like information about how to obtain a SKYZ CD from Trinity Mennonite in Glendale, AZ, please let me know via e-mail (zeditor@sunflower.com). Because of copyright restrictions, I can't post links to the music or post sound files.

1) God speaks to me through music:

Knew as soon as Joanna asked for volunteers to speak this summer that I would do it; way to share my journey back to Peace Mennonite, include examples in sound recordings

Rock gathering Saturday: was listening to car radio, heard Stray Cats “Gonna Rock This Town,” knew that gathering rocks that day was God's will ☺

2) Background

- a) Family tradition – music as natural as walking or speaking, sang as family both at home and in church
- b) School/music lessons
- c) High school music week — Goshen College, music as a way to make friends and connect with people, am still friends with some I met there
- d) Music minor, sang in choirs four years, studied piano and organ, took classes in music history, theory, church music, conducting
- e) Didn't enjoy performing, wanted to earn a good living, so chose English major
- f) Post college: first three years, no music except singing in church & church choir

g) Washington, D.C.

- 1. Cathedral Choral Society
- 2. Washington Bach Consort
- 3. Woodley Ensemble
- 4. American Repertory Singers
- 5. Paid musician in Episcopal churches

- a. Church of the Epiphany
 - b. St. Paul's K Street
 - c. Church of the Ascension & St. Agnes (Anglo-Catholic)
6. Provided lasting friendships as well as extra income

h) Lawrence, Kan.

- i) No more organized music
- ii) Attend occasional choral concerts, listen to choral recordings
- iii) Sing @ Mennonite churches when visiting family
- iv) Recovering from weekly "employment" requirement
- v) Started gardening and working on my house instead
- vi) Used these activities to spend spare time and make new friends, didn't want to get involved in music groups that required traveling to the city, was used to higher standard than local community groups, didn't want to start or organize an ensemble that was more similar to those I'd sung in before

3) Ways in which God speaks through music

- a) Personal meditation/listening
- b) Singing in groups (church, choir)
- c) Emotional impact of music, lyrics, or both
- d) A way to use the gifts of the Spirit and God-given talents to worship and glorify God
- e) Scriptural examples of role of music in worship – Bible mentions music about 1,000 times
 - i) Old Testament full of references to music, both instrumental and vocal (many Psalms, by the rivers of Babylon, the Lord is my strength and my song, sing unto the Lord a new song)
 - ii) New Testament –Listing of biblical references are mostly OT Examples: 1 Corinthians 13-14, Ephesians 5 (Bible)
- f) Singing as uniquely human expression – all cultures have some form of vocal music, and its use has always included religious expression, whether through hymns, spiritual songs, or chant

4) Wikipedia: Singing is considered by some to have positive effects on people's health. A preliminary study based on self-reported data from a survey of students participating in choral singing found perceived physical benefits including increased lung capacity, improved mood, stress reduction, as well as perceived social and spiritual benefits.^[21] Singing may positively influence the [immune system](#) through the reduction of [stress](#). One study found that both singing and listening to choral music reduces the level of stress hormones and increases immune function.^[23]

a) Dr. Tomitas – monks and chanting, neuropsychological effects of chant on a monastery in France

5) Stories

a) Paid singer, or weekly worshipper?

i) Initially approached as something different to do, something friends were doing, unique opportunity to participate in a cultural activity that DC area is known for

ii) Had been attending a Mennonite congregation occasionally, didn't feel drawn into it

iii) Episcopal churches and paid choruses: music central to the liturgy (including chanting of psalms, leading in hymns (processionals), sung parts of the Mass; quality important to some, who view paid choristers as participants in worship and therefore think they need to compensate them for their time and talent

iv) First opportunity: Church of the Epiphany

a. Not as high church

b. Mostly rite II, but still full mass every Sunday

c. Began to learn to appreciate singing the choral "classics" in the context for which they were composed

d. Had studied the parts of the Mass in music history, began to understand their religious significance

- e. Gained appreciation of the aesthetics of church music
- f. Began to share some aspects of being Anabaptist in a very different religious tradition, brought my own values and beliefs to the worship experience while learning about another tradition

v) Next: St. Paul's K Street

- (1) Two services every Sunday, 1st with congregational sung mass (simpler setting), 2d with choral mass
- (2) Full high-church ritual (incense, processional, bells)
- (3) Learned more Mass settings – historical context of mass as one of the central choral vehicles throughout various musical eras (early music, Baroque, classical, romantic, contemporary)
- (4) Felt again an appreciation of the aesthetics of singing as part of a liturgical service, spiritual benefit through that but not direct worship

vi) Next: A & St. A

- (1) Even more formal service
- (2) First exposure: Easter vigil – all the bells and whistles, 3-hour service, started in darkness
- (3) Intimate setting, small ensemble, direct participation
- (4) Felt connection with centuries of tradition
- (5) Felt disconnect with “low church” heritage of both sides of my family (especially on Ascension/Assumption of the Virgin, when a statue of Mary was paraded around the sanctuary)
- (6) Political views of the parish were out of sync with mine (in terms of role of women in worship)

1. (Audio clip: Woodley rec. of “Ubi Caritas”)

b) God speaks through music I

- i) 9-11 shook foundations
- ii) Fear of unknown, horror at country's response
- iii) Wondered where God was amid this kind of suffering
- iv) Driving to Hesston one morning across the Flint Hills, listening to choral CD, Vaughan Williams' “Lord, Thou Hast Been Our Refuge”

- v) Calm tones of the trumpet theme “O God, Our Help in Ages Past” brought sense of peace and assurance that God was holding us in the palm of his hand – sense of historical proportion of 9-11 events as well as personal comfort
 - (a) (Audio clip: excerpt from “Lord, Thou Hast Been Our Refuge”)

- c) God speaks through music II
 - i) Fast forward six years: felt drifting, disconnect from God and community
 - ii) Serious problems with how Christians in this country were acting in ways that seemed opposite my understanding of Christianity, how can we all call ourselves Christians?
 - iii) Doubts about relationship, health problems of partner, general feeling of anxiety and doubt; alienation from Christian community, including family – they all seemed so secure in their faith, I did not feel that way, didn’t have a church family, couldn’t seem to connect with any here in Lawrence
 - iv) Walking one morning, listening to new SKYZ CD, heard “Be Ye Glad,” heard God speaking from the very first words
 - v) Final words of final verse: “There is no disease or no struggle that can pull you from God – be ye glad!” – spoke straight to my heart, that no matter what I was going through, it wasn’t going to be strong enough to pull me from God.
 - vi) Walked along with tears streaming, felt finally that the barricades I’d erected around my heart were crumbling and that God was beckoning me to come home, where he’d been all along.
 - 1. (Audio clip: “Be Ye Glad,” SKYZ)
 - vii) Like the active focus of this particular song: it’s not enough for us to be redeemed, we also have to be a light for others, a refuge amid the slaughter, we are blessed and should share our blessings with others in pursuit of God’s will for all