

What Do You Want from Your Music?

This is simply a personal testimony.

As a lifelong evangelical with an eye on history, I see nothing new in our current struggles over praise and worship music. As I observe its emotional appeal, I am reminded of much of the music I've heard in the church over my 69+ years. It reminds me of the big "anthems" of Sandi Patti, Larnelle Harris, and others. Before that was the "Jesus Music" movement of the late '60's and early '70's. Consider southern gospel music. And before that was the traditional gospel hymn, largely popularized by the Moody-Sankey revivals of the 1870's.

All were highly emotional expressions of song within the evangelical movement. All had roots in popular culture. All were highly controversial in their day, being vehemently criticized by more conservative sectors of the church. And honestly, not without reason. None of our music is perfect. Even our most meaningful music has its limitations and flaws. In the case of these emotional styles, perhaps...just perhaps...all were too exclusively and too uncritically practiced by their proponents. But isn't that the nature of such new movements? Objective reflection and thoughtful editing usually come later.

But the issue is broader than music. During my brief lifetime, I have observed that with both individuals and institutions, our stronger qualities also tend to be our weaker qualities – or at least our more troublesome ones.

For the evangelical church, one of those strong-but-troublesome qualities is the place of emotion. Read back through church history, and the issue never seems to go away. It just continues to resurface with different names and different faces. During my lifetime, the strained relationship between two theological siblings, the Wesleyans and the charismatics, is just one example.

Our problems with emotion are not a surprise. Emotion is inherent in our marvelous, thrilling relationship with our Magnificent God. But like all stimulations, emotional stimulation easily becomes habit forming. It feels good. We want more. We begin seeking more.

I grew up in a church culture where too often, the quality of our religion seemed to be measured by its emotionalism. A good service was one that stimulated our emotions. A good song was one that stimulated our emotions.

Please understand me: I'm not belittling emotion in religion. But I came to realize that if the transcendent God we preached was real, our religion had to be more than emotion. My religion had to be more than emotion.

Speaking for myself, I have found what I was seeking. I have found a God who is very real, very personal, and marvelously constant, moment-by-moment; One who is both transcendent and immanent, One who has planned a beautiful destiny for His people as well as for each of His children. I live and move and breathe in Him.

He is the One I worship. He is the One I trust. He is the One I seek – through music and through silence, through thought and through action, through the everyday and in profound crises. He is completely real, all-encompassing, and the source of all meaning and satisfaction.

I want music that draws me to Him. I want music that helps me know Him and serve Him and glorify Him, not just through singing but through every breath I take; not just for one hour on Sunday morning, but for all 168 hours of the week. I want music that helps me love God, not just with my mouth and my music, but with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength – and my neighbor as myself. It is good and vital that we tell God how great He is. But I want music that also fosters faith, love, and self-sacrifice, learning, growing, repentance, and holy living. I want music that helps me live like Jesus, worship like Jesus, love like Jesus, and die like Jesus.

Our music is good as far as it goes, but I hunger for more.

Hymn: [The Reason We Sing](#)

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