

Music, the Soundtrack of Our Lives

Music is important. Far more important than we realize. All music takes us somewhere. When I hear orchestras play, my mind goes to The Chicago Symphony led by the late Sir George Solti. This is where my wife and I spent delightful evenings in our courtship and early marriage. I would also say, my mind also goes to the days when our kids played in their respective symphonies in high school. When I hear the distinctive sound of Bluegrass, I am back outside Branson, Missouri where Grandpa and Grandma Wright live. It was here that our kids turned their violins into fiddles and the contra bass into the “doghouse” bass under the guiding hands of Grandpa Wright playing his Martin Herringbone. Play the great hymns of the faith and I’m a little boy in church learning to love, worship and serve the Lord our God. Sing a ballad of the land, gunfighters, and trains and I’m back under the tree at a family reunion among the Popes. Music has the gift of transport. To borrow a phrase from Dr. Seuss, “Oh, the places you will go!” As I write these words I have music in the background. Most every time I write I have music playing. I know of other authors who do the same, which encourages me. But there is a reason. I want all my concentration to be focused, and I use the music to maintain the mode of inspiration. If I am writing something exciting, I like bombastic music. If I am writing something that is melancholy, I have soft strings or a lone solo piano.

Recently I was listening to the radio and Howard Shore, the composer of many movie soundtracks was being interviewed. Mr. Shore was telling about when he wrote one of his most famous pieces for *The Lord of The Rings*. He said there was a music that told you where you were in Middle Earth. My son-in-law is familiar with the music of *Lord of the Rings* and he said the music written for Rivendale with the Elves was mystical and beautiful. Then he said you could tell when you were in Hobbiton with the Hobbits; there the music was Celtic-like and playful. At Helm’s Deep the music was foreboding, almost threatening when the Orcs went into battle. Howard Shore explained that you had to play the music in the context of where you were; to play anything else would be a violation.

I am reading the biography of Dr. T.T. Shields, called the Spurgeon of Canada. He was born and reared for the first years of his life in Bristol, England. His father and many ancestors were preachers. His grandfather was a very well respected evangelical Anglican preacher, his father became a Primitive Methodist, and later Dr. Shields embraced the Baptists. (You might say the family kept improving on their faith until they found perfection of doctrine). Although he was a Baptist, he never lost the formality and style of worship that he learned as a lad in the Anglican cathedral and cathedral school he attended. Years later Dr. Shields was walking through the great cathedral with a minister friend of his. His biographer said, “The organist was playing several of the old stately hymns of the faith. The building reverberated with the soul-stirring tunes that are common property of all Christendom. As they emerged from the 800-year-old cathedral, Dr. Shields turned to his companion and pointedly said, “Now you know why I hate jazz!” As I read this statement, I understood it not to be critical as much as constructively saying, “I don’t want anything to take me away from where I am with God.” What he was saying is that this music takes him closer.

Music can take you to the land of love! When a man and a woman fall in love, music often provides a soundtrack of their relationship. When Barbara and I married our pastor’s wife sang a song with the phrase, “Here’s our life, through the good and bad of life.” When I hear that song, I am reminded of our love and joint dedication to Christ. Three of our four children are married and at these three weddings, Heather and Jared have sung a song entitled, *Together*. It begins by saying, “Before the world began our union was His plan. Our lonely days are gone; together we’ll be one.” The chorus goes on to say, “And we’ll go on together, walk together, and with your hand in mine, we’ll stand the test of time, bound by a love from God...And we’ll stay together, pray together, yielding our lives into His hands of love.” This speaks so strongly of love and commitment to each other and to God.

As we look back there was a humorous incident that took place on the night I presented Barbara

her engagement ring. At first we were seated in a lovely restaurant and as the meal was just about to get ordered, loud rock music began to blare. We could barely hear ourselves talk. As I sat there for a moment, I realized it was not quite appropriate to have to give Barbara the ring while I am screaming over the band, how much I love her and want to spend the rest of my life with her. Expressing these words with "Hang on Sloopy" in the background was not going to be right. So we left and found an even lovelier restaurant with soft, gentle music in the background. It was here I presented the ring and in a calm and hopefully romantic tone expressed my love. Later that night I found out that we had become formally engaged in one of Al Capone's favorite restaurants in the Chicagoland area, but believe me, the music we heard that night did not take us into the mafia, but to a beautiful place located at the junction of Love's Corner and God's Will.

Music can take you to meaningful of worship. *"I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving"* (Psalm 69:30). Nine different times the Bible speaks of the new song. We are commanded to sing this new song unto the Lord: *"O sing unto the LORD a new song; for he hath done marvellous things: his right hand, and his holy arm, hath gotten him the victory"* (Psalm 98:1). Then we are commended to sing this song together: *"Praise ye the LORD. Sing unto the LORD a new song, and his praise in the congregation of saints"* (Psalm 149:1).

As I travel throughout our country preaching, I hear music in worship. I should say in some instances it is only an attempt to worship. Lately I have been to some meetings where I knew the Christians to be very sincere in their love to God and their goal was to bring the potential worshippers into an atmosphere that was opening the way to hear from the Lord. But as musicians began to play, I was not transported to where I needed to be. As the guitar ripped, the drums pounded, and the singers whaled, I wasn't the kid in church getting ready to hear the preacher. I was transported indeed. I was a teen-ager who was not allowed to go to the dance, having been reared in an old-fashion Baptist congregation. But I remember one occasion I was walking across Florida Southern College and for the first time in my life I heard a live band. I got closer and closer until I was blown away at the door. I remember I could only make out a few words, but the sound said it all. As bodies swayed sensuously to the music, I was anywhere but where God wanted me to be. Oh it was exciting, it was fun, but it was also taking me down "Flesh Street" not "Hallelujah Avenue." The only relief and good conscious came when I walked away from the door.

Who are we trying to kid? I know much of the music in today's worship is exciting, fun, but I am afraid much of it is also sensual. We must guard our music. We may pretend we are getting close to God, but we may be closer the nightclub. Feelings can betray us. The Bible says, *"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God..."* (I John 4:1). We wonder why morality is lacking and church members are falling away. I am not blaming the music for taking us there, because in truth many are already there; the music is only a soundtrack depicting where we are. We need music to stir us on to God, not just make us feel good.

Let me say we do not have to sacrifice excitement in order to have worshipful music; we can have both. Nothing is more exciting than singing songs that tell of the greatness of God and His work among His children. Worshipping in the spirit and truth will be new to many modern day Christians, but it can be done appropriately and serve as a soundtrack of a beautiful story where Jesus is Lord.

- Pastor Pope -

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