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Music making is an activity of men and angels beginning from creation and extending into eternity [Job 38:7; Revelation 5:9; 14:3; 15:3]. Before biblical standards for making judgments about music can be developed we need to understand both the scope of Scripture's portrayal of music making and its view of the meaning music itself communicates.

Scope Of Scripture's Portrayal Of Music

Scripture's portrayal of music is inclusive in four areas. It sees both vocal and instrumental music, i.e., music with and without words (lyrics) as legitimate [Psalm 95:1-2; 96:1-2; 150]. The context for music's use is both in sacred worship [1 Samuel 10:5-6; 2 Chronicles 5:11-14] and everyday life, whether work, play, celebration, or war [Isaiah 16:10; Jeremiah 48:33; Matthew 11:17; Luke 15:25; Genesis 31:27; Exodus 32:17, 18; Ecclesiastes 2:8; Judges 11:34; 2 Samuel 19:35]. The first reference to music in Scripture presents its function in a neutral sense assuming man as steward of this creative capacity to be exercised in the whole world which then becomes an arena of praise [Genesis 4:21].

Music makers are both professional [1 Chronicles 15:22; 25:7 — worship; Isaiah 5:11-12; Ezekiel 33:32] and amateur [Psalm 100; 1 Kings 1:39-40; 1 Corinthians 14:26; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16]. It is almost commonplace to characterize the Old Testament worship practice as guided by priestly or professional musicians and the New Testament approach as "*solidly social, congregational, and 'amateur'.*" Yet, it is probably not accurate to see these approaches in a mutually exclusive way. There was "*amateurism*" in Old Testament music making and there was professionalism, at least a skilled, possibly trained, if not paid, component in New Testament practice. The terms "*psalms and hymns*" as well as the various hymn fragments [For example, Luke 1:46-55; Philippians 2:6-11; 1 Timothy 3:16; Ephesians 5:14; Revelation 4:8, 11; 5:9-10] are the products of such skilled activity.

Music making was both formal and spontaneous, even ecstatic. Skilled musicians trained others and composed works to be used in the worship of God [1 Chronicles 16:7, 41-42; the headings to psalms in Book III of the Psalms, Psalms 73-89]. It should be noted that such skilled formal music making can also be seen as the product of a Spirit-filled life [2 Samuel 23:1-2; cf. 1 Corinthians 14:26ff; cf. Exodus 35:30-36:2]. The Bible also knows spontaneous or ecstatic music making as persons sing by the Spirit a new song to the Lord in response to His saving work [Exodus 15:20-21; Psalm 98:1;



Isaiah 42:10; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; 1 Corinthians 14:15, 26]. The scope of Scripture's portrayal means that Christians should be inclusive in each of these areas and not pursue one to the exclusion of the other.

The Meaning Music Communicates

Though Christians by and large seem to be able to make moral judgments about music in terms of lyrics, the lifestyle of performers, the goals of those performers, and the graphics used to promote music recordings; there is little agreement concerning whether judgments can be made about musical style and the meaning it communicates. We can isolate the sources of the disagreements if we ask, with the aid of psychology of music's findings, what the Bible teaches concerning why, what, and how music communicates meaning as well as what reception the communication receives.

The Bible has a basically utilitarian understanding of why musicians use a given musical style to communicate. They either desire to express their own feelings or ideas [Exodus 15:1ff; James 5:13]. Or they are seeking to arouse feelings or actions in others [Colossians 3:16]. What then is communicated by the musical style itself? By musical style we mean that particular combination of melody, harmony, and rhythm that is a recognizable musical idiom: romantic, jazz, rock, etc. Carl Seashore defines the musical message as that aesthetic experience, be it feeling, ideation, impulse, craving, wish, or inspiration, which the composer and then the performer desire to convey to the audience through the musical style.

Such musical styles, then, are intended to have extra musical effects. Scripture identifies four aspects of the listener's make-up that may be affected. Music communicates to arouse [1 Samuel 16:14-23] or express feelings [1 Kings 1:39-40; Isaiah 24:8-9; James 5:13]. A musical style may be intended to refer to ideas. The sensual song of Ezekiel 33:32 and the music of the prostitute in Isaiah 23:15-16 may refer to ideational musical meaning. A musical style may be intended to call forth bodily actions such as marching or dancing [Matthew 11:17]. It may also affect one's spirit or aid one in a spiritual activity [Psalm 150:3-5; 1 Samuel 16:14-23; Colossians 3:16].

How is such meaning with its extra musical influences on feelings, mind, body, and spirit communicated? Such communication depends on the conditioned response of the listener learned within their culture. He or she has learned through experience to associate certain emotions or ideas or actions with a given musical style. Jesus appears to assume this dynamic in His brief parable in which children complain about their playmates' lack of cooperation: "*We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn*" [Matthew 11:17].

What is the role of the listener in receiving the musical meaning? A psychologist of music asserts that there is no one-to-one relationship between music as performed and music as experienced. The ideas and feelings which constitute the response are the creation of the listener in his own image. The



The Spiritual Significance Of Music

Scriptures do not affirm such a radical cleavage between intended message and response. They do, however, recognize that the cooperation of the listener is essential for the musical message to have its effect. The will is involved. The playmates choose not to do the bodily actions called for by their fellows [Matthew 11:17]. The state of one's emotions can block music's intended effect on the emotions [Proverbs 25:20]. The understanding of the musical style's meaning in context, i.e., the learned response called for, is of course essential.

Excerpt taken from William Larkin's "*Toward A Biblical Theology Of Music With Special Attention To Standards*" (1989) unpublished paper from Columbia Biblical Seminary. © William Larkin, All Rights Reserved. Used with permission.



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