

The Church As Cultural Leader Through Music

By Steve Allen, Minister of Music and Worship at Westmore Church of God

“If I were not a physicist, I would probably be a musician. I often think in music. I live my daydreams in music. I see my life in terms of music.”

—Albert Einstein

Albert Einstein wasn't the only (or the first) person to connect music with a robust life, but his concise statement about its importance and prominent place in his experience certainly encapsulates what most people believe to be true in their own. Indeed, much has been written about music as a form of communication that transcends all else and is universal in scope and influence. One need only to scan what attracts some of the largest television audiences and fuels passionate discussions, shows such as *The Voice* and *American Idol*, not to mention reading about some of the biggest business deals on Wall Street revolving around hotly contested music services like iTunes, Beats Streaming Music, Amazon's new music service, Pandora, Songza and many more, to see that music holds a unique and elevated spot in our culture.

While leaving the philosophical element of meaning to others, as a minister of music in my local church I can affirm the reality of music's dynamic uplifting effect on and in those who gather for worship every Sunday. Music is a foundational aspect of the church, just as important in the weekly gatherings as the preaching of God's Word. This is so because, as Christians understand it, God Himself created music as a way of expressing beauty and glory, grace and goodness, of story-telling with creativity, intelligence, structure and skill. Amazingly we find that mankind, made in the image of God, from almost day one (and not as a result of some bizarre evolutionary process) has understood the importance of inventing musical instruments and creating and enjoying a rich cultural experience that included poetic song and dance.

Perhaps that is why musical creativity and greatness has historically originated in the church. Christians take the command to “sing to the Lord a new song,” and to “sing praises to [God] with the timbrel and the harp,” seriously and fulfill the call of the great worship leader of the Old Testament who encourages us in Psalm 150 to:

Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet;
Praise Him with the lute and harp!
Praise Him with the timbrel and dance;
Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes!
Praise Him with loud cymbals;
Praise Him with clashing cymbals!

The church and her Trinitarian theology transformed music by providing the intellectual foundation for harmonic music, or “the simultaneous combination of tones, especially when blended into chords pleasing to the ear.” The doctrine of the Trinity teaches that while there is One God, there are Three Co-Equal Persons in the Godhead, each performing a different job in perfect harmony with the others to achieve a shared end. For example, in the theological/cultural journal *First Things*, May 2002, the great Islamic scholar Bernard Lewis is quoted by Richard John Neuhaus concerning how this Christian doctrine produces a different type of music than Islamic belief:

The monism of Islam, Lewis suggests, is also evident in its aversion to polyphonic music. In

polyphony, voices and instruments—whether in duets, trios, or full orchestra—are “following different routes in a common purpose.” “Different performers play together, from different scores, producing a result that is greater than the sum of its parts.”

What you believe about God and Who He is creates the framework for our worldview. The reality is that culture is simply theology externalized.

There is a great deal being made today concerning the cultural crisis facing our nation. But frankly without the church's influence in every sphere of life, including music, the world will always be faced with cultural crisis. The church alone is able to create and “export” a culture of life and life more abundant. The good news is the church is empowered by God to share the Good News of salvation and redemption with the world, and the Good News produces a culture of of life and joy celebrated in song by innumerable singers and musicians in all types of styles.

Westmore Church of God is excited to engage not in the “culture war,” (or the so-called “worship war”) but rather we're engaged in enriching and transforming our culture. We place great emphasis upon music because God loves it, the Bible requires it and the Church has always produced it, knowing that it was serving not only the worship needs of her members, but of civilization at large.

Westmore's goal is to maintain the tradition of performing music at the highest levels with knowledge, skill and passion. We continue to seek out and provide platforms for those who have God-given gifts to play their musical instruments in small ensembles or full orchestra; to lift up songs in vocal praises to God whether as soloists, members of duets, trios, or a full choir. Westmore Church of God's music rings out in Cleveland, TN in church services and television programs and nationally as our choir travels throughout the country and is watched on our YouTube channel or through live web-casts each week.

When the Albert Einstein's of the world daydream in music, we want to provide them with the ability to consider that “This is My Father's World,” and that “He Reigns” and that “God is Good All The Time.” By God's grace and Spirit we'll sing new songs that inspire creative thinking and powerful actions that will lift and benefit our community's culture and harmony. Westmore Church of God, offering the powerful ministry of music, looks forward to fully participating in the great cultural opportunities available today and in the future.

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