

## **A Brief Statement on Church Music**

As a church musician, I would consider the primary venue of my music-making to be a worship service. Of course, there are also other places where music is needed in religious institutions, such as parish dinners, concerts, dance classes or evangelistic outreach meetings. Though it is a form of artistic expression (since all music, to some degree, is artistic expression), music used during worship is *not* “art for art’s sake”. **Music used in worship serves a specific function which is different from that of music used in the other scenarios mentioned above.**

Having a misunderstanding of or neglecting to reflect on the role of music (and art) in worship has given rise to ecclesiastical conflicts in both the past and present over what is acceptable, good, bad, and so on. Puritans and Reformed churches rejected much of the choral and organ music used in mainline churches today due to it being “appealing only to the ear, inarticulate, and uninstructional, and utterly foreign to the intention of the scriptures”. Many churches today have also abandoned historical repertoires to adopt musical idioms that are in line with those of popular culture, in an attempt to be more relevant, approachable and inclusive. In the face of such controversy and choice, I will try here to describe my attempt to carefully define for myself the function of music used in worship, in order that I can begin to resolve the aforementioned issues and choose from the repertory wisely.

In the most general sense, **the purpose of employing music during worship is to work with the liturgy in directing people’s minds and spirits to God.** This can take many forms, depending on its placement in the service. Chanting a Psalm using only simple organ accompaniment would inspire people to be prayerful. Other examples of this “directional” use of music would be using a hymn of thanks led by a bold and enthusiastic choir and organist to help people sing joyfully, improvising during the Communion to evoke reverence and meditation, or choosing a prelude that would be connected to the season or festival currently being celebrated in the Church Year. In many of the above examples, music chosen and presented is in direct parallel with the words that are spoken in the same service. The combination of good liturgy and good music is a powerful force that directs the spirits and minds of those present to focus on the Divine. It is because of this that I consider the task given to a church musician to be one that has substantial consequences. Though it can be a tool of great spiritual help, music can also be a sacrilegious distraction if used improperly. Thus, leaders in the music ministry of the Church must be trained to do their task with reverence and sensibility.

Throughout my life, I would wish to be a part of or take leadership in the music ministry of the community of faith I belong to. As a weekly habit of tithing is a reminder of the bounties one is blessed with, so a weekly offering of music to the Church and who it worships is a reminder that music is given as a gift to both the listener and the performer. I am more concerned about the people I would be working with more than where I would work, as people are much harder to change than organs are! Wherever I am called to be, I will aim to present music that is conducive to deep spiritual experience and nourishing to faith.

Aaron Tan, 2008