

MUSIC CAN YOU IMAGINE?

The greatest power of music and its inherent mystery lies in its ability to place within the listener visions of the potential greatness that the Creator seeks to implant in the soul.

The imagination is a powerful part of our human existence. We become what we can imagine. Capturing the imagination and endowing it with spiritual motivation is the work of Christian education. Teachers must find ways to imbed in the mind those words, phrases, concepts, and desires that produce lofty goals.

How can this be accomplished? According to Ellen White, "There are few means more effective for fixing His [God's] words in the memory than repeating them in song."¹

Why is music so effective in reaching the mind? Because we associate ideas with organized sounds that directly implant themselves in our subconscious. Music is an art, and like other arts, it can represent or symbolize anything that is real. Every aspect of our existence can be represented by music. It appeals to us in much the same way as a mirror draws our attention. Listening to music, we recognize ourselves or remember something we have experienced before.

Music is mysterious. It speaks to us about things from our deeper self that we do not often conceptualize in words. We see ourselves in music's mirror and are entertained. But if we get too close, and try to embrace the illusion as the real thing, it disappears, leaving only the musical shell. We then realize that music was only the vehicle used to bring us a view of ourselves, our world, our experiences.

If music gives us a lofty view, or portrays something great, we may be inspired to become better persons. If the view is grotesque or distorted, we may be sad or discouraged.

If the performers and listeners are musically illiterate, they may view the musical

BY LARRY J. OTTO

effect with superstitious awe. Avoiding this misconception does not mean assuming that music is powerless. It means recognizing that the effects of music are determined by the symbols and meanings ascribed to it by artists and listeners.

The effect of the music depends on the talents and abilities of the composer and performer. Anything can be represented by and through music. But if the composer does not create a coherent piece of music, if the performer does not reproduce the music skillfully, or if the listener does not comprehend the composition, the meaning of the musical creation will be corrupted or misunderstood. Its potential for influencing human lives will not be realized. Obviously, the effect of music depends on a transaction among the composer, performer, and listener; each one contributes to the success of musical art.

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The greatest controversy on earth is over who will control the human mind. We must choose whether to be manipulated and controlled by everything we hear, by accepting other people's images of reality, or whether we will preserve our individuality and creativity and fulfill the potential placed in us by the Creator. The power of music to shape us in a positive way will increase if we choose to surround ourselves with music that brings out our best qualities and lifts us toward heaven.

Commercial enterprises have saturated the market—and the environment—with music that portrays the ugly, immoral, and superficial. Because this type of music is so readily available and so ubiq-

uitous, people assume that the life it displays must reflect reality. As Christians, we must look for and teach something better. We must educate for beauty or it will consistently remain undiscovered.

Learning to make wise choices is the most important lesson we can give our students. So much comes to us uncensored. We must learn to evaluate that which we see and hear and actively accept or reject it. We must help our students learn to select from the barrage of material constantly being hurled at them. Students need to learn that quality is not always synonymous with popularity. The best songs are not necessarily the top 10 on the charts!

Below are some ideas for teachers to use in helping their students make wise choices about music, as well as some suggestions for finding examples of good music to share with pupils.

***Music should be
considered part of the
curriculum, not an
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activity.***

Teaching Music

1. Children need to be taught how to read and write music. They should learn how, when, and why they should listen to music.

2. Music education will not be very effective if it is taught every other Friday afternoon just before dismissal! Music classes should be scheduled regularly, and should include time for students to sing, play, and listen to many kinds of good music.

3. During the period when band and choir members are practicing, the children who are not involved in those organizations should have a listening period when they too learn about music.

4. The value of music organizations goes far beyond their entertainment value for parents or local constituents. Rehearsals that give students the opportunity to sing or perform together will help them appreciate good music and choose to listen to or play it in later life. This early training is so important that schools should employ a teacher to conduct the choir and/or band, devoting sufficient time and money to the endeavor so that these organizations can be a success.

Even though musical performances attract favorable attention to a school, the choir or band should not be viewed as a replacement for team sports and recreation.

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THE RELEVANCE OF FEELINGS

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hand, allow us to emotionally participate with light so that our experiences and feelings provide the basis for understanding Jesus' metaphor in saying "I am the light of the world."

Feelings are the source of meaning in our lives. Out of our experiences and feelings we learn to think and reason. The poet Ezra Pound once described experience as a "sudden emotion," an "Instant when something outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective." He could have described understanding, meaning, and knowledge the same way.

Students in the 1960s sought meaning; they wanted to understand not facts but experience. Perhaps in the 1990s, these same students, now teachers themselves, will find ways to get a different generation in touch with their feelings, to help them understand their emotions, and to learn to use them for others. We may thus effect an enlarging of the Adventist educational creed—to educate the mental, the physical, the spiritual, and the emotional.—Cheryl Jetter. □

A BIBLICAL BASIS FOR APPRECIATING BEAUTY

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appreciation.

Preparing students to view great art takes effort and patience. In addition to offering suggestions for appropriate behavior, the teacher can distribute a worksheet before the field trip to help students know what to look for and to enhance their appreciation and understanding.

Various arts integrate well with other subjects in the curriculum. Social studies, religion, biology, and practical arts lend themselves readily to interdisciplinary approaches. While studying the history of a period, the artistic achievements may also be surveyed. Biblical events can be illustrated by song, sketches, sculpture, or play acting. Nature serves as a direct inspiration for artistic expression. As students master the skills of carpentry or clothing construction, why not encourage them to design and decorate their creations?

But the arts should be much more than just an addenda to the curriculum. A balanced education must include formal study of the various forms of human creativity; student exposure to great literature, art, and music must not be left to chance. When presented attractively, the arts refine human nature and restore finer

sensitivities. As a person's physical body grows and his mind expands, his emotions must mature as well. In an increasingly technical society, young people need the balancing values that artistic pursuits bring to their lives. While everyone should be conversant with the cultural achievements of our civilization, it is even more important to absorb the best and most beautiful experiences the arts have to offer. The arts enrich

Students need the opportunity to personally confront great art.

and enliven. They promote health and happiness as they open the senses to receive new sights, sounds, and perceptions. Through the arts human beings may be drawn close to one another and to their Creator.

An Invitation

You and your students may practice heaven's panoply of praise. Come, join John who jars our jaded senses. Fire and ice mingle. Torches burn before the throne of God. In front of the throne stretches what seems to be a sea of glass "like a sheet of ice" (Revelation 4:6). Chromatic colors encircle the throne. Chanting creatures proclaim, "Holy, holy, holy is God the sovereign Lord." Twenty-four elders finger harps and fragrant

bowls of incense. Myriads of angels sing lustily in honor of the Lamb. A vast throng from all ethnic and language groups stands in review before the universe. White-robed, palm-waving earthlings shout together, "Victory to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" □

Dr. Morris Taylor is Professor of Music at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

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¹ Unless otherwise noted, all texts in this article are from *The New English Bible*. © *The Delegates of the Oxford University Press and the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press, 1970. Reprinted by permission.*

² Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1903), p. 249.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁴ John Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn."

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5. Music should be considered part of the curriculum, not an extracurricular activity. It is as valuable to students as English, math, and social studies. Biblically, we find a precedent for including it as one of the core subjects in the curricula. The Old Testament lists music as one of the four subjects taught in the schools of the prophets.

6. When introducing students to various styles, remember that *good* does not mean old, dull, or boring. Good music may be found in virtually every style. Look for positive attributes in every kind of music, even in the kinds that students seem to listen to most. You may not find much to praise, but if you do find anything at all, you will have gained credibility with your pupils!

7. When playing music for your students, be sure to select good quality recordings and to maintain the equipment properly. Use a good playback system to assure quality reproduction. Better yet, invite local musicians and composers to perform for your students and to talk about their music.

8. Teach students that music is not something that is always good at church and bad at loud parties. Expose them to both sacred and secular music, and teach them how to make wise choices about the quality of each.

9. Help students understand that music

can be either a career or an avocation. Invite professional musicians to discuss their work on career days or during music class.

10. If you are musically illiterate, do not pretend to know more than you do. Ask someone in the community to outline a plan for you to follow in teaching music or invite a retiree or professional musician to teach several units or even the entire music curriculum.

11. Above all, make music class fun. If students do not enjoy listening and participating, it will be meaningless or may even generate negative attitudes.

Everyone needs a creative outlet for his or her emotions. Listening to or performing music offers just such an opportunity. If people do not have a positive, constructive outlet for their emotions, their only choice is negative and destructive. Personal music-making can soothe and subdue the spirit and promote peace of mind. In an alienated, high-pressure society, music offers solace as well as time for personal enjoyment that can be shared with someone else.

Our imagination and subconscious mind give meaning to and are nurtured by music. Within that realm of existence God communicates with us. Through our creative efforts we can also communicate with Him.

In the ancient tabernacle services, God took advantage of all human senses in trying to reach His people. The ringing bells, the smell of ascending incense, the bleating of sheep, the lights of the candlesticks, and even the blood on the altar spoke a message from God. The sounding of the rams' horn trumpets and the singing of the people combined in response to the voice of God. The Bible gives us unmistakable directives to use music in the worship of God and to associate musical sounds with spiritual perspective.

Today, our schools largely have the responsibility of providing the link between music and praise. In shaping the school curriculum we need to reassess our priorities and teach those subjects that are most important. If we are really serious about this, we will reaffirm that we want our students to learn first about God, and then to master as many other worthwhile subjects as can possibly be crowded into their schedule.

Music belongs to the first category—learning about God. Today, as in the schools of the prophets, we can teach our students about God through music. "Sanctified intellect brought forth from the treasurehouse of God things new and old, and the Spirit of God was manifested in prophecy and sacred song."² This quote, in the book *Education*, gives us an astounding concept to ponder. What is God trying to say to us? Why does the

noise of the world's music drown out the voice of the Spirit in sacred song?

King David caught the vision of God's Spirit as manifested through music. He placed musicians in the temple and gave them the job description of "praising the beauty of Holiness."

Currently in our church we have few ministers of music. Only in our schools are a few musicians employed for teaching purposes. Many young people feel called into musical service for God each year, but most of them eventually choose other careers because they know they will probably never be able to get a job within the church.

It is time that we stopped viewing our Christian musicians as entertainers who are so eager for self-gratification that they will perform anywhere free and at any personal sacrifice. If we get our priorities straight, we will recognize the value of these professional musicians in our schools and churches, and we will pay them what their service is worth.

Imagine the positive results of our recognizing the value of music in our lives and institutions. Let us resolve to teach our students about music as it was taught in the Bible, challenging them to look for and listen to the good and uplifting. This will hasten the day when in all our schools and churches we will hear God's people praising Him with singing and instruments of praise. □

Larry Otto is Chairman of the Department of Fine Arts at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

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² *Ibid.*, p. 47.

WHY STUDY LITERATURE?

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the "particulars of humanness"¹⁵—fostering understanding and compassion, developing judgment, exploring attitudes and ethics.

Too often English teachers confuse literary study with literature.

A Validation of Experience

As we look back at the original question that prompted this discussion—*Why teach literature?*—it is easy to see that when teachers focus on their students' responses to their reading rather than on "correct" interpretations, when they allow their students the *authority* to speak about their own responses, students will find a validation of their experience. When literature teachers take a reader-response approach to teaching, instead of, "Why do we have to read this?" they will hear "Why can't we read more?" □

Douglas Jones is Assistant Professor of English at Andreus University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, where he teaches literature, writing, and teacher education classes. He previously taught academy in Oregon.

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⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-53.
⁷ ———, *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978), pp. 6-21.
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⁹ Rosenblatt, pp. 33, 34.
¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 26, 27.
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¹² Rosenblatt, p. 26.
¹³ Purves, p. 35.
¹⁴ Rosenblatt, p. 218.
¹⁵ Benjamin DeMott, "Reading, Writing, Reality, Unreality..." In *Response to Literature*, James R. Squire, ed. (Champaign, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1968), p. 36.

WHY TEACH THE BIBLE AS LITERATURE?

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simply not grasp the author's complete meaning.

Literary Devices Are Used Throughout the Bible

"Literature exploits, for example, such