



Metropolitan Music Ministries

Grace Notes

November 20, 2021

Editor: Diann P. Back

“My servants sing for joy
of heart...” Isaiah 65:14

Choirs and Congregations Get Back Together and Realize What They’ve Missed

(Part of the following is from an article that appeared in the *The Charlotte Observer Online* by Alison Bowen on August 21, 2021. It originally appeared in *The Chicago Tribune*.

One of the earliest casualties of the COVID-19 Pandemic was the tradition of singing together in a choir.

Whether a church choir, professional ensemble or friends getting together, the fellowship involved with seeing the same people, on a regular basis and, creating music together, is simply put, unmatched by Zoom.

Many who sing in choirs said throughout the past year, they missed not only the regularity and beauty of creating music but also the fellowship and friendship through spending time week after week, sometimes year after year, seeing the same people.

Alison Harrald, 74, has been in the choir at the First Presbyterian Church of Arlington Heights, IL, since the 1980s. The absence of singing in person with her choir colleagues, she said, helped her realize what she was missing.

“The music has always been my favorite part of worship,” she said. “When you practice and practice, and go over it week after week after week, it just becomes part of your soul.”

When COVID hit, many choirs quickly ceased rehearsals.

Ideally, said Adam Hendrickson, director of music and worship at First Presbyterian, a chorus becomes a place away from conflict, with a common goal

“The goal of the unit is singing, and as long as you’re in sync with that, it’s just so refreshing to be amongst a group where you’re not thinking about the news,” he said.

An article in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* by Sheila Poole noted that the Bible even references the importance of music in Ephesians 5. “Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Not only did choir members miss making music together, the congregations missed being part of a musical setting to worship our Lord.

“The concept of having a church without singing goes well beyond having a worship service without a choir”, said the Rev. Donna M. Cos, a professor of music and coordinator of the bachelor of arts in music degree program and Church Music Studies at the University of Dayton.

As the pandemic wore on, churches began to improvise so members of their congregations could still connect with the musical aspect of their services.

Instead of large choirs, there may have been a handful of singers such as a quartet. Some churches used prerecorded music, used Zoom or had singers record individually in their homes then a technician merged the videos together.

Cox says, “What makes worship powerful is deeply connected to the connections created between singers and congregants and between worshippers and God. Raising voices in song is critical to the worship experience for singing churches, irrespective of the style of song performed. From hymns to chants, to spirituals, to gospel to anthems, lifting a song together transforms an ordinary gathering to a spiritual one.”



Christy Stephens, MMM Secretary

A Letter from the MMM Board

We're living in uncertain, even scary, times. If you read the paper or listen to the local, national or world news, you know that there is a lot going to make us fearful natural disasters and terrible weather events, sad stories of gun violence, political division and turmoil here and abroad, controversies re: masks or no masks, vaccine or no vaccines, gatherings or no gatherings, climate change vs. no climate change, and a predatory virus that is showing signs of re-surgng just as we thought we were getting back to some semblance of normality.

Especially during times of uncertainty and fear, it is important to come out in support of things that bring us peace and joy, things that have been shown to be eternal and beyond the vagaries and turmoil of the present day. I am thinking of something that fits that description perfectly and that thing is Music. There is a saying that "Music soothes the savage beast" and our world can use all the soothing it can get right now. Metropolitan Music Ministries (MMM) has a history of supporting all kinds of musical programs in the Charlotte and surrounding areas and we continue to do so. Admittedly, we cannot safely do all that we used to do because of current covid restrictions; but we continue to encourage and support young, up and coming musicians through the awarding of music scholarships that help them pursue musical careers that will touch and bless others through the magic of Music.

MMM wants to keep its organization strong so that when covid restrictions finally lift and we can safely go back into the community to share musical offerings, we can do so with confidence, knowing the joy and peace that Music can bring to those that need it. And it is so needed right now.

Please consider sending a donation ... either a little bit or a generous amount ... to Metropolitan Music Ministries this fall. The amount isn't as important as your participation in supporting an organization that seeks to share this special gift from God with others.

Thank you & God bless!

Christy Stephens

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MMM Welcomes Pam Greenwood to Board

Earlier in the fall Pam Greenwood, an active participant in community choral musical groups, joined the MMM Board as an advisor.

Pam's home town is Durham, North Carolina. She and her husband, Jim, reside in Charlotte. She is the mother of one daughter and the grandmother to three granddaughters.

Pam has connections with Campbell University and the University of North Carolina Charlotte. She and her husband attend Providence Baptist Church.

Before retiring she was active in church music and served as a preschool music teacher. Her special interests include singing, yoga, walking, and her grandchildren.

Pam brings a wealth of experience and enthusiasm to MMM and will be instrumental in helping the organization determine its future.

MMM is delighted to welcome Pam as an advisor.



For additional information on MMM

visit the MMM Website at

www.metromusicministries.org

or call the MMM Office at 704-449-3709

“What Is Your Song?”

By Rev. Betsy Williamson

What is your song? We all have one. When someone from a music ministry asks that question, you might assume that you are being asked for your favorite song or hymn – and, perhaps you are being asked to play or sing it. Some of you might say, “I can’t sing. I don’t have a song.” Others of you might say, “I love lots of songs or hymns. I don’t have just one.” But that is not what I am asking. What is your song? What is the song of your life?

There are many songs in the Scriptures. The Psalms are the first songs or hymns that come to mind, but here are many other songs. In I Samuel chapter 2, we find Hannah’s song. From the words we learn that the song of her life is gratitude. Her “heart rejoices in the Lord.” The entire song is full of praise for the Lord, who has gifted her with her beautiful son. We hear it in her words, and we see it in her life as she lives out her gratitude to the Lord by returning her small son to the Lord.

Luke’s Gospel has many songs. In Luke chapter 1, we hear Mary’s song. From the words, we learn that she loves the Lord. Her song begins, “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” The song of Mary’s life is obedience, which we see as she lives out her obedience to the Lord by being a willing vessel to carry God the Son.

A few verses later, we hear the song of Zechariah, father of John the Baptist. Zechariah did not believe the words of the angel Gabriel that he would father a son, so he was made mute until the birth of his son. When John was born, Zechariah’s voice returned, and his song was the joy of the Lord. He lived out that joy by sharing the joy of the Lord with others.

Later in Luke’s gospel, we hear the song of the angels, announcing the birth of Jesus to the shepherds. “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.” From the angels’ song, we learn that we are to

praise the Lord and live out that praise as peacemakers. So, what's your song? What is the song of your life?

Psalms 146 is one of the many songs of the psalmist. In the first lines, we learn that the song of the psalmist is to praise God with his whole being (with his soul). This is not just praising God on Sunday. It is not just praising God in the morning when he awakes. This is continuous, constant praise of God no matter what. And, this praise is lived out in a daily life of gratitude to God. In the psalmist's song, we learn that he praises the God of Jacob, YHWH. His words tell of what God is doing in their midst now, not what God has done in the past (although that is important, too). He uses contrast to show that, while we might be tempted to put our trust in powerful rulers, their kingdoms won't last. The only one who is worthy of our praise is God, whose kingdom is eternal. Then, he gives us a list of the things God is doing now in their midst: keeps faith forever, executes justice for the oppressed, gives food to the hungry, sets the prisoners free, opens the eyes of the blind, lifts up those who are bowed down, loves the righteous, watches over the strangers, upholds the orphans and widows, and brings the wicked to ruin.

Like the psalmist, each one of us is called to live out the song of our lives. We are to live our songs of praise to God in faith, serving God and neighbor by seeking justice, feeding the hungry, setting free those who are bound, healing the blind, watching over strangers and upholding the most vulnerable in our community. If we live our lives, our songs, in this way, God will see to the justice and ruin for the wicked. God is empowering us to live our lives in praise, and for this the psalmist gives praise to God. This is the psalmist's song.

What is your song? Perhaps there is a song or hymn that exemplifies your experience of how God has worked and continues to work in and through your life. Perhaps you have your own personal, individual song that no one has ever heard.

That doesn't matter. What is important is that each of us recognizes the presence and work of God in our lives, and that we live in gratitude for God's blessings. Maybe we can't sing or play an instrument, but we can live out the song of our lives.

About the author of this article...



Rev. Betsy Williamson joined the MMM Board as an advisor in January, 2020. Betsy is a retired from the Presbytery of Charlotte having most recently served at Amity Presbyterian and Quail Hollow Presbyterian Church before that.

WELCOME

Welcome to the second digital edition of MMM's *Grace Notes*. If you would like to receive your copy of this newsletter electronically or you know of someone who would like to receive a copy, please submit your name and email address to the link below.

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