



# **The Musical Mess in Christianity**

## **truth about church music**

By Daniel Rendelman ~ [ravemet@comast.net](mailto:ravemet@comast.net)

As baby boomers age and traditional hymns become a thing of the past, Christianity faces a crisis of music and worship. To be more culturally relevant, many churches now hold contemporary services with live bands, drama, and even dance. Such a dramatic shift in style makes one wonder where such changes will end. If Baptist churches that fifty years ago discouraged people against the sounds of Elvis Presley are now featuring full drum sets and electric guitars, what will church music be like in the next fifty years?

The first followers of Messiah attended synagogues and home meetings that allowed and encouraged spontaneous participation of songs and prayer. History shows that things changed when only trained choirs were allowed to sing in worship services. Congregations were made spectators in 367AD when the Council at Laodicea forbade all others to sing in church besides canonical singers. Children's choirs were soon instituted in the church by those who worshipped Greco-Roman gods because it was believed that the voice of young boys possessed special spiritual power. And organs were first used in Catholic churches during the sixth century.

The Protestant Reformation included the promotion of congregational singing and the use of instruments during worship. The Wesleyan revival during the late 1800's promoted the use of hymns to bring people to joy during offerings and repentance during altar calls. In the 1950's gospel music began to spread to the church from radio and live concerts. After the Charismatic renewal of the 1970's the contemporary Christian music movement began its growth in popularity. Today, contemporary Christian music is the fastest growing segment in the music industry with annual sales over one billion dollars.

Slowly the church has replaced the organ with the praise band and moved towards a more “worldly” sound of music. While the style of songs has changed, the lyrics have remained somewhat consistent over the years. Such lyrics make the type of rhythm and melody inherently spiritual. This establishes the fact that there is no such thing as “Christian music.” Any order of notes on sheet music can be spiritual. One variety of melody is no more holy than another. Heavy metal, rap, gospel, or middle-eastern flavored songs can certainly praise the Almighty if the music is paired with the right intentions and the right lyrics. A song is given spiritual meaning through the lyrics used and not by the style. The words of song can inspire joy, worship, praise, reflection, and community. A person can worship with the hymn “How Great Thou Art” or with the Bob Marley tune “Don’t Worry about a Thing.” Such variety is a good thing. Remember that there were twelve tribes of Israel who each had their own unique style and dialect! All music does not have to sound the same.

The major problem with church music is that it is mostly intended as songs for an audience to listen and watch as entertainment to hopefully inspire worship. This is wrong. The worship service was never meant to be taken hostage by paid professional preachers and ministers of music. The Bible teaches that worship should be participatory with an audience of only One. Ephesians 5:19 says to “speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.”

While many churches argue over which type of music is more spiritual or appealing, the main issue of participation is usually ignored. The church has confused entertainment with worship, opting for concert styled performances over open services during which anyone could lead a song or share a testimony. Hopefully, the ministry of music will return as an outlet for all believers and not just the worship leader or choir director. It’s not the style of music but the freedom of worship that’s most important.