

“Fa La La La la?” December 21, 2008

Music has a way of transporting us back to a certain place and time; we can remember what we were doing and who we were with. Music brings to mind special occasions. For example, my husband Mike and a good friend of ours who recently died—the one I mentioned last Sunday—had a song that was “their” song. It was the “Proud Mary.” And whenever we were at a party of one sort or another, one of them would request that song from the band, and off to the dance floor they went! There’s no way either of us can hear the strains of the Proud Mary without thinking of all those times that seem even more special now.

AS you’ve just seen, music is a part of most children’s lives, and they learn all kinds of songs when they are very young. They hear and quickly absorb songs like the “Hokey Pokey, “B-i-n-g-o,” “The Wheels on the Bus go Round and round,” and more. And what child doesn’t learn “We Wish you a Merry Christmas” or “Jingle Bells” as soon as they can talk?

I suppose most of us have some love of music, or we probably wouldn’t be here at The Garden. Here we celebrate life through music; it is an integral part of our time together each week. The music that’s chosen for each service is carefully selected, making sure it shares some insight into our main theme, and connects us to what we believe God wants us to share on any given Sunday.

It’s likely that our exposure to music probably began very early. I know that it did for me. One of my earliest memories is of my Dad playing the saxophone, and my sister playing the piano. Being the youngest of my family, my role was to sit on the saxophone case and sing along, or just clap my hands and cheer. Music was an important part of my growing up days.

Colin Holmes said, “**Music evokes emotion, and gets everyone into the spirit of the occasion.**” Music also reflects our emotions. As Mark Twain once said, “When I’m sad, I sing, and then others can be sad with me,” which I suppose was an indication of his singing ability.

Today, we’re reminiscing a bit as we share some of yours and my favorite Christmas music. We’ll be invited to sing along sometimes, and please do—even if our vocal ability isn’t the best. Some of the songs we will be able to enjoy by just listening. Whatever our role, let’s celebrate Christmas with the gift of music!

It’s kind of interesting how favorites like the ones we just sang came into being. *Some Christmas songs, “Sleigh Ride,” for example were not written in winter, and were not intended to be solely heard at Christmas time. It took nearly a year for Leroy Anderson to write that song, and he began it in the midst of a July heat wave.

Last Sunday, our daughter and I attended the Jim Brickman holiday concert at Clowes Hall, and he told a similar story. As he said, about everything that could be written and sung about Christmas has been, but he

decided to try to come up with something new, something that hadn’t been addressed.

Since he’s best known for the romantic piano pieces he composes and plays, he tried to come up with a unique twist on an old story, and chose to focus on the story of the relationship between Mr. and Mrs. Claus. Once he had the idea, he still had a major issue: he lives in L.A., and this was in the heat of July, which is the time a musician has to write and record Christmas music to get it out to the media. So, he said, he closed all the blinds and curtains, turned on the air conditioning, lit a fire in the fireplace, and drank hot chocolate to try to get himself in the mood to write!

That was one of the lighter notes of his concert. After the intermission, he began the second segment with a beautiful medley of familiar carols, and I found myself transported back to another time and place. Actually, I found myself tearing up a little bit, and for no particular reason. It’s just that those carols that have endured for scores of years touched something deep inside me, and called forth an emotion that I hadn’t expected.

I guess it was the kind of thing someone named Mark Lopez talked about with these words: “**Christmas music seizes us. And almost out of a power of its own, it has determined its place in our experience of Christmas, so much so that any yuletide season of celebration would be felt by us as incomplete, unless these hymns are heard or sung.**”

Our Bible passage shares with us the joy, hope and love that can fill our hearts at Christmas. This part of the story as told by Luke tells us of the joy of that accompanied the birth of Jesus, even though it wasn’t the best of times or circumstances. Our version puts it like this: “**At once the angel was joined by a huge angelic choir singing God’s praises...**”

As Johann Sebastian Bach said, “**Music is an agreeable harmony for the honor of God and the permissible delights of the soul.**” Centuries ago Bach understood the power of music to move us beyond ourselves and closer to that whom we call God.

Music, almost mysteriously, can transport us into a deeper connection with God, and enlarge and enrich our lives. In a way that most of us cannot completely understand or explain, Christmas music touches a chord deep inside us and draws us together. Again, Mark Lopez has something to say about that: “**The most basic in our experience of Christmas music is the experience of a connectedness.**” And so it is.

Closing:

Maybe, in a very real way, music connects us with the true spirit of Christmas, or as columnist Tom Ehrich put it, “**Music brings us closer to what matters in faith.**” So, this morning as we have celebrated with the gift of music, I hope and pray that each of us has come a little closer to God and to one another.

And to help us keep this connection alive long into the future, and to continue our thread of thinking

about the gifts of Christmas, some lucky people are going to receive a Christmas CD to take with them.
Have a good Sunday, and go in peace. Amen.