

When Words Are Not Enough

Music Sunday, May 12, 2019

By Gary Legwold

We sing because we do not smile. The choir, me included, has a DNA that dictates: DO NOT SMILE! This is music. This is serious stuff. Don't smile, no matter how jubilant the song, no matter how much Nancy pleads. In fact, don't look at the director. And whatever you do, don't look at the congregation. You do not want to encourage any sort of connection between you and the congregation.

And during Passing the Peace, that happy-happy "How ya doin'?" time, don't bother. Do not mix with the commoners. Sit in the choir loft where it is safe, and be part of the black-robed, grim-faced great cloud of witnesses. Stay put and look superior ... and make delicious judgments.

That smell? It's the smell of the bridge that's burning between me and the choir.

Let me give two real reasons why we sing and make music:

We sing for vibration. It starts with the heart, a marvelous organ that, like God, is made of mystery and music. The mystery: Where does the pulse come from? What keeps it going? The music: In meditation, we hear music, a simple-yet-mesmerizing melody that carries us to wonderful places and sets an assuring rhythm that says:

God is. God is. God is. God is. God is.

The pulse creates vibration that enlivens the diaphragm and lungs. Sound wells up from within and springs forth from the voice box and hums through the passages of the head, amounting to a full-body glorious vibration that gladdens the heart in the center of it all. We sing for that vibe. It's like tapping the singing bowl and holding it near your heart. It *feels* good and reminds us God is with us, God is within speaking to the God within you.

That vibe is amplified by the other tenors, the basses, altos, sopranos, the piano, the organ, the instruments, the other choirs, and you in the congregation. The joint is jumpin' with one big vibe! Is there anything more moving than standing with children and grandchildren, home for Easter and singing full out "Christ the Lord is Risen Today"? Is there anything more powerful than a great old hymn sung in unison?

We sing because our soul commands. The soul is like a child pulling on our pant leg or dress, asking us to come to our senses. We sing for those moments when we *can't* sing, when our senses storm the walls of the head, when our cup runneth over, when the merriment of the song or the mourning or a sweet memory or the might of

the song ... it's just too much and we pause for a few measures to cry. That's why we sing.

Tears and music connect us to the soul. Lyrics are important, but sometimes not. Opera: Music carries the day. You can't understand the lyrics because they're in a foreign language, and if you do, it's the same old same old:

My love, my love, I'm virtuous, you're a scoundrel, you done me wrong, and now I'm going to die? How's that work? ...

So, often words alone are not enough to reach the heart, to access the soul. Hans Christian Andersen wrote: "Where words fail, music speaks."

I close with a poem about a son who comes to his mother about his difficulty in expressing deep emotions.

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*A very bright lad had issues with sad
And with joy, it got kinda tough
"To talk about feelings, it gets very bad
Oh, Mama, the words aren't enough."*

*"My son," Mama said, "sit, have some tea
Don't argue, don't give me no guff!
It is a good question, if you ask me:
What happens when words aren't enough?"*

*Using words about joy, and to talk about grief
It's so-so—but you gab the whole afternoon!
No, to go deep inside it is my belief
You must travel there with a tune.*

*Words have their limits, they speak to the head
It is music that loosens control.
God is music, my son, what more can be said?
It softens your heart, and waters your soul*

*What do you do when words won't do,
When words are not enough?
Good question, my son, I'm so proud of you!
But is one feeling especially tough?*

*The lad paused then replied, "I confess ... it is love.
Expressing my love — how's that done?
I'm Norwegian, you see, and I need a shove.
When I search for the words, there are none!*

Mama ...

*When words are not enough, you say,
Make music, the language of God.
Music reveals when words won't convey
So voicing my love won't be odd?*

OK ... Mama, on this Mother's Day ...

*To write, "I love you." again and again
Like 28 times ... it's not wrong
But to say it more deeply, and feel the Amen
I'll say it to you in a song.*