

A Brief Look at Music, Its Functions, and Its Ethical Use

by Ted Slater

Introduction

With closed eyes, a young woman raises her hands and sings praises to her God. A man lounges in his favorite chair singing a lullaby to his sleeping grandson. Disheveled sailors sing as they lug nets over the side of their troller.

What is music?

A girl balances on a train track, arms out to her side, whistling off-key. The young man caresses the strings of his guitar, drawing out a melancholy love song. At the trumpet call soldiers crawl from their trenches and careen toward the enemy bunkers. Federal agents bombard the cult's compound with a cacophony, intending to draw its members from their sanctuary.

What are music's legitimate functions?

"That's a take," the producer sighs, relieved that the jingle for the television commercial is completed at last. Cracking open a Budweiser, his feet warmed by the beach sand, the teen reaches into his jeep and cranks up the radio. As the little girl blows out the last candle, the rest of the children finish singing, "... happy birthday to you!"

What is music? What are its functions? And if rules exist which govern its being used correctly, what are they?

Definitions

It is unwise to consider whether a thing is ethical or not before getting a decent understanding of it. For that reason, it seems appropriate to examine first what this phenomenon called music is.

Nearly all of the music scholars confess their inability to accurately define music. They have, however, proposed theories of what it is. Some posit that it is simply an evolved primitive grunt; it has survived and developed because it is a fit means of communication, they might say. Others say that music is more of an innately magical, spiritual force, like an impersonal Holy Spirit. Writes one such mystic:

The tones of archaic music ... were intimately and indissolubly associated with gods, nature spirits, cosmic elements, biopsychic states in animals and human beings, and very often a particular season or time of the day. Such a mythological and vitalistic association gave each tone a communicable meaning, and made of the tone an entity with a specific character or quality of being. (Rudhyar, 1982, p. 14)

Although both ends of the music theory spectrum have convincing arguments, the author of this paper has chosen to approach music as if it were not merely the product of millions of years of evolution, or were in itself goddish, but as if it were a valuable creation of God.

One could be satisfied with Plato's definition of music — it is one part gift, one part madness, and one part technique (Tippett, 1980, p. 30), and is made up of melody, rhythm, and harmony (Williams, 1976, p. 15). This definition, however, doesn't touch on the fundamentals of music — its being a form of communication. And most music scholars agree that music is a form of communication — that it is a language which conveys meaning. While some argue that it is a universal language, others point out that it is not thoroughly cross-cultural: Asian music is easily unappreciated by Westerner's ears and the North American country song is likely to be misinterpreted by, say, the tribal peoples deep in Africa's heart.

Nevertheless, music communicates something to most everyone. And just as it is valid to consider the morality of speech, so it is valid to consider the morality of music, which can be divided into two major classes: natural music and art music.

Natural music

As its name implies, this type of music tends to be unrefined and is often spontaneous. It is the kind of music that comes naturally when one is feeling good or working. Examples include a child humming a tune, a lonely man playing his harmonica, a mother singing her child to sleep, a congregation singing a chorus, campers singing around a bonfire.

Artistic music

This type of music is more formal than natural music. Those who perform artistic music often consciously practice using their instruments in order to become more proficient. Classical music falls into this category. The Lutheran tradition, as an aside, endorses the use of both natural and artistic music in corporate worship, while the Calvinist tradition excluded art music entirely from the church service (Schalk, 1988, p. 35).

Music's aesthetic beauty

Some people have set up rules by which one might judge the outward beauty of music. It is difficult to improve on what Rudhyar (1982) writes:

For us [in the West], a melody is “beautiful” if the well-proportioned steps according to which it proceeds satisfy our esthetic sense and give us pleasure, and if they convey to us a feeling of coherence and order in terms of what our culture considers “good” or harmonious (thus in terms of the rules of tonality, modulation, and intonation). The tones of the melody are “true” if they are in exact relationship to the preceding and following ones, according to a standard of pitch (diapason) and the canon of proportion predetermined by the major or minor scales of European culture. So we do not lose this feeling of coherence and unity, chords envelop all the relatively separate sounds of complex symphonies within a psychic atmosphere of tonality. Changes in tonality (modulation) are made safe and predictable by means of numerous repetitions, recognizable variations of restated themes, and standardized types of developments with the structure of familiar musical forms (fugues, rondos, sonata forms, and so on). These works end with a repeated “perfect chord” assuring us we can go in peace, certain that there is order and purpose in the world. (p. 93)

Rudhyar has laid out a nearly comprehensive system for determining what makes music aesthetically good according to Western tastes. But while a thing's appearance has value, in order to more thoroughly understand the value of a thing, it is necessary to better understand what makes it meaningful — its soul. You can familiarize yourself with certain people by studying their artifacts, but by actually spending time with them you can know them in a more intimate way.

The inner beauty of music

Music has been called “a reaching out to the ultimate realities by means of ordered sound” (Williams, 1976, p. 3). It has also been called “the organization of sound toward beauty” (Spaeth, 1963, p. 85). Plato considered “beauty absolute, separate, simple and everlasting” to be love (from his Symposium). It follows, then, that music, at its very nature, struggles to reveal loveliness — to become itself a thing of love.

C.S. Lewis (1962) recognized man's struggle to possess beauty. “We want something else which can hardly be put into words,” he wrote “- to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it” (p. 208). Worship is a celebration of that beauty, an entering into that beauty. And, according to Psalm 22:3, the Lord make this possible by in some way actually inhabiting the praises of his people. This natural desire to possess beauty may explain some people's apparent addiction to music, and music's accompanying TV

and radio ads and movie soundtracks. Products, by some Pavlovian process, become more desirable by their association with beautiful music.

For Lewis, however, beauty is not found within the tones of music itself. It is not the notes or lyrics which make a piece beautiful, but something beyond the temporal sounds. In his sermon “The Weight of Glory” he writes:

The books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; it was not in them, it only came through them, and what came through them was longing. These things — the beauty, the memory of our own past — are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard. (Lewis, 1962, p. 200)

The flower to be found is located in a world apart from earth: heaven. A scent is dependent upon the flower from which it emanates. Similarly, the beauty which music possesses is due to its some day being revealed to us in its fullness in heaven.

In his *Surprised By Joy*, Lewis (1955) further discusses the idea of desire, which he calls “Joy.” His infrequent experiences of Joy were intense:

... instantly I was uplifted into huge regions of northern sky, I desired with almost sickening intensity something never to be described (except that it is cold, spacious, severe, pale, and remote) and then ... found myself at the very same moment already falling out of that desire and wishing I were back in it. (p. 17)

He describes these experiences as “an unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction. I call it Joy ...” (p. 17f).

Lewis’s ideas are similar to those of Plato, who wrote, “Of necessity, a desiring subject desires something it lacks, and when it does not lack something it does not desire it. Happiness is the final aim of all desire, and it consists in the possession of good things” (from Plato’s *Symposium*). Music which most approaches what we could consider beautiful, then, should stimulate participants’ desires to possess beauty by leading them to where it gets its beauty: heaven. One way music does this is by its involvement in the heaven which is currently at hand; another way is by its involvement in the heaven which is to be realized at the Second Coming of Jesus.

Music, because it is composed of tone and rhythm, functions only in time. In heaven, where time is likely not as it is here, the music with which we are familiar probably can’t take place. Just as many things on earth are mere shadows of

heavenly things, so music is likely a shadow of some magnificent form of communication (or communion) utilized in heaven.

Functions of music

The things God created are both beautiful and functional, as is demonstrated in the following passage: “And the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground — trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food” (Genesis 2:9). A thing is valuable for both its aesthetics and its function.

Luther considered music to be the *viva vox evangelii*, the “living voice of the gospel” (Schalk, 1988, p. 51). The responsibility of those who live the gospel, as Jesus said, is to love God and to love others (Matthew 22:37-40). Music, then, is to be used in loving God and in loving others.

Music as worship

Worship is a primary manifestation of loving God. Although “worship” is classified in this paper as a function of music, it can be convincingly argued that worship, while being meaningful, aims to accomplish nothing. The reasoning mind sees no utilitarian use in worship, as illustrated in the woman’s pouring of expensive ointment on Jesus’ hair (Matthew 26:6-10). “Why this waste?” those watching asked. Jesus responded, “She has performed a good service for me.” We see another example of the apparent unfunctionality of worship throughout Revelation. For example, the four living creatures of chapter four sing without ceasing around the throne of God, “Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come” (Revelation 4:8b). All parties present are aware of God’s holiness — their communication seems redundant.

Music is often useless but far from meaningless (Schaeffer, 1990, p. 87). Schaeffer concludes that art, which includes certain musical productions, “is the expression of the divine uselessness of beauty, truth, and reality” (p. 87). The woman pouring her expensive perfume and the creatures singing “holy, holy, holy” are performing very meaningful tasks, although they appear to accomplish little in a practical sense.

Luther considered music to be an archetype, or perfect example, of worship. A person participates in worship not to gain the worshiped one’s approval, but because it is the consequential response of a confrontation with a God who is holy. It is not unlike the giggle of a child — in the same way, in the ideal world music simply results from one’s encounter with God or the wonder of his creation. And just as youthful laughter has been designed as a good thing, so spontaneous eruptions of worshipful music are good. Luther said, “Reason sees the world as extremely ungodly, and therefore it murmurs. The Spirit sees nothing but God’s benefits in the world and therefore begins to sing” (Schalk, 1988, p. 35).

Luther further addresses this proposition when he writes, "... let this noble, wholesome, and cheerful creation of God be commended to you.... At the same time you may by this creation accustom yourself to recognize and praise the Creator" (Schalk, 1988, p. 33). Music as worship is not merely a catalyst for worship, but is an actual manifestation of worship.

Composer J.S. Bach writes, "The ultimate end of [harmonic composition] should only be the glory of God and the recreation of the mind. Where these are not kept in view there can be no real music, only an infernal jingling and bellowing" (Kupferberg, 1985, p. 4). Elsewhere he adds that music is not only a "harmonious euphony for the glory of God," but also for "the instruction of my neighbor" (Mellers, 1981, p. 9). In addition to music's existing to worship God, Bach believed it served as a teacher and as a recreator or minister. As such, music works as a sort of inanimate Holy Spirit, who unites with God's children in worship, and acts as teacher and comforter. A final function of music is that it enables the performer to express feelings which are difficult to express in other ways, and to express those feelings in a manner more emotionally charged than mere words.

The didactic role of music

Outside of mere worship, music is transformed from being an art to being a craft, a craft being some artifact which is functional. Some would argue that a Monet or Michelangelo really serves no function — they are examples of art. A well-made water jar or pair of sandals is a craft — in addition to having aesthetic qualities, they are functional.

Aristotle said, "Music has the power to form character" and Luther said that music makes "fine, skillful people" (Schalk, 1988, p. 34). As such, it may be used both to proselytize and teach. When people teach, they impart knowledge with the goal of bringing someone toward maturity and wisdom, toward some heavenly ideal. And music energizes those words which it accompanies. D.L. Moody said, "Singing does at least as much as preaching to impress the Word of God upon people's minds. Ever since God first called me, the importance of praise expressed in song has grown upon me" (Osbeck, 1982, p. xi).

"Historians have stated that Martin Luther won more converts to Christ through his encouragement of congregational singing than even through his strong preaching and teaching.... Of the Wesleys it was said that, for every person they won with their preaching, ten were won through their music" (Osbeck, 1982, p. xi).

Luther believed that music could be used to bring the Scriptures to common people. He commended its use "so that God's word and Christian teaching might be instilled and implanted in many ways" (Schalk, 1988, p. 33). And the psalmist revealed that he believed the same thing: "I will sing of your steadfast love forever. With my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations" (Psalm 89:1).

Accounts of God's faithfulness are not meant to be directed back to God alone, but to others as well.

John Calvin recognized the fearful power which music held. He wrote about music: "There is hardly anything in the world with more power to turn or bend, this way and that, the morals of men.... It has a secret power to move our hearts in one way or another. Therefore we must be the more diligent in ruling it in such a manner that it may be useful to us and in no way pernicious" (Schalk, 1988, p. 33). Teachers who choose to use music as their medium must realize that they will be judged more harshly than those who don't teach.

Personal edification or ministering

Music also can function in the role of minister. "We are morally and emotionally enfeebled if we live our lives without artistic nourishment," said Tippett (1980). "Our sense of life is diminished" (p. 27). Just as music, in the role of teacher, affects the mind, so music as minister affects the spirit and the emotions.

Spiritual. How music affects things in the spiritual realm is illustrated in 1 Sam 16:23: "And whenever the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand, and Saul would be relieved and feel better, and the evil spirit would depart from him." For some reason, perhaps because it is a gift so saturated with the inclination to be worship, music is a spiritual tool. On the other hand, it could be convincingly argued that David's music invoked the Lord, and that his presence caused the spirit to flee (see Psalm 22:3).

Luther, remarking on this inherent spiritual power of music, wrote that "the devil, the creator of saddening cares and disquieting worries, takes flight at the sound of music almost as he takes flight at the word of theology. This is the reason why the prophets did not make use of any art except music.... they held theology and music most tightly connected, and proclaimed the truth through Psalms and songs" (Schalk, 1988, p. 22).

Luther wrote, "Music drives away the devil and makes people happy; it induces one to forget all wrath, unchastity, arrogance, and other vices" (p. 55). Obviously Luther wasn't talking about all music, such as the bawdy tunes which have been around since before his time. But when Luther spoke of music, he understood that that included only such functions as were intended for it at its conception.

Emotional. Luther said that "except for theology, [music] alone produces what otherwise only theology can do, namely, a calm and joyful disposition" (p. 22). Elsewhere he wrote, "For whether you wish to comfort the sad, to terrify to happy, to encourage the despairing, to humble the proud, to calm the passionate, or to appease those full of hate ... what more effective means than music could you find?" (p. 9f).

Charles Darwin explained what happened to him as he lost interest in art such as music. He wrote:

...now for many years I cannot endure to read a line of poetry.... I have also lost my taste for pictures and music.... My mind seems to have become a kind of machine for grinding general laws out of large collections of facts.... The loss of these tastes is a loss of happiness and may possibly be injurious to the intellect, and more probably to the normal character, by enfeebling the emotional part of our nature. (Bowen, 1980, p. 22)

Darwin too late understood the healing, ministering effects of music.

Entertainment, or recreation, might be considered a form of emotional ministering. Too often, sadly, most people rarely see music as anything more than entertainment.

Self disclosure

A final function of music is that of being an agent of self disclosure. Music enables the performer to express feelings which are difficult to express in other ways, and to express those feelings in a manner more emotionally charged than mere words. Just as for some Christians the use of *glossolalia* enables speakers to express things which can't be expressed in their known language, so music has the innate ability to convey information (especially emotions) which can't be expressed as readily through other forms of communication.

Guidelines for the ethical use of music

While the form of music can be considered aesthetically wrong, it cannot be declared ethically wrong, just as saxophones, syncopated beats, or sound waves cannot be wrong in themselves. A knife in the hands of a surgeon, as the Aristotelian saying goes, is a good thing; the same knife in the hands of a thief is a terrible thing.

When addressing the issue of ethics in music, one should fight the initial urge to condemn certain types of music, such as John Cage or grunge music. While those who decry such works may have legitimate arguments, one cannot come to a good understanding of what is ethically right by merely recognizing and condemning what is ethically (or aesthetically) wrong. Instead, one should propose positive guidelines for the propagation of virtuous music. Chesterton (1909) said:

Virtue is not the absence of vices or the avoidance of moral dangers; virtue is a vivid and separate thing, like pain or a particular smell. Mercy does not mean not being cruel or sparing people revenge or punishment; it means a plain and positive thing like the sun, which one has either seen or not seen. (p. 14)

In the same way, good music does not consist of the absence of backbeat, electric guitars, power saws, or chanting.

Just as music was earlier divided into natural and artistic, we now divide it into private and public music.

Private use of music

Generating music can be a reflex, like a sneeze, and so it is typically a healthy thing. However, just as habitual sneezing may be an indication that the body is infected, so the continual making of music or dependence on music may indicate some problem. The person who is frequently making music may be depending on it to provide what only the Holy Spirit can supply. If a teenager turns on the radio as soon as she gets in her car, or habitually whistles while she works, she might ask herself whether music is acting as a distraction from more important things (such as partaking in other forms of communication, such as prayer). Although (or perhaps because) private use of music is powerful, care must be taken so that it doesn't supplant the working of God.

The Apostle Paul addressed the issue of personal use of music. He wrote, "I will sing praise with the spirit, but I will sing praise with the mind also" (1 Corinthians 14:15b). If one sings in the spirit alone, the mind is unproductive. While having an unproductive mind is not always avoidable, consistently denying its being used is wrong. Instead, private music makers are encouraged to become conscious of what they are doing with their music.

In C.S. Lewis's *Screwtape Letters*, a demon writes letters of direction to his nephew, instructing him how to foul up a man's spiritual walk. Throughout the book, the demon encourages him to make the man focus on distractions rather than on truly important things. By having his mind clouded with temporal things, the man will be unable to receive direction and ministry from the Holy Spirit. Although the kingdom of hell may not really work that way, Christians should consider Lewis's allegory, being careful not to be distracted by relatively unimportant things, such as unceasing music making.

Public use of music

Just as one judges public communication differently from private communication, so the rules governing music shift somewhat when performed publicly before groups of people. Under consideration are the performer's attitude and the performer's skill.

The performer's attitude and motives. In a sense, music should be performed for deontological reasons — people worship God in song because it is proper. Music should be produced as an end in itself, not as a means of bringing about some

response. Non-Christian sources confirm that music should primarily be produced for deontological reasons. Plato said the following:

In the course of my life I have often had intimations in dreams “that I should compose music.” The same dream came to me sometimes in one form, and sometimes in another, but always saying the same or nearly the same words: “Cultivate and make music,” said the dream. (Kaplan, 1969, p. 71)

Plato later concluded that “making music” referred to the act of discipling pupils. In the meantime, however, Plato composed several tunes — because he believed God had instructed him to do so.

Although music should primarily be performed purely out of a sense of duty, in another sense one may say that the motives for performing music are teleological — to give glory to God, to instruct, to refresh the spirit, and to disclose oneself to others.

Music performed in worship, for deontological reasons, as functionless art, is often better than that performed for other reasons. Luther wrote that “Joerg Planck plays better when he plays for himself than when he plays for others; for what he does to please others sounds [from obedience to the law] and where there is [law] there is lack of joy; where there is [grace] there is joy” (Schalk, 1988, p. 23). (Words in brackets are the English equivalent of the Latin words which Luther used.) My own experience is that I play piano better when only God is present with me; the pressure to perform for others seems to stifle free and beautiful expression.

Music by its very nature is good, since God created it, but can sometimes be confirmed right or made wrong by the motives of the performer. Haweis (1872), however, said that music in itself cannot be considered either right or wrong,

in the same sense in which a drug given one day as a poison and another day as a medicine is in itself perfectly un-moral. The morality lies in the administration, and comes from a quality which belongs, not to the drug, but to the agent who administers it. In like manner, the morality of an artist’s work depends upon the good intention of the artist, as displayed in the general effect which the expression of his thoughts and emotions is calculated to produce. (p. 45)

Others might argue that the drug itself is good, but that this good thing can be used for good or ill; so while the building blocks of music are morally good, a composition may be judged in part by the performer’s intentions to lead others in worship, teach them truths, minister to their emotions or spirits, or disclose himself or herself with integrity.

Performers who are involved in leading worship. Worship leaders are found throughout Scripture. Their role is to worship God with song and to encourage others to worship. The psalmists found it possible to simultaneously worship and encourage worship. Many of the Psalms encourage people to worship: “O come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation,” “O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker,” and “O sing to the Lord, bless his name” (from Psalm 95:1, 6 and 96:2).

A danger exists, though, for leaders of worship. Once leaders shift from solely worshipping God to trying to coax others into worship as well, they can find themselves unable to worship. The act of encouraging others to worship is not, by default, worship, unless the leaders’ worship direction is done in response to an encounter with God. It is a difficult position for the musician who is leading worship — to worship God while trying to motivate often-tired people.

Schalk proposes a solution to some church musicians’ tendency to think that more intricate music is more worshipful. It is assumed by some in the church that artistic music is categorically better suited for a service than natural music. Schalk (1988) counters this assumption with an observation: “To place ourselves as church musicians under the discipline of a radical simplicity will mean forgoing the pretentious and the bombastic music that panders to the hearer, exploits the easily achieved effect, and seeks to please at all costs” (p. 53). The term “radical simplicity” is the key phrase. By “radical,” Schalk refers to the root part, the basic foundational principle of music; by “simplicity,” Schalk means unpretentious, free from vanity, of humble origin or modest position.

The performers’ role, when leading others in worship, is not to draw attention to themselves. Instead, performers should guard against ostentatiousness. Once performers “steal the scene” they begin to use music as either a teacher or as a form of entertainment — or worse, as a way to draw people to themselves.

Performers who are involved in teaching. Although most of the examples of singing in Scripture refer to worship, it is used as a tool for teaching as well. Didactic performers should discern when to play and when to remain silent. Music is primarily an emotional tool; any words (such as a pastor’s message, prayer, or altar call) which accompany music are placed within a highly emotional framework. Arthur Kruger is one of many ethicists who has studied emotionally charged arguments. His central position regarding emotional appeals is strict: “Persuasion by ethos or pathos either eliminates, obscures, distorts, or actually does violence to reason and hence by its very nature is incompatible with the rational ideal” (Johannesen, 1990, p. 25). Relying on beautiful music to empower flimsy words or arguments is manipulative and wrong.

Jesus selected musicians to represent those who expected the Christ to respond to their whims. He said, “To what then will I compare the people of this generation,

and what are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another, “We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not weep” (Luke 7:31f). Driving people to action through the use of music tends to be manipulative, and is therefore often unethical.

As Haweis (1871) points out, music, when it “excites an emotion not destined to culminate in action has a weakening and enervating effect upon character” (p. 53). If one’s emotions are roused to action, but the individual doesn’t follow through by carrying out the action, the music is being used inappropriately. Steven Curtis Chapman’s song, “For the Sake of the Call,” for example, challenges listeners to “abandon it all” and carry out God’s mission to evangelize the world. Listeners may feel deeply moved and excited to evangelize, but if they do no more than listen, then the music has inured them to undesirable inaction.

When a song’s lyrics lack the content which God intended for it to express, the music is unethically used. Amos prophesied, “Alas for those ... who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp, and like David improvise on instruments of music ... but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph” (Amos 6:4-6). Apparently weak lyrics which accompany music are a thing to avoid.

Performers who are involved in offering ministry or recreation. In many ways music imitates the Holy Spirit. It offers to its listeners the fruit of the Spirit, including love, joy, peace, and patience. It teaches, comforts, heals, satisfies, emboldens, recreates. At times music seems more attractive than the Holy Spirit because it doesn’t require one to struggle with the issue of obedience, or the responsibility of a relationship, as he does. For this reason, performers must be especially cautious not to give listeners the impression that there is no need for anything (more specifically, anyone) but music.

There is a legitimate place for music as minister, however. Haweis (1871) wrote that if applied judiciously to a disorganized mind, music

might be as powerful an agent as galvanism in restoring healthy and pleasurable activity to the emotional regions. Who can deny, then, if such a mysterious command as this is possessed by music over the realm of abstract emotion, that music itself must be held responsible for the manner in which it deals with that realm [of emotions], and the kind of succession, proportion, and degrees of the various emotional atmospheres it has the power of generating? (p.53)

Music is already being used in the more therapeutic environments of hospitals; many people have recognized music’s ability to bring emotional healing. It may be used in less formal settings, as well, such as in the home, in nursing homes, or in prisons.

Performers who are involved in self-disclosure. Performers must consider their motives for disclosing the part of themselves which isn't easily expressed in other ways. If they are sincere, desiring to make themselves vulnerable to their listeners and build relationship, this form of musical expression is valid. In other words, if their disclosure is intended to further develop a relationship with their listeners, or help them to develop better relationships, then it seems difficult to consider their music unethical. If, however, they are being manipulative, their goal being to attract people to themselves by offering a phony representation of themselves, their use of music is unethical.

John the Baptist insisted that he become less renowned while Christ become greater. St. Francis composed a prayer which says, in part, "Grant that I might seek, not so much to be consoled, as to console; to be understood as to understand; not so much to be loved as to love another." Musicians who are motivated to perform music in order to disclose who they are for the purpose of attracting people to themselves may be doing so for the wrong reasons, St. Francis might say.

Skill of the performer. Just as God judged a tree not only as functional, but also as pleasing, so music can be judged not only according to its functions, but according to its aesthetic qualities as well. As stated in Psalm 33:3, performers are instructed to "play skillfully."

As Plato pointed out, music is one part gift, one part madness, and one part technique (Tippett, 1980, p. 30). Performers are unable to stir up the gift of music if they've not been given it in the first place. And while some might have the gift of music, it is rare to find those who can consistently generate inspired music, what Plato labels "madness." The one thing performers can do (after petitioning their Creator for the gifts of music and madness) is cultivate their skills.

Many musicians, however, don't cultivate their skills, but seem satisfied with the status quo. It is, however, possible to maintain a "radical simplicity" while struggling for musical excellence. Schalk (1988) writes harshly of the modern trend of unskilled music in the church and repetitious choruses:

Much of the music heard in churches today can be characterized by the banal melody, the trite rhythm, the treacly harmony, and a striving for the easy effect. Such basic dishonesty, lack of integrity, and contempt for craftsmanship in dealing with the materials of music, often overlaid with a patina of superficial attractiveness, does a disservice to the Gospel in which service such music pretends to be. We readily decry such an approach in church architecture, automobiles, and refrigerators. It is time that those who fashion the songs of faith listen seriously to similar criticism of worship and church music. (p. 52)

Again, instead of settling with “good enough,” musicians should struggle with old and new ideas of music, utilizing old instruments and theories, and new technology and instruments. The command to “sing to the Lord a new song” is found in Psalm 33, 96, 98, 144, and 149, and in Isaiah 42. With the Creator living within Christian musicians, they have opportunities which non-Christians don’t have for producing creative, skillful music.

Conclusions

The primary function of music is worship, which appears to be impractical. Secondary functions include teaching, ministering, and self disclosure. Music differs in significant ways from other forms of communication. By understanding what music is, and how it functions, one might better make wise judgments regarding the ethical use of music.

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music Spirit scent
by ted slater

beautiful strains of music
and you know the Spirit has passed
close
His musical scent is familiar,
like a lover's perfume

His face, however, is not familiar

our eyes' sad predicament is not eternal, though
some day the Spirit will
graciously condescend
and heal them
banishing music with all His other shadows