

Maya D. Vernon
Michael K. Madison II.

Healing the World with Religious Music



*A Closer Look at the Role of Religious
Music in Creating Inner Peace*

•
•
•
•
•
•
•



STATE OF THE WORLD 3

WHY RELIGIOUS MUSIC? 5

THE USE OF SPIRITUAL MUSIC TO INFLUENCE BEHAVIOR 7

THE ROLE OF MUSIC 9

THE HISTORY AND CULTURAL INFLUENCE ON THE EVOLUTION OF MUSIC IN RELIGION..... 10

PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECT OF MUSIC 13

INFLUENCE OF HIGH PROFILE PEOPLE ON THE PUBLIC 16

ROLE OF RELIGION IN HIGH PROFILE PEOPLE..... 17

GIVING PEACE A CHANCE 18

APPENDIX A 20

WORKS CITED 22

Healing the World with Religious Music

A Closer Look at the Role of Religious Music in Creating Inner Peace

State of the World

"Throughout history, religious differences have divided men and women from their neighbors and have served as justification for some of humankind's bloodiest conflicts. In the modern world, it has become clear that people of all religions must bridge these differences and work together, to ensure our survival and realize the vision of peace that all faiths share."

-- H.R.H. Prince El-Hassan bin Talal, Jordan Moderator, WCRP Governing Board

Everyday we have an opportunity to bear witness to religious intolerances on display in the media as modern times are filled with uncertainty about terrorism and war. Amidst all of the finger pointing, hand-waving and confusion, many are beginning to realize that there will be no peace until there is ubiquitous religious tolerance. The situation seems insurmountable. Yet in spite of the present political and social climates, there is a universal cry for healing and peace – and music plays a large role in this healing process. At first glance the connections between music, peace and healing seem trivial. However, after taking a closer look at a variety of events staged in the name of promoting peace and healing, the significance is unquestionable. From the Dalai Lama, a Noble Peace Prize recipient, who gave musical concerts in

1999 promoting peace¹, to the United Nations declaring International Music and Peace Day², high profile peacemakers everywhere are using music as their instrument of choice for achieving global harmony. Celebrity actors and musicians are donating their time to produce musical works in an effort to raise the consciousness of the listeners, urging them to “Give Peace a Chance”.³ Moreover, at the heart of this musical movement is religion giving way to religious music. While the difference of religion is historically and presently the source of discord, the fundamental visions of peace are emerging within religious music as people begin to realize that the peace is something bigger than oneself. The recent acts of terrorism have touched people, America specifically, in a very personal way. There is a widespread personal need for peace and this is what fuels this movement. Visions of world peace are getting cloudy and the masses want a personal solution – they want inner peace; they want a personal miracle that helps them to recover from a seemingly hopeless situation. People are searching for God, and are finding Him through music. Even people who aren’t religious are receptive to the power of the music ministry. Time Life Magazine has drawn this connection and has organized a new campaign called “God Will Make a Way.” The new CD series is a collection of religious music for the purpose of getting through impossible times. Each CD in the series is categorized based on the musical

¹ http://www.tibet.ca/wtnarchive/1999/5/19_1.html

² <http://www.unesco.org/imc/mup.html>

³ The title of a song.

contents that speak to a specific human condition. A few examples are “Overcoming Unexpected Challenges”, “Calming Fear and Anxieties”, “Letting Go of Sorrow and Disappointment” and “Experiencing Peace Through Prayer [in Music].” Their infomercial consisted of a variety of “true-life stories of people who have overcome remarkable odds through these inspirational songs.”⁴ See Appendix A for the complete list⁵. It even comes with a guide book on using the music to deal with life’s problems, written by renowned psychologists Dr. John Townsend and Dr. Henry Cloud.

Why Religious Music?

If you have inner peace, you will have world peace.

Among the many forms in which the human spirit has tried to express its innermost yearnings and perceptions, music is perhaps the most universal...

-Dalai Lama .⁶

The aforementioned quote by the Dalai Lama speaks volumes. Why music – more importantly, why religious music? Why does the world turn to religious music during times of trouble? Why does the world look to religious music to uplift the spirit? Perhaps the answer is simply because it involves the spirit in the first place; maybe because it yields to a power greater than mankind, thereby addressing problems that seem insurmountable by mere mortals. No

⁴ http://www.timelife.com/is-bin/INTERSHOP.enfinity/eCS/Store/en/-/USD/DisplayProductInformation-Start:sid=2XIH9XV2lht_sUsZrg8H-VOzZGPqs1R7RrI=?ProductSKU=18617

⁵ http://www.timelife.com/is-bin/INTERSHOP.enfinity/eCS/Store/en/-/USD/DisplayProductInformation-Start:sid=2XIH9XV2lht_sUsZrg8H-VOzZGPqs1R7RrI=?ProductSKU=18617

“It is not by mere accident that music has always been used in religious worship, for religion and music arise from the same general part of our being. Religion is the most intimate of all human experiences, and music is the most intimate of the arts. Music is at once the most subjective, and the least concrete of all the arts; its subjectiveness is the most personal, its substance the least tangible. It has the very valuable property of stimulating the emotions and strengthening consciousness, yet at the same time regulating them through the sense of balance and proportion inherent in the art of music itself. Music is thus the ideal art for religious worship.”⁸

The Use of Spiritual Music to Influence Behavior

There is something here that people find which has to do not only with diversity but with spirit. They don't have to be closed off. They don't have to feel that "Oh God, I'm into something, it's a movement, and people are enjoying it and feeling it and committing to it and what can I do?" Well, what you do is just participate, be a part of it, be a part of the music on Sunday, be a mentor, be a volunteer.”

-Cecil Williams

Music is a form of communication that enhances religious celebrations and facilitates rituals. It can also entertain and give directives. From chanting to a full contemporary gospel band, some form of music has long been an integral part of the religions of the world. Music is the universal language that transcends all boundaries of culture, language and customs. There are many references to music as a form of prayer and praise in the Bible, Qur'an, Torah and many other religious books. In fact, the intersection of music and religion in Africa is so entangled there is no division. In the African roots it is believed that, “music reflects the beliefs of the community, sends prayers to particular gods of worship and calls on spirits to influence personal actions.”

⁸ <http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?action=openPageViewer&docId=213783>

leaders from Christian to Muslim prayed together enhanced by healing and comforting songs.

The Role of Music

“And his brother’s name was Jubal: he was the father of all such as handle the harp and organ.”
-Genesis 4: 21

Whether it is chanting or lyrical, music is a style of worship that plays an important role in the practice of religion. It is used for enhancement in various ceremonies, rituals, and occasions. Almost every religion includes music as a part of every service. In an interview with Scotty McClennen, the dean of religious studies at Stanford, we asked what religion would be without music. He said, “you cannot have religion without music”. In some religions such as Judaism and Christianity, music is used more heavily than others. The origin and viewpoint of church music varies in different religions and cultures and therefore is used very differently. For example, there is a lot of controversy in the Muslim religion concerning instrumental and lyrical music in worship. The traditional Islam religion did not permit instrumental music or vocal music unless it was a harmonious recitation (chant) of the Qur’an. Religious leaders were mindful of the powerful effects music has on people and was afraid to incorporate instruments and lyrics into their services. However, over the years the music of Islam has evolved to include instruments influenced by culture. In contrast, one Sunday I went to Jubilee, a church in San Jose, where there was a full one hour of music before they

joy accompanied by a number of instruments such as guitar, drums, piano, saxophone, bongo, organ and many more.

The use of instruments and non-Qur'anic lyrics were taboo in the traditional Muslim religion. The beginnings of what was to become an evolved musical art of Qur'anic recitation began with the prophet and his friends in Arabia.

This style of music is referred to in the Qur'an dating back to the time of Abû Bakr and Umar. The tradition is not to sing the Qur'an, but to chant it harmoniously. Although the chant was not designed for entertainment, one of the best known chanters, Yamanite Abû Mûs a al- Ash arî, was said to have a beautiful voice. The recitation was to be chanted in such a way that is humble and peaceful. The evolution of this style of music was greatly influenced by many different cultures.

Along with the Arab renaissance in the 19th and 20th century, Egypt made momentous progress in music. The Egyptian style of recitation became the de facto. In fact, popular secular Egyptian singers began their career reciting the Qur'an. This is analogous to many of the R&B, jazz and soul singers in the US originating in the church. We will delve into a deeper discussion of that later. The Turkish and Iranian style of Qur'an recitation is reflected in the timbre and tone of their musical traditions. Moreover, the North African and Arab Spain cultures are evident in their performance of the Qur'an.

during the time of the Maurya Dynasty (317-180 B.C.E.) where they included instruments such as harps, gongs, drums, flutes, and horns. Other countries that had an impact on Buddhism were Tibet and China. Tibet influenced the Buddhism by inserting there tradition of song, dance and unusual instruments. Chinese Buddhist music is uniquely different due to the transformation of traditional India song to more of a folk song style as well as their use if instruments like the gong, large bell, large drum, wooden fish, small cymbals, and large cymbals. Many Chinese emperors, who were devout Buddhist, contributed heavily to the development of Buddhist music. They also initiated the use of music in many conventional Chinese traditions. It wasn't until the 1990's that the music was performed in a large public setting. "From its humble beginnings, Buddhist Music has developed to such an extent that it is currently performed in temples and concert halls throughout the world and can now rival the beauty of western philharmonic orchestras."¹¹

Psychological Effect of Music

"In the twentieth century, especially in the last four decades, tons of research has been done on the interrelationship of music and human behavior. Although each study addresses slightly different aspects of this general premise, the aggregate conclusion is clear: music affects human behavior. It affects our moods, our attitudes, our emotions, and our behavior. It affects us psychologically and physiologically."¹²

Music is present in many elements of our daily lives. It is often played in doctor's offices, elevators, sporting events, stores, television, movies, and

¹¹ <http://www.blia.org/english/publications/booklet/pages/38.htm>

¹² <http://www.bibleinterp.com/articles/Music.htm>

the soul, release feelings of happiness, suffering, hope and faith. On an infomercial for “God Will Make A Way” music CD, survivors of the terrorists attacks were testifying to the powerful affect those songs had on them. Thelma Stuart, who lost her husband in the 9-11-01 attacks speaks on how she felt when she learned that her husband, a man who had spent his life saving thousands of lives as a police officer, died a hero rescuing men women and children from the falling skyscrapers. She felt hopeless as she was left to explain a seemingly unfair situation to her three month old child. Thelma Stewart went on to say “...this song has helped me to get through every single day” and “I always go back to this song for strength and courage”. Stanley Paimath, who worked on the 82nd floor of the World Trade Center, spoke of how he witnessed the airplane land on his floor. He survived, but found himself crying profusely feeling it unfair that he live when other around him died, including the firemen and rescue team members who applauded his rescue. He found that certain songs on the Time Life’s musical collection “soothe[d] the soul and comfort[ed] the mind”.¹³ Sheila Moody, who worked in the Pentagon, notes that she felt that, “God’s presence can come into your life while listening to a song.” There are countless examples of how this music changes people’s lives and the lives of people around them. There are a host of people who feel like they are experiencing God through their religious

¹³ God Will Make a Way, infomercial by Time Life Magazine and Integrity Music

•
•
•
•
•
•
•

music and it is this feeling that helps them to tackle problems that seem impossible.

Influence of High Profile People on the Public

“Since Mr. [Christopher] Reeve began appearing on Capitol Hill five years ago, federal research funding for spinal cord injuries has increased \$20 million — a 50% increase. Contrast that with lupus, which afflicts 1.4 million Americans, five times the number who suffer from spinal cord injuries, but receives less than two-thirds the federal funding.”

Celebrities can influence the public’s behavior. Companies use celebrities to endorse their products, because they know the impact high profile people have on the public. Musicians whether they want to or not influence millions of people through their actions and their art. They are leaders of masses; they set trends, and push their ideas and beliefs forward. Many people who are in the public eye use their wealth and influence to promote causes they care about. Garth Brooks, Mariah Carey, Eric Clapton, Britney Spears, Sting, Justin Timberlake, U2 are a few Americans musicians who have founded or support many philanthropic foundations. Moreover, celebrities have a large impact even in politics. When a celebrity lobbies for a cause in congress, they usually are successful. For example, Michael J. Fox and Muhammad Ali appealed to congress for more funding on Parkinson’s disease. Sharon Stone appealed for more funding to go towards AIDS research and succeeded while far more people suffer and die from diabetes and heart disease.

Role of Religion in High Profile People

There has been countless times where a musician will thank God first and foremost when accepting an award at music award ceremonies in America. The genres including, but not limited to Jazz, Rhythm and Blues (R&B), Pop, Reggae, Alternative, Rap and of course Gospel contain artists that have been influenced by religion. In fact, if you look closely at some artists' humble beginnings, most of their careers started in the church. R&B musicians such as Destiny's Child, Aaliyah, Lauryn Hill, and Whitney Houston bring their religion into their music making many references to God or Allah or by dedicating an entire song or an entire album devoted to His praise. Michael Jackson is an internationally well known Pop artist who was brought up as a strict Jehovah's Witness. His religious values and "heal the world" messages are manifested through his music as well as interviews and books. Stevie Wonder is currently working on a gospel album and others like Run DMC and MC Hammer, former hip-hop artists, are now ordained ministers.

Political and powerful leaders such as Jesse Jackson, Minister Louis Farrakhan, Reverend Al Sharpton, Al and Tipper Gore and Oprah Winfrey influence millions of people in this country and around the world. They also love gospel music. Dr. Bobby Jones hosts the first and only national gospel program which is aired on Black Entertainment Television (BET). During his twenty five years in gospel music, he has had the privilege to meet and get to know the aforementioned national figures and many secular and non-secular

popular musicians. With the backing of some of these influential people he has started many organizations including Project Help and Black Expo using gospel music and local celebrities to raise money and give back to the black community and educate the country on the problems that affect the black community. He has also been able to minister peace through Gospel music around the globe in areas that were in turmoil. For example, his choir visited South African as a part of the Gospel Music Association during the Apartheid controversy and Jerusalem during their battles with the Arabs. He states in his book that “everywhere we performed, people responded to gospel music”.¹⁴

Giving Peace a Chance


“The contributions of Buddhist music upon the world can be exemplified in a legend involving a famous Buddhist musician. During Sakyamuni Buddha’s time on earth (500 B.C.E.) there was a bhiksu named Pathaka whose voice was so beautiful that when he chanted Buddhist fanbei even animals that overheard him were touched. One day, King Kausala was leading a large army to invade Anga (a small state in ancient India) and on the way they encountered the Jetavana Monastery while Pathaka was in the middle of a chanting service. As soon as the horses heard the sound of Pathaka’s chanting, they became so absorbed in the sound that they came to a full stop and refused to advance any further. When the sound reached King Kausala, he was so moved by the beauty of the music that he could not bring himself to shed blood in battle and immediately decided to abandon his campaign and return home.”¹⁵

Fact or fiction, it really doesn’t matter the underlying message is clear. Music is a powerful tool that touches the heart, and religious music specifically heals the spirit and loosens hardened hearts. Until religious tolerance is learned, the world will always be on the brink of war. Moreover, world peace begins with

¹⁴ Jones, Bobby and Sussman Leslie, “Make a Joyful Noise: My 25 years in gospel music”, St. Martin’s Press, 2000.

¹⁵ <http://www.blia.org/english/publications/booklet/pages/38.htm>

individual inner peace. It begins on the personal level and music is a key element to interacting with the very personal human psyche.





Special Edition Guide Book

Written by renowned psychologists Dr. John Townsend and Dr. Henry Cloud, this 128-page personal guide book contains step-by-step tools for dealing with the issues in your life.



Bonus Inspirational Video

Packed with powerful, life-enhancing songs of hope and encouragement, performed by popular artists including Don Moen, Ron Kenoli, and Darlene Zschech. Includes true-life stories of people who have overcome remarkable odds through these inspirational songs, plus a special message from Don Moen, with guidance on how to use each component of God Will Make a Way.



•
•
•
•
•
•
•

Works Cited

World Tibet Network News, “Dalai Lama plans to promote peace through music (AP)”, Wednesday, May 19, 1999,
http://www.tibet.ca/wtnarchive/1999/5/19_1.html

International Music Council Website, Music and Peace,
<http://www.unesco.org/imc/mup.html>

Time Life, “God Will Make a Way”, http://www.timelife.com/is-bin/INTERSHOP.enfinity/eCS/Store/en/-/USD/DisplayProductInformation-Start;sid=2XIH9XV2lht_sUsZrg8H-VOzZGPqs1R7RrI=?ProductSKU=18617

Ashton, Joseph N., “Music in Worship: The Use of Music in the Church Service”, The Pilgrim Press, 1943.
<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?action=openPageViewer&docId=213783>

Donaldson-Evans, Catherine, “Muslim Musicians Rap About Islam” Monday, October 14, 2002, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,65540,00.html>

“*Coltrane and the jazz revolution*”,
<http://www.greenleft.org.au/back/1993/109/109p28.htm>

“Music and Buddhism”,
<http://www.blia.org/english/publications/booklet/pages/38.htm>

Burgh, Theodore W. Ph.D., “Music and Musical Instruments in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel/Palestine”, 2000,
<http://www.bibleinterp.com/articles/Music.htm>

Jones, Bobby and Sussman Leslie, “Make a Joyful Noise: My 25 years in gospel music”, St. Martin’s Press, 2000.