

Music

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Stony Brook, NY, January 2015

Rev. Margie Allen and Rev. Dr. Linda Anderson

Opening words

The whole problem can be stated quite simply by asking, Is there a meaning to music? My answer to that would be 'Yes.' And can you state in so many words what the meaning is? My answer to that would be 'No.' (Aaron Copland)

Chalice lighting and silence

Covenant (optional)

Check-in

Topic Introduction

In the beginning was a sound. For Hopi people this sound was a creating song, for the native peoples of Australia the sound was caused by beating the original seas with a reed. For the people of India the whole universe hangs on sound upon which all of human activity is dependent. (Elinor Artman) Christian scripture says the in the beginning was the word -- when spoken, a sound.

"Sound is a nutrient for our spirit as well as our body. It is how we express ourselves to the world. And sound in the form of music accompanies us throughout our lives, celebrating our brightest moments, sensualizing our romances, and offering comfort for our pain. For many of us, music is the bridge between the inner world and the external, between the invisible world of dreams and passions, and the concrete world we can see and touch. How music touches us is at once personal and universal.

Some sound patterns in nature seem musical; examples include: bird songs, whale songs, howling wolves and raindrops on the roof. Astronomers have been able to isolate the sound of the Big Bang and it turns out to be B-flat. It is 57 octaves below middle C and quite outside human hearing, but has been translated for human perception and can be found on the World Wide Web." (Jan Thomsen)

If music affects us in a spiritual way - at a level that transcends the realm of personalized emotions -then the music we ingest daily may influence the healthfulness of soul and spirit alike. For the music that is our steady diet resonates within our spirit longer than its effect upon our body, mind and emotions. It is in this sense that, on the spiritual level, the effects of music are cumulative and can, over time, either strengthen or weaken us. Likewise the music we hear within our minds can be every bit as powerful as the music we experience through our physical ears. For even though the actual music may have ceased, its influence on us may continue to resonate within and therefore permeate our mind, direct our emotional life, regulate our bodily energies and ultimately influence our spiritual aspirations and overall healthfulness. (Randall McClellan, *The Healing Forces of Music*)

Quotations

Activity: Making an Orchestra

(Facilitators: ask participants to bring a household object to the session. This object should not be a musical instrument but one which nevertheless

makes an interesting sound, like a glass you can tinkle or a plastic container you can beat or a paper bag you can blow up and explode, or dice in a cup, etc.)

Facilitator explain what will happen.

Ask participants to sit in a circle with their objects. The group will be an impromptu orchestra. Explain that the facilitator will begin by setting a beat. Ask participants to wait about 10 seconds and then come in, one at a time, with their instrument. When everybody has joined the orchestra, play for a short while then stop. When the facilitator stops that is the signal for everyone to stop. Sit in silence for three breaths. Then facilitator starts again with a different beat and everyone can join in whenever they want. Play for a while then stop. When the facilitator stops that is the signal for everyone to stop.

Take a minute for group reactions.

Questions for group reflection

1. What kinds of music did you grow up hearing? What were the circumstances? Were there people who influenced, joined, or opposed your musical choices? How did music influence your identity growing up?

2. Do you associate any particular music or song with key events in your life -- good or bad? (I.e. The song played at your wedding, popular music from your formative years, etc.) What does it mean to you? How do you feel when you hear it now? What pleasant and/or unpleasant associations do you make?

3. Are there ways you express yourself musically, like singing, composing, playing an instrument? How does it affect you? Is there an instrument, including voice, that you wish you played? Or that you used to and no longer make use of? Any regrets and/or longings around your ways of expressing yourself musically?

4. How does music both affect and reflect your emotional states? Does some music just make you feel happy? Sad? Energized? Do you seek out special music when you are feeling certain ways?

5. If you were a musical instrument, what would you be? Why?

6. Has there been a time when music has added to your sense of spirituality, or been influential in a particular spiritual experience? Tell us about it's effects on you. Does music play a role in your spirituality? What, if anything, does music contribute to your spiritual life that is unique and special?

Likes and wishes

Closing words and Chalice extinguishing

From John Wesley's Select Hymns, 1761: Directions for Singing

--Sing the songs exactly as they are printed here, without altering or mending them at all; and if you have learned to sing them otherwise, unlearn it as soon as you can.

--Sing lustily and with good courage. Beware of singing as if you were half dead, or half asleep. . .

--Sing modestly. Do not bawl, so as to be heard above or distinct from the rest. . .

--Sing in time. Whatever time is sung be sure to keep with it . . . And take care not to sing too slow.

--Above all sing spiritually. . . In order to do this attend strictly to the sense of what you sing. . .

Quotations

"All deep things are song. It seems somehow the very central essence of us, song; as if all the rest were but wrappings and hulls!" ~Thomas Carlyle

"Music expresses that which cannot be put into words and that which cannot remain silent." ~ Victor Hugo

"Those who dance are considered insane by those who cannot hear the music." ~ George Carlin

"Every time God's children have thrown away fear in pursuit of honesty- trying to communicate themselves, understood or not- miracles have happened." ~ Duke Ellington

"Music was my refuge. I could crawl into the space between the notes and curl my back to loneliness." ~ Maya Angelou

"If I should ever die, God forbid, let this be my epitaph: THE ONLY PROOF HE NEEDED FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD WAS MUSIC" ~ Kurt Vonnegut

"It's no good pretending that any relationship has a future if your record collections disagree violently . . ." ~ Nick Hornby

"Because when he sings...even the birds stop to listen." ~ Suzanne Collins

"Somebody just gave me a shower radio. Thanks a lot. Do you really want music in the shower? I guess there's no better place to dance than a slick surface next to a glass door." ~ Jerry Seinfeld

"If I can't dance to it, it's not my revolution." ~ Emma Goldman

"I've always thought people would find a lot more pleasure in their routines if they burst into song at significant moments." ~ John Barrowman

"Music is the strongest form of magic." ~ Marilyn Manson

"To be creative means to be in love with life. You can be creative only if you love life enough that you want to enhance its beauty, you want to bring a little more music to it, a little more poetry to it, a little more dance to it." ~ Osho