

Revitalizing Song

*Finding and presenting great new songs for your church which bridge
the traditional and the contemporary
Resources for Church Leadership*

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for the Greater Bridgeport Chapter of The American Guild of Organists

*Change is avalanching upon our heads and most people are grotesquely
unprepared to cope with it. Future Shock, Alvin Toffler 1970, p. 12*

Consumer electronics, the internet, and a seismic shift in the gadgets and music we consume all impact the music we hear music, the way we listen to it, and the music we connect to in worship. With ipods, mp3s, and organs and keyboards played with headphones - one might say that music today is much more personal and intimate than it's ever been before. We play whatever music we like, whenever we like - be it a Bach or rock - and in my case - both!

Having the capability to listen to and try vast stores of music online has dramatically broadened today's musical tastes leading to genres such 'crossover' and 'fusion' which meld styles. Classical musicians such as Yo-Yo Ma have led the way in bringing together classical, folk and indigenous and popular elements of music.

Rather than react - churches must construct a well thought-out plan for compelling worship. Contrary to heresay, the presence of praise music or even a praise service in a church does not mean the diminishment of the organ or traditional music or groups . It is possible for traditional and contemporary music to support each other and the growth of the church as we have witnessed at Attleboro Evangelical Covenant Church. The musician with a full toolbox of skills can assist the church in strategizing a well-rounded program and impact its success.

What music is right for my church and musicians?

In 1965 Vatican II propelled the Catholic Church into a new era of 'vernacular' expression. Since that time, most denominations have supported various movements of updating songs and liturgy - as has been done since the early church. Hymnals represent their era's musical and theological tastes. When observed from the perspective of history - we can see a continual refining of the canon of song. Although high-profile editors and musicians such as Ralph Vaughan Williams (The English Hymnal) and Sydney Nicholson (Hymns Ancient and Modern) each put their own indelible mark on their Hymnals, it is ultimately the people, swaying with their likes and dislikes, who decide the music which endures.

Music and liturgy which grow out of the talents, needs, traditions and polity of the church and community will energize the congregation and attract people creating synergy in worship and the church community. When this strategy intersects with denominational directives your church is in what Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi dubbed 'flow'.

In the late 20th century, mainline denominations made similar attempts to incorporate 'contemporary' music with Hymnal Supplements. These supplements contain hymns on subjects that were thought to be missing from the traditional canon of hymns – on war, bigotry, and apathy, and multiculturalism, to name a few. The battle over inclusive language continues to pit art against inclusivity. Most of these hymnal supplements were a failure because they were too narrow in their scope. Very few denominations were ready to embrace the growing trend of popular Christian music, even though the 'pop' and 'rock' genres had by then accumulated substantial longevity of over half a century – the 'rock' era is now in it's 70s – old as or older than most of us!

Strategies for Implementing Change

Church leaders implementing changes in music and liturgy, no matter how insignificant the changes may seem to them, should think carefully about their strategy, even when they have 'the right' or 'the power' to make those changes. The way in which changes are made will make all the difference in their success. Change which is intrinsic – growing from within the church – rather than imposed from the outside – will always be more readily embraced and more successful over time. Know where you want to go – and keep your eyes on it, but remember to treat people with kindness and respect as you go – they might teach you something you something unexpected.

Just as Hymnals are collections of past and present – so is most worship. Leaders who wish to revitalize worship must take into consideration factors such as:

- Worship style of preference of the congregants/parishoners (and compare it to others in the community)
- Present musical human resources (in the church and in the community at large)
- Styles of music which resonate with the denomination and the community
- Financial resources for licensing, copying, musician's time (The work of keeping worship updating worship is ongoing and time consuming.)
- How to present lyrics/music outside of a Hymnal (To project or not to project)
- Emotional and subjective reactions from congregants undergoing change and how to manage them

Often, musicians, clergy, and laity are unskilled in managing conflict. Any of them may overreact spinning a whole new set of dynamics and problems into the mix. A church who has an ongoing commitment to education in team building, conflict resolution and professional development will have a clear edge during times of change.

Some successful strategies for introducing new music

- Work tirelessly to have your team working in the most positive ways to support the new music
- Have children/youth present it first
- Use instrumentation appropriate to the particular piece
- Use musicians in the congregation who are beloved (change perceived as coming from within)
- Present new music in an environment of more familiar music
- Brainstorm new and novel ways/services to use new styles which will not threaten current worship

Where will you find 'pushback' ?

- Musicians/ Clergy/Congregants who have misperceptions about the quality of contemporary 'praise' literature
- Administrative Assistants who become overworked printing leaflets, downloading lyrics, designing projection sheets
- Musicians/clergy/Congregants resistant to change
- Musicians/Clergy who lack knowledge of the possible repertoire, skills with instruments/instrumentalists
- Musicians who fear being marginalized by or losing their jobs to rock musicians
- The lyrics are too conservative (see workshop songs for rebuttal of this), the lyrics are too 'ME' centered, the theology of the lyrics
- Peer pressure from other musicians or clergy – snob pressure (this is often centered in misinformation)
- Projecting text can often present major hurdles
- Making room for instruments can become a battleground
- Real or perceived lack of instrumentalists to present desired style of music

What not to do (Disasterous strategies I've witnessed as Councillor)

- The new clergy throws out the hymnals in favor of projected lyrics
- Clergy embarrasses the organist in front of the choir by telling (him/her) she is incompetent
- Vital music parish decimated by marginalizing musician and importing seminary Praise Team.
- Clumsy transition strategy by clergy and laity involving bad timing of transition, false accusations, giving the musician a pink slip while on tour with the choir, etc.

The Role of the Music Director

When church leadership hires a musician, they choose someone who not only has appropriate musicianship skills, but who also has managerial, organizational, leadership and interpersonal skills commensurate with the needs of the music program and the church. For the traditional church musician – this has meant primarily having proficiency in organ and choral arts. The other so called ‘soft skills’ and leadership skills are curiously absent from college curricula. It is assumed that they are learned ‘on the job’.

Today’s church musicians have many more skills to develop – improvisational skills, reading lead sheets, developing knowledge of electronic equipment, proficiency with keyboards and their functions, and increasingly vital tech skills including use of various software including notation programs, website and marketing savvy and social networking. Perhaps the most important of all to develop is the ability to attract people into the program who will people your new style of presentation. Musicians, clergy and laity must work together in unconditional mutual support to allow this to happen seamlessly.

When I began work at Attleboro Covenant, I had no experience with leading handbell ensembles. One of the ringers said to me in the very most supportive and humorous way “Would you like us to train you?” I said, “YES, PLEASE!”

The church musician who can take on humility for the sake of learning from those around him on the job will not only glean lot of information and skill from other musicians, but also develop a rapor and spirit of camaraderie among the musicians which is invaluable.

Our Team and How we Collaborate

*When is the last time a member came out of a service and exclaimed to you –
“We ought to have to pay to hear this music!” ???*

Our Worship Team has been in place in various stages of development for many years. We are truly blessed to have trained instrumentalists and life-long musicians - I learn from them every week. Worship teams and bands operate on a different model than traditional church choirs. Like the Director/Choir model – everyone ‘s contribution is valued, and the Music Director still has final responsibility for the end result. But the way we accomplish that end is different. Work is more collaborative – each person bringing ideas from his own area of expertise, experience and interest. This can only work with a secure musician, pastor(s) and laity who are willing to maintain a sense of curiosity and wondering about the possibilities for worship.

We use a Facebook page – *ECC of Attleboro Worship Team* to share information and ask questions. It's open and anyone can join. I post clippings of renditions I like of songs we're doing from YouTube. We can have conversation on the page – listen and practice ahead of rehearsal in order to come to rehearsal prepared and get more out of the limited time we have. I also maintain a list of our current songs including songs we might like to try on Spotify. The list is called 'Praise'. I also maintain a list called Praise Albums which includes many more tracks I still want to hear and assess.

Our rehearsals are collaborative – the Music Director supports the other instrumentalists in their individual leadership areas. We begin setting up and tuning up at 7:30-7:40 for a 45 minute pre-service rehearsal for an 8:30 service every Sunday morning. Some of our musicians miss as few as a couple Sundays per year!! In worship, a lead guitar/vocalist will verbally lead the congregation and segue between songs. We have extended rehearsals on designated Sundays after the traditional service – around noon.

We use instruments available to us. Like most church groups, sometimes we have an excess of drummers, bass players, etc when we can only use one. Other than those exceptions, we find ways to incorporate instrumentalists and look for repertoire to involve them.

From time to time we have more vocalists. When that happens – I look for ways to present songs in parts. Most often we will do echo responses as parts, or improvise descants or harmony parts below or above the melody.

Musical Styles in Contemporary Christian Music

Churches have many options in musical styles which I'm certain are familiar to most including Catholic liturgy from GIA and OCP (Oregon Catholic Press), Taize, Jazz and Gospel, so-called English praise music such as *I the Lord of Sea and Sky*, the Iona (Wild Goose Ecumenical movement), John Bell, and celtic movement.

Mainline denominations have shied away from contemporary Christian and praise music calling it 'charismatic'. If one examines the way we get our entertainment today – it isn't difficult to see from where this vernacular form of music originates. The variety of settings of the songs is infinite and ranges the full gamut from rock to simple acoustic guitar accompaniment, with lots of instrumental settings thrown in along the way. Like any other movement in music – the enduring classics separate themselves from the rest of the pack over time. This is true with all music – and art in general. One of the most interesting movements in contemporary Christian music is the recycling of old songs and hymns with fresh settings and original praise bridges – these beloved songs are what I call the Christian equivalent of 'Standards'.

Some of my favorite Hymns with Praise bridges are

New Doxology – Ken, Miller

Come thou fount, come thou King – Robinson, Miller

The Wonderful Cross – Tomlin and Reeves

Jesus paid it all – Hall and Nifong

O worship the King – Chris Tomlin

There is also a proliferation of fusion-type choral arrangements of old songs/hymns with praise songs. Look for further info in the Bibliography. As with all choral octavos, musicians should look with a critical eye to quality of the arrangement and the needs of their program and musicians. A short but by no means exhaustive list:

Paul Baloche

This composer's work has many classical elements which make it ideal for crossover-type situations. *We adore thee, Your name*

Keith Getty and Stuart Townend

These composers aim to keep their music biblically tethered – *In Christ Alone, Speak, O Lord*

Hillsong

This group has done over 40 full-length recordings since 1992 and is at the top of the Australian charts. *Shout to the Lord, The Power of Your Love*

Robin Mark

Celtic Christian rock. *Garments of praise, All for Jesus*

Fernando Ortega

Singer/Songwriter/Pianist with lovely acoustical adaptations of hymns and original songs. *Sing to Jesus, Be Thou my Vision*

Matt Redman

This singer/songwriter is writing enduring quality music with depth such as *Blessed be Your Name* and *The Wonderful Cross* (hymn with praise bridge)

Chris Rice

Keep it simple – Chris has a knack for choosing the best of the old and making it fresh. Primarily acoustic. His album *Peace Like a River* is one of the best introduction to acoustic praise in the form of revitalized hymns. You will never hear *Peace like a River, The Old Rugged Cross* and *Rock of Ages* the same again.

Michael W. Smith

Practically everything this singer/songwriter does turns to gold – positively infectious! *All is well, A New Hallelujah*

Chris Tomlin

This is one of the most creative singer/songwriters on the scene today. Many of his hymn settings are set like chorale preludes with a recurring countermelody to the cantus. *Unspeakable Joy* (on *Joy to the World*), *Amazing grace, my chains are gone*

I encourage you to sign on to [Spotify](#) and find your own favorites. Or follow my [Praise](#) list to get started or [Praise albums](#) for further exploration. Start by checking out these three styles of doing *How great thou art* by Paul Baloche, Chris Rice and Carrie Underwood. Check out Chelsea Moon singing *What Wondrous Love is this* – nice adaptation with strings. In *We fall down*, Chris Tomlin does a masterful rendition with piano, keyboard and cello. Lovely choice for a crossover situation.

You'll know a great song by the number and variety of artists who have chosen to perform it. When these artists span different genre's and styles – this is the marker of a truly great song – *How Great thou art*, *It is well with my soul*. You can tell a great text by it's successful pairings with different songs.

I keep a spread sheet of our praise library as well as songs that interest us. I rate the song A+, A-, etc, give any seasonal or style information, composer/s, hints for performance, biblical reference, refrain, hymn adaptation or bridge, and last few times used. I'm always especially interested to note songs appropriate for Advent, Christmas, Lent or Easter

Theology of the lyrics

What's the word that most often begins a "praise song"? It fits with the igeneration of personal digital everything – 'I'. Many of these lyrics sound very close to secular love songs - such as *You're all I want*, *It is You*, and *Arms of Love*. Another complaint about the praise genre is the lack or theological grounding. This is natural in an era with more individual experimentation in 'spirituality'.

One of the biggest complaints about contemporary Christian songs is their conservative theology and, sometimes, agenda. This doesn't have to be a deal breaker, as it is not true of all the literature, and possibly not even the majority of the literature, though I haven't studied this in any systematic or scientific way. Church leaders should screen music on a song-by-song basis, just as they do with songs from any Hymnal. We each develop our list of 'won't go there' themes whether it is militaristic imagery, nationalism (Zionism), or too much emphasis on shame (not enough emphasis on love), to name a few.

Sometimes adapting lyrics is appropriate, though I rarely do that. I prefer to look for the combination of music and lyrics which is right for the church as well as for me. I say it that way because my first priority is to serve the mission of the church, however, I must find ways to do that which I myself can embrace so that both my work and the music have integrity.

Online resources

I use [CCLI Premium](#) (Christian Copyright Licence) for downloading much of the music we use. A Premium license for a church between 250 and 500 with copyright and song printing – their full package outside of streaming – was \$466 this week. I also use [PraiseCharts.com](#) which has tiers of purchasing based on 50 or 100 songs loaded. You can also pay per piece, but it's much more expensive. [Onelicense.com](#) covers a lot of publishing houses – and I'm sure there are other resources as well. We also use [Musicnotes.com](#). [YouTube](#) is another great place to hear new music. What I love about YouTube is the ease with which you can post a link to [Facebook](#) or email to share with others. (There are many others as well.)

Some things to keep in mind when choosing where to spend your money

- Inquire about ability to transpose – when, and to what keys you may transpose.
- Will the platform work with both windows and mac (some are more troublesome on mac)
- Does the site offer any additional resources – song ratings, top 20, 50 or 100s lists? Easy ability to paste lyrics, link-up to worship planning software like [Proclaim](#). On CCLI you can look at charts for top-rated songs, watch instructional videos, and link up to conferences.
- Is it easy to search the database and print
- CCLI has some wonderful resources
- We don't use a video or streaming licenses – but if you are broadcasting or narrowcasting – you must also get this license.

I highly recommend getting Spotify premium (\$9.99/mo) for learning more about any kind of music. (Some like Pandora – that's great, too.)

The advantages are numerous

- Infinite playlists to keep favorites sorted
- Numerous ways to search for songs, albums, artists, and playlists
- Ability to share music and learn from others
- Expand your range of listening exponentially by clicking on the source album for a song and check out new songs.

Technical skills to develop

See the attached appendix for a primers on reading lead sheets, using keyboards and their features effectively, and studying jazz organ style.

Another appendix discusses equipment you will need for various different styles and instruments, such as mikes, speakers, amplifiers, stands, drums and other rhythm instruments, and mixers.

Many traditional organists are uncomfortable with improvising. The American Organist magazine of The American Guild of Organists frequently publishes articles by different people laying out strategies for improvising in various ways and for different needs in worship. If these are not sufficient, get a teacher and study it for a while. The same holds true for learning jazz organ. Using these skills every week will definitely help.

Most church musicians are familiar with arranging music for their musicians own unique instruments and voices. It's no different with new music. Putting together medleys, soloing out melodies for instruments, creatively adapting favorite hymns to other renditions/instruments will bring the music alive to your congregation.

Appendix - Questions for Church Leadership

1. If we are committed to communication in the vernacular of the community, should our music reflect that vernacular? To what extent?
2. What is the purpose of music in worship?
3. How do you view your 'calling' as a church musician or pastor/ priest?
4. How is your 'calling' related to the greater purposes of music in worship and worship and music in the life of the church?
5. What makes good congregational song?
6. How are hymns structured? How do they differ from praise songs? How are they the same?
7. Are there styles of music better suited to sacred worship than others? Conversely, are there styles of music not suited to worship?
8. What is the future of the organ?

Bibliography (very brief since most of your resources are online)

All the Best of Praise and Worship, Vol 1-4, Lillenas/Hal Leonard (spiral bound)

These are nice compilations at an entry level for a reasonable price of around \$20. One caveat – sometimes the songs are abbreviated. I recommend cross-checking with another source. The abbreviated versions sometimes are useful as responses.

iWorship publications including Connect, Total Christmas and 24-7, also volumes for kids, by Hal Leonard

The bar for inclusion in these compilations is usually high. Worth a try – or check out at your local music store.

YouTube Instructional links

Paul Baloche – Our God saves

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mCTzf7IS9AE&feature=share&list=PL0EC0014A24868156>

Great Redeemer – story of composing a song

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SHeAfBXolqA&feature=share&list=PL0EC0014A24868156>

A few good choral arrangements

Breathe – Marie Barnett arranged by Derek Hakes, Hope C5446 choral octavo, handbell/handchimes parts 2387, Synth C5446S

*This is a wonderful medley of Marie Barnett's **Breathe** and **Breathe on me, Breath of God**. I have used it in choral festivals and people always love it.*

Blended Worship, settings by Tom Fettke, Lilleas, CD, Accompaniment CD, and Orchestration Simplified choir arrangements which include **I Sing Praises** blended with **O For a Thousand Tongues** among other combinations.

Easy Choir, Volumes containing blended anthems by Jack Schrader, Hope Publishing The various volumes contain a veritable hit parade of old and new praise and popular hymns. A contingency plan if your choir prefers 4 parts. Some anthems have 4 part sections, but sections usually vary unison, 2-part, and 3 and 4 parts.

A few good CDs

Peace like a River – Chris Rice

Wow Worship albums

Deeper – 2 hours of Deep Worship for Prayer and Intercession

iWorship albums

Worship and Adore (Integrity)

The Attleboro Evangelical Covenant Worship Team

Tom Bonnarigo, Drums

Liam Harreys, Electric Guitar

Scott Kwart, Guitar, Vocals

Kent Pigeon, Guitar, Vocals

Bill Urmson, Hammond B3, Bass, New England Conservatory

Beth Thomas, Ted Smietana Vocals

Cheryl Duerr, Minister of Music, Organ, Piano and Flute, MM Boston University

Ms. Duerr, AAGO, serves as Councillor for Region I and is also a member of the International Coach Federation currently acquiring accreditation as a Personal/Professional Coach. *"I love people and I love music. I've tried to find as many ways as I can to employ those passions."* Ms. Duerr worked most of her career

in large Episcopal parishes around Boston. Currently she is enjoying her tenure as Minister of Music at Attleboro Covenant. She leads 2 diverse Sunday services, one Praise-based and one Traditional, leading The Chancel Choir, The Celebration Ringers, The Junior Choir and Junior Ringers, as well as the Worship Team. In addition to it's commitment to contemporary worship, the church has a fine tracker organ which attracts many listeners to the postlude each Sunday. She lives in Lexington, MA and credits her sons with giving her the best education of her life.

The Evangelical Covenant Church (ECC) is an evangelical Christian denomination of more than 800 congregations in the United States and Canada. Founded in 1885 by Swedish immigrants, the church is now one of the most rapidly growing and multi-ethnic denominations in North America. Historically Lutheran in theology and background, it is now a broadly evangelical movement.

This handout is intended as a point of departure. It is not exhaustive and will most certainly contain some holes which will be filled in subsequent editions. I hope it will provoke interest and inspire you towards RE-Vitalizing music in your worship services. A New Hallelujah expresses this Re-Vitalization beautifully.

A New Hallelujah

Can you hear there's a new song, Breaking out from the children of freedom
Ev'ry race and ev'ry nation, Sing it out sing a new hallelujah yeah

Let us sing love to the nations, Bringing hope of the grace that has freed us
Make it known and make Him famous, Sing it out sing a new hallelujah yeah

Refrain

Arise, let the church arise, Let love reach to the other side
Alive, come alive, Let the song arise.

America sings a new song, Reaching out with a new hallelujah
Ev'ry son and ev'ry daughter, Ev'ryone sing a new hallelujah

Refrain

Bridge (women sing echo in parentheses)

Woh (woh) yeah (yeah)

Let the song arise, (Let the song arise), Yeah (yeah)

Let the song arise, (Let the song arise)

Ev'ryone sing a new hallelujah, Ev'ryone sing a new hallelujah
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