
If Music be the Food of Love...



How come christians get so steamed up about it?

We live in an age of extremes in musical taste. In the same christian household may be heard the classical order of J.S. Bach or the screamed monotones of punk rock played at volumes which would require ear-protectors in industry. The difficulty is that spiritual values are often given to certain kinds of music, so that one no longer regards other people's tastes as "poor", but as unspiritual, even demonic.

I prefer to look at what music actually is, and what it can and can't do, so that we can all breathe a bit easier in front of the stereo.

One of the main sources of concern about music is that it is, quite unscripturally, said to speak directly to the spirit, and so to be able to damage our relationship with God. Writing as a musician whose faith has always been tied up with music, I can only say that this view credits music with more power than it actually has. The wonder of music is that it can stir

up the emotions more than any other art-form; but emotions are only the raw ingredients of experience, and are only good or bad according to what they are stirred up about.

For example, take a piece which is probably in the collection of anyone with the least interest in orchestral music; "The Planets", by Gustav Holst. I was drawn to it because of an early interest in astronomy, and wove my own fantasies about it. "Mars, the Bringer of War" conjured up armoured creatures from H.G. Wells. "Venus, the Bringer of Peace" evoked images of an unfallen world of tranquillity and exotic plants, and so on for the other movements. It wasn't until a year or two ago that I learned that Holst hadn't been keen on astronomy at all, but astrology, and that all this music was intended to show the influence of the planets over our lives. Hardly the same thing at all! Yet the music had never suggested this aspect to me, nor led me to dabble in horoscopes. And I still find nothing wrong in listening to it, for even if Holst's explanation of the

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piece is pagan, the emotions it evokes are God—given. The same goes, I am sure, for rock, jazz, highland pibrochs or Masai cattle-songs.

Good music, then, is that which is successful in making the hearer experience true human feelings: good christian music will direct those emotions to the spiritual realm so the hearer will better comprehend its reality. It is obviously our responsibility to listen to what will help our spiritual growth, but we need not, I believe, be afraid of letting demons in by the back door by hearing non-christian tunes.

I often wonder why much “christian” music is so bland and unemotional, when we have such a message to get excited about, a passion to weep over, and a hope of such overwhelming joy. Who knows, if we were a bit more willing to be completely carried away by music, as they clearly were in biblical times, it might just bring us nearer the Lord***

JCG

