

What Is the Best Music for Worship?

By Dr. Charlotte Kroeker

One of the phrases in CMI's mission statement is that CMI tries in all we do to use the "best" of sacred music, remembering that we also aim to be "Informed by the past, Committed to the present, and Preparing for the future." So what is the "best" music?

No one would likely argue that God deserves what we offer in worship to be less than our best. But what is the best? It is not an easy answer. All church music must function in a particular environment at a particular time, and with the resources at hand. The "best" can represent the finest craft at any given point. Time helps to sift what is best, to that which is lasting.

Dallas composer and church musician Jane Marshall was also a deeply theological thinker.* She gave an example of the difference between a plastic spoon and a sterling spoon as a way of thinking about good church music. Both spoons function equally well, and for her, the plastic spoon was much more practical when she traveled and wanted ice cream on the road. Would she pass a plastic spoon on to her children? Not likely

Marshall then goes on to identify at least four characteristics of quality to apply to good church music:

- Universality. Good music speaks across locations and cultures. Chinese folk melodies, tribal Kenyan dances, Mozart in Tokyo, spirituals, are examples

of music that crosses boundaries. A plastic spoon will break in all but soft foods; sterling will not.

- Timelessness. The same characteristics in chant from medieval times are present in Bach, Duke Ellington, shape-note melodies, and American folk tunes. A sterling spoon will function across generations.
- Involvement of the whole person. Good music will appeal to body, mind and spirit — not only one of those elements. If it is only intellectual, it is hard to become a good friend. If it is only emotional, it will not last. A sterling spoon not only satisfies a practical purpose but it has lasting aesthetic qualities.

***Would she pass a plastic spoon on to her children?
Not likely ...***

- Ability to speak uniquely. Good music functions in an almost undefined way that cannot be duplicated. Sometimes we call this inspiration or genius. It is what we aspire to in planning for worship: *transcendence*.

Jane Marshall goes on to say that it takes time to learn what is the finest of music. Only prolonged exposure

can hone the skills required to identify universality, timelessness, ability to capture a total human response, and the uniqueness of any piece of music. People with these skills are who CMI gathers repeatedly, to reach for the "best."

One more important aspect of church music, and one that is vitally important to how Church Music Institute functions, is **accessibility**. Accessible music and good music are compatible criteria. Good music can be accessible to everyone.

In order for church music to work in any one time or place and for any gathered group of people, it has to be accessible as a vehicle for worship. How is that determined? By the good judgment and knowledge of the clergy and musicians in that congregation who understand what will be possible for the congregation. They will know what music is immediately accessible, and how to prepare for any other music.

What does this mean for the Church Music Institute? It means all of our music must be categorized so worship planners can find music for their particular congregation. That is how our libraries are built! With many search criteria, a congregation of any size and resources can be served with the "best" music to worship God for their time and place.

* Jane Marshall, *Grace Noted*. Carol Stream, IL: Hope Publishing. 1992.

Summer Course June 12-23, 2023—Congregational Song

This intensive online summer course, presented in cooperation with Brite Divinity School (TCU), is a historical survey of the church's hymnody and underpinning of psalmody. The course is available for three hours graduate credit for clergy and musicians through Brite, or as documented non-credit/audit participation through CMI.

Organized around Robert Mann's *The Church Sings Its Faith*, the course covers church music from the Psalms in the Hebrew scriptures through contemporary styles. Faculty include CMI staff Dr. Charlotte Kroeker, Dr. Rene Schmidt, and Rev. Dr. Julie Adkins; as well as other scholars from around the country:

- Dr. James Abbington, Associate Professor of Music and Worship, Candler School of Theology
- Dr. Wilma Ann Bailey, Minnie Vautrin Professor of Christian Witness and Professor of Hebrew and Aramaic Scripture, Emerita, Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis, Indiana
- Dr. Zebulon M. Highben, Director of Chapel Music at Duke University Chapel and Associate Professor of the Practice of Church Music at Duke Divinity School
- Roger Holland, Teaching Associate Professor in Music and Religion and Director of The Spirituals Project at the Lamont School of Music, University of Denver
- Rev. Dr. James Marriott, Assistant Professor of Music and Department Coordinator (Chair) of Music at Concordia University (Texas)
- Rev. Dr. Don E. Saliers, Theologian-in-Residence, Candler School of Theology; retired as the William R. Cannon Distinguished Professor of Theology and Worship at Candler
- Rev. Dr. Paul Westermeyer, Emeritus Professor of Church Music and Cantor at Luther Seminary, where he directed the Master of Sacred Music degree program with St. Olaf College.

Deadline for applications is May 1: www.churchmusicinstitute.org/graduate-course-in-congregational-song-applications/

Dr. Kroeker Speaks at AGO Meeting

Madison, WI. On January 20, twenty members and guests attended a dinner at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church ... Following the meal, a presentation was given by Charlotte Kroeker, executive director of the Church Music Institute in Dallas, Texas. Kroeker spoke about the influence of sacred music on various movements in the history of the church, making the point that music can also positively impact the church in the future. At certain points in the presentation, attendees sang hymns, accompanied on the organ by Don Horisberger, representing different movements in church history. The presentation was followed by a question and answer session focused on current challenges and opportunities experienced by churches and church musicians. Andrew Schaeffer, dean, won the drawing for Kroeker's book *The Sounds of Our Offerings: Achieving Excellence in Church Music*. Printed information on the Church Music Institute was available for interested persons to take with them.



(from the April 2023 issue of *The American Organist*, publication of the American Guild of Organists)

Another Story of Our CMI Supporters: Two Love Stories, Two Generations Apart

His great-grandfather, a pastor, established a church in a western town in the 1800s. The pastor's daughter played the pump organ for services. A certain handsome young man (to be Grandfather) was the Sunday School Superintendent who also operated the air pump for the pipe organ. The inevitable happened: the Sunday School Superintendent married the Organist (to be Grandmother), even though his family thought his marrying into a different family would have been a better financial decision. It was a marriage based on love. The woman he loved was a church organist who loved music, the music of the church. Theirs was a union built on love with commitments to each other and God, and always surrounded by music.

Grandfather and Grandmother had a daughter (Mother) who was a fine pianist and who played the piano regularly at home for her family. Mother made sure he had a fine instrument and piano lessons throughout his developmental years. His musical ability was noted as early as 4th grade, when he sang a solo for the school Christmas program. He started piano lessons at age ten. He played an audition including masterworks of the piano repertoire for the National Guild of Piano Teachers, receiving an excellent score card, and remarks from the judges that encouraged his continuing study. He had a superb music teacher in 6th, 7th, and 8th grades who taught the students to sing in three parts. He sang in the high school glee club.

He loved music but knew his career path was not to be a professional musician. That did not, however, deter his passion for singing, taking organ lessons while getting an advanced degree, and, when he married, delaying the start of his career so he and his bride could attend a full season of opera and finish their educations before settling into domestic life. Oh, and despite the opinions and alternative suggestions of family and friends, he married for love. Just like his grandparents. He married a brilliant woman who shared his love of music and service, and his life goals. He played his Grandmother's Steinway in the evenings to entertain his wife while she prepared dinner, which was often accompanied by her favorite dinner music: Mozart.

When their community needed arts and culture they, along with others, established a decreasing fund to bring talented artists to perform. When the Symphony needed help, they made a lead gift to inspire others to join them. When the local college needed a performing space, they helped build an auditorium. When the church needed an organ, they made sure the best organ available was secured, and followed the process from choice of builder to installation of the pipes. Now the organ remains the foundation of a music program that flourishes after decades in a culture where church music otherwise might have faltered. That pipe organ, one of the few in the area, is the rock upon which significant music for worship can stand.

His wife has been "promoted" now, and he still plays the piano every day. His hands are nimble and strong. The repertoire of his earlier years serves him well, as do the hymns he loves. He finds the last stanza of "The Church's One Foundation" especially meaningful as he misses his wife so much....

Yet she on earth has union with God, the Three in One,
And mystic sweet communion with those whose rest is won:
O happy ones and holy! Lord, give us grace, that we,
Like them, the meek and lowly, May live eternally.

Two love stories. Two generations apart. Two lifelong commitments made for all the right reasons. One continuing family whose lives were bound by love, faith, and music; who have made the world a better place because they lived, loved, were faithful to God, and made music.

We thank these donors and all the generous supporters who make the work of CMI possible.



Bob Chilcott

October 7-8

CMI in collaboration
with Highland Park
United Methodist
Church

Dallas, Texas

Saturday Online Workshops Reach More Than 200 Attendees — So Far

A total of 241 “students” have attended CMI’s Saturday morning workshops in January through March. Not surprisingly, most attendees were church musicians, but there was also a scattering of clergy and of congregation members who are/were not paid staff.

Here are some interesting “factoids” about the workshops and those who attended:

- By far the best attended workshop (66 people) was on January 28: “What Every Church Musician Needs to Know But No Course Ever Taught Us”
- January 28 also had the most first-time attendees: 19
- Online events are engaging more attendees more often
- The workshop that gained the most attention from clergy (3 attendees) is one that you probably would not guess: “Lent: Borrowing the Language of Bach’s Passion—the Organ Chorales.”
- In the past year attendees to CMI events have come from 43 states and 2 foreign countries

Workshops presented thus far:

- What Every Church Musician Needs to Know But No Course Ever Taught Us (Prof. Ellen Johnston)
- Fr. Michael Joncas Returns to Probe His Collection of Lenten Hymns
- Lent: Borrowing the Language of Bach’s Passion—the Organ Chorales (Rev. Kathryn Johnson)
- Practical Session on Choral and Vocal Techniques for Cantors and Choral Singers (Ms Joanne Werner)
- Musicians and Clergy Working Together (Profs. Ellen Johnston and Bill Roberts)
- Highlights of African American Choral Music (Dr. James Abbington)

Looking Forward

June 27 to 30 — CMI at the American Guild of Organists Regional Convention in Tulsa, OK.

August 4th and 5th — CMI Summer Intensive: “Equipping Leaders to Serve the Saints”

August 6 through 8 — “Music and Worship: Imagine & Explore.” Retreat designed especially for early career church musicians

To register for either or both of the August events: www.churchmusicinstitute.org/events

October 7th and 8th— Bob Chilcott in collaboration with CMI at Highland Park United Methodist Church, 3300 Mockingbird Lane, Dallas, TX

Did you know?

A CMI membership gives you access to our extensive, carefully curated repertoire searchable by scripture, hymn tune, composer, and more! To become a member, sign up at www.churchmusicinstitute.org/membership/

Let’s Connect!

@churchmusicinstitute on Instagram, as well as on Facebook and Twitter, to keep up with the latest CMI happenings!



The Church Music Institute is a proud partner of the American Choral Directors Association and the American Guild of Organists.



Dr. Charlotte Kroeker, Executive Director
214.751.7669 | info@churchmusicinstitute.org
8100 Lomo Alto Drive, Suite 260, Dallas, TX 75225
churchmusicinstitute.org

Dedicated to the advancement of the best liturgical and sacred music for Christian worship, serving clergy, musicians, and congregants.