

Encountering God

By Dr. Charlotte Kroeker

Hopefully, we've all had the experience. We attend a worship service or mass and something special happens. We lose ourselves in the music, readings, prayers, the eucharist, and leave knowing we have been changed. We experience God in new ways and our world is different. We are taken to a different place during that hour+ and are renewed. What happened? How did it work? How can it be replicated?

For anyone who plans liturgies and music, this is always the goal: transformative worship. Sometimes it happens, sometimes not; every worshipper is not the same. We come from different places and experiences, yet we come with expectations. There are no simple answers or mandates, but let's try to describe what encounter with God might look like.

1. We come with openness. This is hard in the rough and tumble of everyday life that intrudes in our ability to be open to God and others. At our best, we come to give and receive love. Richard Rohr describes it this way: "Great love is always a discovery, a revelation, a wonderful surprise, a falling into 'something' much bigger and deeper that is literally beyond us and larger than us." We put ego aside to be open to the new and loving.
2. We come to belong to a community of faith. According to a recent Pew survey about online and in-person worship, "Among those who participate in both forms of worship and prefer attending in person, the most common reason respondents give is a stronger sense of connection and community with fellow participants. About half (52%) say this – more than three times [those] who name any other reason."²
3. We encounter an experience of loving God with heart, soul, and mind, and leave with capacity to love our neighbor as ourselves. (Matthew 22:37-38)
4. We come to be a part of a community that sings. In her article "Singing is good for you. Singing with others may be even better." Alexandra Moe speaks of research with members of the Washington Chorus who rehearse at National Presbyterian Church in D.C. They say when they enter the rehearsal they "escape whatever was outside." Singers provided a saliva sample to researchers to determine whether singing affected their health and mood. It did so positively.³ If the congregation is the first choir, such advantages are not limited to the rehearsed choir. Singing is important.
5. We find a service/liturgy thoughtfully planned and offered. The flow of the service is without disruption where leaders melt seamlessly into the greater goal of worship. Nothing they say or do calls attention to themselves or anyone else.
6. We experience a space free of visual distractions. The space is intentionally religious, tasteful, and designed to give greater meaning to the experience in the space. Leaders are dressed to keep attention away from themselves.
7. We hear music well-rehearsed. The congregation is prepared so they know what, when and how to sing.
8. We uncover truths in spoken words, prayers, music that transcend time and place, and yet truths are rooted in time-bound experiences where the spirit is fed and a renewed faith empowers service in the world beyond.
9. We experience music worthy of its capacity to influence long beyond the moment. Cognitive neuroscientist Susan Rogers says, "Music and memory are devoted mental partners. Our memory for songs. . .is surprisingly resistant to decay, even in the face of physiological damage." Further, "Linking words to melody 'doubles up' brain activity by engaging both the left and right auditory cortices. This 'dual encoding' of memories . . .may have contributed to the preservation of oral histories."⁴ Hence, the importance of "Sing to the Lord" and centrality of the Songbook of the Bible, the Psalms, to worship.

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As one CMI constituent described a recent such experience: “The Psalm 96 admonition to ‘sing to the Lord a new song’ was realized, seamlessly, and without gimmickry, to a level that took me to a different place. . . . [I was able to] suspend critical analysis, and follow C.S. Lewis admonition to ‘relax’ into the faith.”⁵

A CMI Summer Intensive and Retreat attendee this August said he appreciated the chance to worship without being responsible for preparing and offering the worship, and losing himself in the worship itself. (At least for this person, the goal was met.)

Do you experience worship and music where loving God with heart, soul, and mind happens, and where you are challenged to love your neighbor? What would you add to the list?

Charlotte Kroeker, September 2023

¹Rohr, Richard. *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*. Jossey-Bass, 2011. xxvii.

²Electronic communication, September 6, 2023. <https://pewrsr.ch/3PCKNFn>

and June 2, 2023 <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2023/06/02/online-religious-services-appeal-to-many-americans-but->

[going-in-person-remains-more-popular/?utm_source=Pew+Research+Center&utm_campaign=d0d5130f17-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2023_09_06_04_](https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2023/06/02/online-religious-services-appeal-to-many-americans-but-going-in-person-remains-more-popular/?utm_source=Pew+Research+Center&utm_campaign=d0d5130f17-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2023_09_06_04_)

³Moe, Alexandra. “Singing is good for you. Singing with others may be even better.” *The New York Times*, June 25, 2023.

⁴Rogers, Susan, and Ogas, Ogi. *This Is What It Sounds Like: What the Music You Love Says About You*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2022, p. 193.

⁵Email message from Lance Bohannon, August 20, 2023

Anthems Every Church Choir Would be Privileged to Sing

Robert C. Mann, D. M. A. Senior Resource Librarian

We all use lists for a variety of purposes. Over the years as a university professor and church musician, I created lists of genres of classical compositions as exercises for testing my ability to think through historical development, styles, and importance of composition. With anthems, I tried to articulate why some lasted for centuries and what made them notable and exceptional for both singers and congregation. If you are a choral director, this is for you. If you are an organist or member of a congregation, this is for you to have a conversation with your choral director. In 2020, Tim Sharp assembled a significant and vital collection of essays that assessed 173 titles from the canon of sacred music over six centuries, *Sacred Choral Music Repertoire Insights for Conductors*, GIA Publications. (I reviewed compositions by Heinrich Schütz, Johann Pachelbel, and Healey Willan.) Recently, thinking about this book and finding myself in an octavo mood, I constructed a short list of anthems I consider any church choir would be privileged to sing. These selections reflect music of highest craftsmanship and literary value of the period, music that perhaps influenced other composers, and music that has been revered by singers and congregations for generations, even centuries. These anthems are wide-ranging in vocal demands, but most are accessible to average choirs. Some of the more recent anthems are arranged for varied groups of voices. Many will be familiar. Your congregation is extremely blessed if your choir sings a large percentage of these compositions. I share the list particularly for choral directors with the following recommendations:

- Examine each title and familiarize yourself with those that are unknown.
- Select anthems to add to your choir’s repertoire with reason for doing so.
- Identify how each anthem could be used in your worship service.
- Compare existing repertoire of your choir with new compositions as to quality of music, text, and effectiveness in worship.
- Music cited dates from the 16th century to the present. Does choral music in your worship reflect as much diversity? Why might this be important to effective worship?

Anthems for Every Church Choir

Title	Composer	Voicing	Accompaniment	Liturgical Use
If Ye Love Me	Tallis	SATB	a cappella	Easter, Pentecost, General
O Magnum Mysterium	Victoria	SATB	a cappella	Christmas
Cantante Domino	Pitoni	SATB	a cappella	General
Jesu, Joy of man's Desiring	Bach, J.S.	SATB	Keyboard reduction	General
Ave Verum Corpus K618	Mozart	SATB	Keyboard	Lent, Holy Week, Communion
Laudate Dominum K339 (Vesperae Solennes)	Mozart	SATB, soprano	Keyboard reduction	Holy Saturday, General
Bogoroditsye Dyevo (Vespers Op. 37)	Rachmaninoff	SATB	a cappella	Advent, Christmas
God So Loved the World (Crucifixion)	Stainer	SATB	a cappella	Lent
He, Watching Over Israel (Elijah)	Mendelssohn	SATB	Keyboard	General
How Lovely is Thy Dwelling Place (Requiem Op. 45)	Brahms	SATB	Keyboard reduction	General, Funeral
The Shepherds' Farewell (Childhood of Christ, Op. 25)	Berlioz	SATB	Organ	Christmas
For the Beauty of the Earth	Rutter	SATB	Keyboard, orchestra	Thanksgiving, General
Greater Love Hath No Man	Ireland	SATB, soprano, baritone	Organ	Lent, Easter
O Taste and See	Vaughn Williams	SATB, soprano	Organ	General
Thou Knowest, Lord	Chilcott	SATB	Organ	Ash Wednesday, Lent, Easter
Draw Us in the Spirit's Tether	Friedell	SATB	Organ	Communion
E'en So, Lord Jesus, Quickly Come	Manz	SATB	a cappella	Advent
My Eternal King	Marshall	SATB	Keyboard	General
Salvation is Created	Tschenokoff	SATTBB	a cappella	General
Stay with Us	Hovland	SATB	keyboard	Easter

CMI Donor Story: The Sounds of a Small Town Oboe

She never meant to be a professional musician. She thought she might be a veterinarian. But time had its way, and the draw of music was too strong. Yale School of Music and Stonybrook prepared her, and she became professor and prototype to hundreds of other performers and music educators.

There was always another draw, however. Calls came regularly to play the organ for church or to play the oboe or English horn for special services. She always said "yes" if it was at all possible. That is what you do when you are from a small town in Missouri where everyone is needed and when you are needed you respond. She learned this from her father, the doctor, who was always on call and always the person who understood what was needed and when.

Her intelligence and capabilities took her to faraway places to perform and explore professional pursuits. International travel. Esoteric music literature. Yet she always knew how to make the music available to any audience. She was a great teacher who employed good reason and practicality.

When the music department needed a steady hand and wise head, she was the person to whom they turned. She never aspired to department administration. Her commitments lay in teaching, performing, and building young musicians. But when truth and wisdom were scarce her colleagues knew where to turn. They found her and she responded.

Retirement means more opportunity to return to spend time with a father in his 90's who needs his daughter. That is what you do when you are the daughter of a beloved doctor in the small town where you grew up. You go back. And when you are back home and your church needs an oboe for Christmas (or any other Sunday) you say, "Yes, of course, I'll play." When your sister cannot play in the bell choir because of back surgery, you take her place. While there you can drive your dad to his morning coffee group. When the community orchestra is giving a concert, you say "yes" to helping them in the wind section. If you can do something that is needed, you say "yes."

When your good friend wants to play a concert, you offer to play with her. When you see an opportunity to help grow CMI, even without being asked, you give. That is what you do when your values were formed in a small town in Missouri and where the faith of the people in your small congregation nurtured your own. Thanks be to God.

North Texas Giving Day is September 21st. Can we count on you?

With generous donations from our supporters, CMI is able to equip clergy, musicians and congregants for meaningful worship by providing online and onsite education, festivals, workshops, newsletters and the largest curated library of sacred choral anthems and organ compositions in the world. Mark your calendar and watch for ways you can maximize your gift. Thank you!

2023 CMI Summer Intensive and Retreat

New and experienced church musicians gathered August 4-8 for the first full in-person event since the pandemic. The annual 24-hour Summer Intensive was expanded to include a multi-day retreat exploring church music topics not usually covered in academic music programs. Learning in wonderful spaces at Highland Park United Methodist Church, Perkins/Meadows/SMU and Canterbury House included time with colleagues, rich worship, and expertise from fine clinicians. We welcomed the first members of the Paul Lindsley Thomas Society. Gratitude to the Fort Worth and Dallas American Guild of Organists Chapters, the Hopson and Thomas Endowment donors, and Linda Weiss for generous support.

For photographs and more about the intensive please see the insert accompanying this newsletter and visit the event page on the CMI website where those who attended can still access event materials:

www.churchmusicinstitute.org/event/church-music-institute-summer-intensive-2023/

Missed Out on the Summer Intensive? Don't Miss Upcoming Events at CMI

September 16th and 30th—Saturday Morning Hour Topics

October 6th-8th Bob Chilcott Residency at Highland Park Methodist Church

November 9th—30 Sacred Anthems Everyone Should Know with Dr. Tim Sharp

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



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