

## FAQ's *(in no particular order)*

### “Isn't it all just a matter of taste?”

- Personal taste is inevitable due to the variety of the human tapestry – eg, preferences for certain music-writers, instruments, genres, eras, moods, styles, vocalists, etc. However, taste should only be indulged within the parameters of acceptable music, whether secular or spiritual.
- ‘Personal taste’ doesn’t justify disregarding the clear(er!) boundaries. If, for example, “Punk Rock music just appeals to my taste” - well... it’s probably time to develop a new taste! Remember that the flesh has its own ‘tastes’, and these need to be (re-)educated by the spirit.

### Regarding Taste and Ecclesial Music

- If we have a problem appreciating the music we hear on Sunday mornings, maybe we need to make some changes to your listening habits at home during the rest of the week, because this may be affecting or determining our tastes!
- Try a ‘worldly music detox’ for a period of time, and spend some time with the hymn book and/or other appropriate spiritual music and see if your tastes change!

### “I only listen to the music – the words don't affect me.”

- This is simply not true. Both music and language are processed in different parts of the brain, and an unadulterated mind is a precious gift. Musicians choose the vehicle for their words carefully. If a certain type of music has questionable words, chances are there aren't many redeeming qualities to the music either. Ie, music is *usually* a ‘package deal’. If a product advertises unrighteousness by its lyrics, style or images, we should not endorse it. The works of the flesh have no place in our lives, our minds, or our subconscious.
- Scripture is unequivocal in requiring us to keep our minds pure, as a dwelling place of the spirit. Our mind is a precious gift, and the adage ‘garbage in, garbage out’ finds a scriptural parallel in **Gal. 6:7** ‘For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.’

### “Well, classical musicians were the Rock stars of their day, pushing boundaries all over the place.”

- Classical musicians did at times push the boundaries of musical style as western music developed in complexity and diversity. However it can hardly be claimed that the intention of most classical music was to provide a soundtrack for youth to rebel against the constraints of society, tradition, religion, morality, etc. If by their image, their lyrics, their style, and their expressed goal classical composers had preached this doctrine in the explicit manner of today’s artists – then there might be an argument.
- The lives of composers from several hundred years ago can hardly be described as well-known or influential today.
- All music should be judged on its merits, applying spiritual principles, regardless of the era of its composition.

### ‘How can we say that we should be wary of emotion in our spiritual music? God wants us to love Him, to show our emotions toward Him. He wants our hearts!’

- Absolutely. But God wants the finest of our emotion, the depths of our hearts, and the best of our understanding. Covenant love is *not* ‘puppy love’.
- God doesn’t want us to just speak of our emotions, to repeat how we’re feeling, or focus on transient sentimentalism. There needs to be a firm basis for our emotions, not merely effervescing.
- “The heart in Scripture refers to the understanding, the conscience... **the whole inner man** . . . that which makes him what he is, a conscious, intelligent, responsible, moral being... The Hebrews regarded the heart

as the **seat of the understanding.**’ In the New Testament the word used for ‘heart’ is more closely linked with the seat of man’s **affections**. But the overall teaching regarding loving God is that it *is no mere emotion, but the centring of the understanding and the will upon Him*<sup>1</sup>

- ‘While there can be no religion without it, and any professed religion devoid of it is a mere husk, the emotion **must not become an end in itself**. If it does, it is in the first place an **unsound basis for faith**. We may be “**in love with love**”: the **emotion itself may become a substitute for its object**.” Bro. L.G. Sargeant, *A Sound Mind*

#### ‘But David danced when he brought the Ark to Zion’

- Miriam danced in response to a great deliverance (**Ex.15**), and David danced due to the magnitude of bringing the ark to its final resting place in Zion. There were tremendous spiritual overtones to this dancing. As well, Michal’s response seems to suggest that this was *exceptional* rather than *usual* behavior for David.
- Their dancing was most probably in the style of traditional Hebrew folk dancing. Apparently the Jews typically danced in separate-sex groupings (Miriam and the women (**Ex. 15**), the maidens in (**1 Sam. 18:6-7**)), or if together, not in the sensual, sex-mimicking style of today.

#### ‘But even orchestras have drums in them, and they had/used percussion instruments in the Bible’.

- It’s not always the instrument itself which is ‘evil’, but the way it’s played. There’s a difference between the effect of well-employed percussion and overbearing/driving repetitive drumbeat patterns. Many note the contrast between subtle percussion and modern music’s substantial use of syncopated (the ‘off-beat’, or irregular ‘jazzy-sounding’) rhythms as more unsettling for the body and mind.
- The times in Israel’s history when they mimicked the style of the heathen (*cp. forms of idol worship*) are the times when Israel was led to immorality and ended up being punished by God.

#### ‘But even classical music was ‘modern’ when it was written’

- The relevant point is the style not the era. The problem with ‘modern music’ is not its *modernness* but its style, what that style is associated with, and what it encourages – otherwise we wouldn’t drive cars or own computers because they are modern. With the rapid decline of traditional values in western society in the last days has come a celebration of carnal freedoms, which are lauded and encouraged in the popular music genre. It is with this spirit that we should be most concerned.
- All music should be judged on its merits, applying spiritual principles, regardless of the era of its composition.

#### ‘Our hymns were ‘modern’ in their day.’

- Not true! To quote The Christadelphian Magazine, ‘... *our hymns and anthems were originally composed to be associated with worship. Despite what is said, their style was completely different from the popular or folk music of the day...*’
- At the same time, as one brother notes ‘*in music, almost more than in any other aspect of our community life, we reflect very much the age and culture in which we live. There is no special virtue in material produced before—or after!—the beginning of the twentieth century, or in Europe rather than in African countries.*’ And ‘*There is nothing [sacred] about a Victorian style of expression and harmony.*’
- All our songs of worship must be judged on their own merits, according to their appropriateness for worship, regardless of their era.

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<sup>1</sup>. Vol. 112: *The Christadelphian : Volume 112*. 2001, c1975. The Christadelphian, volume 112. (electronic ed.). Logos Library System . Christadelphian Magazine & Publishing Association: Birmingham

**‘Most of our hymns are written by non-Christadelphian composers – so why are we so opposed to making use of the music of today’s Christian artists?’**

- Aside from the matter of style (ie, how the Christian-Rock movement developed in the footsteps and soundsteps of the Rock rebellion), the difference in approach to song-writing is worth noting.
- Even traditional church music had as its guiding requirements:
  - “Theologically orthodox lyrics
  - Theologically significant lyrics
  - Literarily apt and thoughtful lyrics
  - Lyrics and music appropriate to a meeting between God and His visible people
  - Well-written music with regard to melody, harmony, rhythm and form
  - Musical setting appropriate to the lyrical content”<sup>2</sup>
- The church music which was (by necessity in our beginnings) borrowed and incorporated into our hymn book had to pass a very fine filter, and was edited where necessary to reflect our unique beliefs. The wisdom of proven Bible students and elders was involved in this process. Consider the following excerpt from *The Christadelphian Magazine* upon the first publishing of the Christadelphian Hymn Book in 1869:
  - “The best of “orthodox” hymns have been selected, and, with a little alteration, have been **adapted to Christadelphian use**. The principle of selection has, however, been **somewhat strict**... Hymns of doubtful character, from their **effeminate style of treating truth [ie, watering down]**, or from their **approximation to error** in their modes of expression, have been excluded. **Only those of unequivocal purity and robustness have been chosen**. This has reduced the number to very small proportions. Out of nearly five hundred, at first thought admissible [after sifting through thousands of others], only about two hundred—including the bulk of those contained in the Golden Harp—have been ultimately approved. This has resulted from the policy expressed in the following words: “Let the Hymn Book be as free from ‘orthodox’ taint as possible. Better have a small Hymn Book with hymns that can be sung with **the heart and understanding of a Christadelphian**, than a large one with many hymns of doubtful character.”<sup>3</sup>

**‘But when you look into their background, some of the classical music composers had immoral lifestyles too’**

- That’s quite possible - we can find immorality exhibited in the lives of all subsections of society throughout man’s existence! But the personal lives of musicians from earlier eras is not widely and conspicuously known today, nor was it a ‘selling point’ manipulated by the ‘music industry’ of days gone by. **Their music is not therefore prominently associated with it today**. As well, their mission was not typically to turn the world upside down or celebrate hedonism. If one does find the associations of a certain composer, *from any generation*, to offend their conscience, then avoidance is encouraged.
- All music should be judged on its merits, applying spiritual principles, regardless of the era of its composition.

**‘But some classical music has immoral lyrics – Cp. Opera, in particular.’**

- Yes it does and they should be avoided. Not every piece of classical music is suitable, and we need to apply the principles of acceptable music to our whole music library, whether a song was composed recently or 400 years ago! Stylistically, however, music in the classical vein typically needs little filtering.
- All music should be judged on its merits, applying spiritual principles, regardless of the era of its composition.

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<sup>2</sup> Gordon, David T., *Why Johnny Can’t Sing Hymns – How Popular Culture Rewrote the Hymnbook*. New Jersey: P&R Publishing 2010.

<sup>3</sup>. Vol. 6: *The Christadelphian* : Volume 6. 2001, c1869. The Christadelphian, volume 6. (electronic ed.). Logos Library System . Christadelphian Magazine & Publishing Association: Birmingham

**‘At least Christian Rock’s not as bad as conventional rock - I’d rather they were listening to gospel rock than heavy metal.’**

- God-manifestation is about assessing things by God’s standards, not by the world’s standards. We are striving for what’s *good* - not *‘less bad’*. The morality and standards of society are constantly on a downward slope. By merely trying to stay *‘a few steps holier’* than the world or the church, we’re bound to their same rate of collapse. Our standard is God’s standard, and if we hold to it, we should affect an ever-widening and noticeable gap between us and the world. Will this affect the music we listen to? It shouldn’t, because we should find what is acceptable, and hold fast to it, regardless of what the music of the world degenerates to.

**‘But what about culture – are we right to impose our western cultural norms on those in the third world?’**

- Although music as *‘the universal language’* shares many similarities across cultures (similar stylistic approaches to communicating mood, etc.) there will be different stylistic elements and traditions.
- But regardless of culture, some elements (manipulation of heavy beat, emphasis on *‘ecstatic experience’*, sensual styles, etc.) are inappropriate, regardless of culture.
  - *Latin* music, for example, is characteristically physical and often linked culturally with very sensual dancing, immodest dress/behavior, etc. The fact that this is *cultural* doesn’t change the fact that saints ought to be wary of it. Our principles shouldn’t exclude cultural differences, but neither should they cater to them.
  - If a style comes down purely to culture, and it truly doesn’t contravene key principles of music, then we have to accept it as appropriate, regardless of any discomfort it causes us because it’s *‘different’* to what we’re used to.

**‘Christian rock styles of music have been around all my life and the ecclesias still seem to be functioning fine with them.’**

- The truth is under assault from every side, with challenges to gender roles, marriage, relationships with the world, fellowship practice, general morality and even the fundamental tenets of our statement of faith. Our focus should not be introducing the superficial style or content of Christian/gospel music, because the style and content of false worship will only cause deterioration.
- The use of rock music in Christianity started in the early 1970s in fringe groups and became mainstream only in the 1990s, making it a relatively new phenomenon. We often see trends in the world and the church find their way into the Truth a generation or so later, if we’re not careful to put up boundaries first. It’s wise to witness the effect of these trends and beware their entrance and influence in the Truth. **The effect of this style of music on both society and the church can hardly be described as positive.**

**‘The Hymns can often be boring and drab.’**

- Hymns cover a wide variety of purposes and represent various moods. While the style might not be particularly engaging to us, we have to acknowledge that our musical intake outside of the ecclesia might be affecting the development of our tastes.
- That said, not all hymns will thrill, and other suitable musical options abound within the brotherhood for times when we wish to explore a broader variety of appropriate musical style. The value of our hymnbook is its suitability for ecclesial worship – the hymns are typically easy to learn, relatively simple to sing, fairly easy for most accompanists to handle, most importantly reflect the scope of our unique understanding of the Truth.
- Many brethren and sisters find that the hymns take on a new life and beauty upon completion of a particular Bible study. It’s then that the depth and power of many of the hymns come alive. **This typically can’t be said about most Christian gospel music, which usually doesn’t reveal much below initial reading/singing.**

**Some suggestions to make hymn-singing more powerful:**

- **Practice!** Sing the hymns outside of ecclesial meetings to develop familiarity and an appreciation of their content. This typically makes the hymns take on a new lustre.
- Encourage ecclesial hymn-singing evenings – either just to enjoy hymns you already know, or to learn new ones.
- If your ecclesia posts hymn numbers, then make use of opening voluntary time to **read through the words**. Though some complain about the complexity of language (and it's true that sentences sometimes get a little jumbled when trying to fit words into a certain syllable count of meter!) the lyrics of our hymns are no more difficult to understand than the average grade-school poetry selection.
- Make it a habit to **write in your hymn book**. Note scriptural references that form the basis of the hymns' words. If a line or a word is confusing, write it in your own words to make it clearer. The Bible is full of challenging language and content, so we should be used to using our heads!
- And if your ecclesia makes use solely of hymns in ecclesial meetings, encourage **regular song and praise evenings** to present, learn or just enjoy other suitable music. Ecclesial praise, in all the varied forms of acceptable music, is wonderfully unifying!

**'What if I can honestly say that my conscience allows me to listen to music that might cause difficulty for some brothers and sisters?'**

- We all have honest wrestlings with issues without a clear black-and-white dividing line. If you believe that you can listen to a piece of music and retain your holiness to God all the while, your principle-based conscience must be the guide.
- However, in matters where one's conscience falls in a grey area which may cause offense to others, it is wise to confine them to private life, and avoid advocating it in the ecclesial environment. Our music should be unifying, and not divisive. Consider the principles of conscience-based decision making in **Romans 14**.