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# **SINGING DISCIPLES**

By

*Hugh C. Benner*

*“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without  
which no man shall see the Lord” Heb 12:14*

**Spreading Scriptural Holiness to the World**

Wesleyan Heritage Publications

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# **SINGING DISCIPLES**

Toward Better Church Music

By

**Hugh C. Benner**

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**SINGING DISCIPLES**  
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By  
**Hugh C. Benner**

**MUCH DIFFERENCE OF OPINION ABOUT CHURCH MUSIC**

PLEASE NOTE: HDM does not necessarily endorse all of the thoughts and suggestions put forth in this publication.

Perhaps even from the earliest centuries, there has been much disagreement about what music is appropriate or inappropriate for Christian gatherings. Probably all denominations believe that the "right" use of music in Christian worship can be used of God to edify the saints and to further the gospel. However, while music has the great potential for good in Christian worship, the wrong type of music in Church services can foster much evil.

Adam Clarke once had a head-on confrontation with an obstinate choir that refused to sing, and he probably was not the first minister to encounter "trouble with the music department," and certainly not the last.

Realizing that the wrong type of music will harm and hinder, rather than help promote genuine piety, concerned leaders have advocated taken various positions on whether there should or should not be instrumental music in the church, whether there should, or should not, be a church choir, and whether the choir should, or should not, be robed, etc., etc., etc. Personally, I feel that robed choirs smack too much of formalism. However, I am not prepared to say that a robed choir cannot sing, "in the Spirit," and to the glory of God. "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind" about these matters. If you fervently disagree with some things in this little booklet, perhaps you will at least find some thoughts that can help improve the music in your church.

Given the widely differing views on this subject, even among holiness people, it is not without some misgivings that I place this book in the HDM Library. We do not do so to cast forth a "bone of contention," but rather to put forth those views of the author which may be useful to all, at least in part.

OUR ADVICE CONCERNING THIS BOOK... Pick from it what thoughts and suggestions you feel to be good, and helpful, and disregard the rest. — DVM with HDM

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# **SINGING DISCIPLES**

Toward Better Church Music

By

**Hugh C. Benner**

## **FOREWORD**

Singing Disciples is written, not as an exhaustive treatise on church music, but as a brief, practical manual designed to assist the average church and the average church musician "toward better church music."

Those interested in a more formal or liturgical type of service will find nothing of any particular interest here. But for the Church of the Nazarene, which adheres to the less formal, free, spontaneous type of service, we offer a kind of philosophy of church music, based on what we feel is clearly portrayed in the New Testament as the character and spirit of the music in the Early Church.

Then we deal with the detailed areas of church music. The chapters vary quite considerably as to length, depending on the scope of the area involved. We trust that these pages may be of value, not only to those who are in the more prominent musical positions in the church, but also to choir members, instrumentalists, special singers, and indeed, to every member of the congregation. For a more intelligent congregational understanding of the music of the church, as well as interest and participation in that phase of church activity and service, can make a vital contribution to the effectiveness and outreach of the church.

We send this forth in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and to the glory of Him whose "singing disciples" set the pattern for "singing disciples" of all the Christian centuries.

**Hugh C. Benner**

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# **SINGING DISCIPLES**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The continuous demand from both clergy and laity has brought forth this highly informative manual of church music. A framework of accepted principles which should govern the musical portion of the free, nonformal type service has not been available. Our people everywhere will welcome *Singing Disciples* — the guidebook on evangelical church music by Dr. Hugh C. Benner.

It is significant that the Church of the Nazarene has within its Board of General Superintendents one who by technical training and diversified experience is eminently qualified to speak with authority on this specialized subject. Dr. Benner is not only a gifted church administrator and minister of the gospel but also a musician whose talents in church music are widely recognized.

In addition to his degrees of bachelor of science and bachelor of divinity from Olivet Nazarene College, he has a master of arts degree from the University of California. Dr. Benner has also done graduate work at Vanderbilt and Boston universities, and pursued advanced piano study with Dr. Samuel Burkholder, a pupil of Arthur Friedheim. He has served as head of the Department of Fine Arts and professor of piano at Pasadena College. Dr. Benner has organized and directed choral, band, and orchestral ensembles and possesses a playing knowledge of most orchestral instruments as well as the piano and organ.

It is especially fitting that this manual should be presented during Music Year — 1959.

Al Ramquist

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# **SINGING DISCIPLES**

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By

**Hugh C. Benner**

## **Chapter 1**

### **SINGING DISCIPLES**

Jesus and His disciples sang. Both Matthew and Mark record it: "And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives." What did they sing? It may have been the Great Hallel, a song of praise consisting of portions of Psalms 115—118, which traditionally was sung at the close of the regular Passover meal. Or it may have been some other psalm.

And who led that song? Was it Simon Peter, who consistently took the initiative in most situations? Was it John, with his fine spiritual sensibilities? Possibly the Master himself "gave the pitch" and intoned those first words that set the disciples singing. But whatever it was that they sang, and whoever it was that led them, it is agreed that this was a psalm of praise to God, and it is a precious picture we have of those "singing disciples," raising their voices in a musical declaration of faith and hope and praise, even in the midst of darkness and uncertainty.

Although direct allusions to music and singing in the New Testament are relatively few, it is clear that this phase of religious experience and expression was prominent in the life of the Early Church. In the writings of the Apostle Paul there are three major references to music. From these we may sense both the significant place of singing and the character of the music in the early Christian services.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord (Col. 3:16).

Be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord (Eph. 5:18-19).

I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also (I Cor. 14:15).

In all of these passages the immediate context represents some idea or truth of major and vital importance. Thus Paul does not deal with Christian music incidentally, but connects it with matters of a high order.

To the Colossians he writes, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly," and immediately makes "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" a normal part of this experience and process. By singing they are to teach one another, thus using music to instruct the people in the truths and doctrines of the Church. Furthermore, by singing they are to admonish one another, and this deals with promoting the practice of Christian principles in life. It is by such singing, according to Paul, that the Christian disciples could meet the exhortation, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you," for the word "dwell"

means literally "to be at home," or to "make one's home." By singing, the truths of God's Word would become familiar, and a normal part of life.

In his letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle writes, "Be filled with the Spirit." Surely this fullness of the Holy Spirit is basic in the experience of the victorious, effective Christian. To this blessed truth and experience Jesus Christ gave unusual attention as He came near to Calvary. But Paul ties this great truth in with singing: "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." Evidently he felt that "singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" was a spiritual expression completely compatible with the fullness of the Spirit.

The essence of the passage from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians is to be found in verse 12, where he writes: "Seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church." Elaborating on this idea he asks, "What is it then?" or, "What is the conclusion of this matter?" He answers, "I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also." Such an emphasis on prayer in relation to the edifying of the church certainly is to be expected. But almost in the same breath Paul adds, "I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also." Side by side with prayer as an edifying, strengthening, building force, the Apostle places singing. As in the days with Jesus, so in Paul's day, Christians were to be "singing disciples."

These Pauline passages furnish more than the general idea of the importance attached to music in those early days of the Church. They also make clear the qualities which the Christian music was to possess and evidence. In the passage from Colossians cited above, where Paul writes about "singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord," the word "singing," according to A. T. Robertson, denotes "lyrical emotion in a devout soul." The same Greek word is used in the Ephesian letter, together with the idea of "making melody in your heart." In the passage cited from First Corinthians a different and more general word is used for "sing," but there another idea is injected when Paul writes, "I will sing with the spirit," which signifies emotional content, or even ecstasy.

Thus we may be sure that the singing to which Paul refers was not to be formal, stilted, or stiffly professional. Rather it was to be as a melody in the heart, coming forth with emotion from devout souls expressing the praise of redeemed, and at times rising to a sense of victorious ecstasy.

There are those formal individuals who would insist that joyous, spirited, victorious music is a deviation from the original Christian music, in content and character. But the fact is that the early Christians were spiritually transformed individuals, and the vitality and joy of their relationship with Christ brought them soon to the place where, in addition to the "psalms and hymns," they were singing also "spiritual songs," which very probably were new compositions of the Christians themselves.

True, Paul insisted on content, saying, "I will sing with the understanding," but he first declares, "I will sing with the spirit." As Ellicot has well said, "He [Paul] will not let his public ministrations, as regards prayer and praise, evaporate into a mere enthusiasm; nor will he, on the other hand, allow a cold intellectual creed to chill and freeze the warm emotions of the spirit."



Thus we of the Church of the Nazarene, adhering to the idea of the free, spontaneous, less formal, more emotional type of service and music, may be sure that we are on good, sound ground, both scripturally and traditionally. The services held in the days of Paul and James and John were not formal, unemotional services. Formalism and liturgy came later. Those early services were filled with spiritual freedom, spontaneity, joy, and blessed "times of refreshing ... from the presence of the Lord."

Of course we are not saying that the early Christians sang gospel songs such as are in use today, for music in general had not developed to the point of melodies and harmonies as we know them. But within the framework of the common musical development and expression of that day, the Christians of that time voiced praises to God, rejoiced in the redeeming grace of Christ, witnessed to the presence of the Holy Spirit, repeated the truths of God's Word, and exhorted one another to Christian living, by means of that medium which in our day plays such a prominent part in the life and service of Christians everywhere — sacred music.

Let us then, as Nazarenes, emulate those "singing disciples," not only in a sound content, but in a spirit that, through music, will demonstrate the joy of Christian experience and will cause others to want to know the Christ who can put "melody" in the heart.

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# **SINGING DISCIPLES**

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## **Chapter 2**

### **A SINGING CHURCH**

#### **I. MUSIC TO STRENGTHEN THE CHURCH**

As indicated in the Foreword, this is written, not for those who are committed to formal services and formal music, but for those who have discovered in experience the true "liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free," and have been led by the Holy Spirit into the blessedness and effectiveness of this freedom in their worship.

We recognize the need in many places for improvement in the music which characterizes such worship and such services. However, in attempting to improve the music we should be aware of the fundamental problem: that the suggested improvement might be along such lines as would destroy the fundamental strength of the group.

The strength of the Church of the Nazarene lies in the sense of unique character and spiritual mission. This should be a fundamental concept in all our activities, and particularly in the area of our music. Thus we should guard vigilantly against any so-called improvement that would militate against or destroy our unique source of strength. Particularly should we guard against any influence that would make a formal type of music predominant. Our Nazarene music should make a major contribution to the deep purposes of our services.

What is included in this vision and concept? Basically it involves the paramount truth of a complete redemption from sin through the sacrificial, vicarious death of Jesus Christ on the Cross, and the resurrection life of the living Son of God; and that this redemption becomes a conscious fact of personal experience to all who meet the divine conditions and trust wholly in Christ.

Proceeding naturally from this basic concept, and compatible with the practical teachings of the Word of God, are the elements of spiritual initiative and aggressiveness, the freedom of the Spirit, personal testimony, emphasis on the saving and cleansing power of the blood of Jesus Christ, legitimate emotional experience, and a consistent sense of evangelistic mission.

Our church music should strengthen and promote all these phases of individual and church life. It should not weaken or frustrate them. As Donald D. Ketting so aptly says in his *Steps Toward a Singing Church*, "Because each church has its own kind of worship, therefore it has its unique possibilities for a distinctive kind of ministry ... A music program will affect the traditions in corporate worship, but it should not dictate them." <sup>[1]</sup>

## II. THE PURPOSE OF OUR CHURCH MUSIC

### 1. Unity

There is great power in music to unify a church. Of course, there are many elements that serve this purpose, such as administrative policies, the pulpit ministry, and the teaching ministry. But it is doubtful if there is any stronger force toward the unification of a group than the music which they hear or in which they participate. In the area of unified worship, music is paramount, for it sets the "tone" of the service and moves all in a given direction of thought and emphasis as no other activity. Also the fact that usually the first congregational element of the service is singing further enhances the importance and influence of music in worship.

Furthermore, music develops a unity of thought, particularly in the field of doctrine. The singing again and again of a hymn that expresses clearly a great doctrine of the Christian faith will crystallize that truth in the minds and hearts of the people as no other medium of expression, bringing to bear upon them powerful laws of learning such as expression and repetition. The classic example of this truth is found in the tremendous effect upon early Methodism of the hymns of Charles and John Wesley.

This unity from music may also have a strong influence in the unity of a group in supporting the basic program of the church, impelling a spirit of unity and aggressiveness toward evangelistic efforts both at home and abroad.

Throughout the Church of the Nazarene we have sensed the unifying influence of music, even among widely separated peoples from widely varying backgrounds, and using many different languages. In the United States or Canada, in Great Britain or British Honduras, in Puerto Rico or the Cape Verde Islands, in Italy or Japan, in Haiti or Hawaii, in Guatemala or British Guyana, in Nicaragua or Korea, in Okinawa or Mexico, in Trinidad or Formosa or the Philippines, there is an amazing uniformity of content and spirit in the singing. At no point is the broad unity of our church more apparent. Making their "melody ... to the Lord" in Italian, English, Spanish, French, Creole, Kekchi, Portuguese, Japanese, Ilicono, or Mandarin, there is an underlying oneness, a spiritual concord, a harmony of experience that not only is expressed in music, but, one is constrained to feel, has been developed and fostered by their music.

### 2. Atmosphere

In any nonformal church, atmosphere is of vital importance. The musical elements of any service do more than anything else to establish this atmosphere. And nothing can contribute more effectively toward maintaining the best in the atmosphere of a church than a sound, spiritual, free, spontaneous, music program.

At this point it is profitable for us to caution against the possibility of using music to create a careless, cheap, shallow, slapstick kind of atmosphere which smacks more of the theater or ballroom than the church. A so-called musical freedom may degenerate into musical license, appealing to low human sensibilities, and perverting the sacred purposes of true Christian worship and service.

On the other hand we must not be so impressed with the perils of a cheap atmosphere that we swing the pendulum to the other extreme and adopt a basically formal musical ideal. A formal musical program is out of place in our regular services. Of course an occasional anthem can be utilized, and special services such as at Easter and Christmas may properly include music of a more formal variety. But in the regular services of a church where a free type of service is the usual order, attempts to inject formal music often result in a hodgepodge that benefits no one. Such a service reminds one of a building in which the architect has mixed some extremely varied styles.

In this connection we wish to make some observations concerning the relation between formal musical training and the music program of our churches. With all due respect to Christian colleges or to seminaries, the atmosphere and technique of formal training are not to be taken as a pattern for church atmosphere and techniques. Incidentally, it is in a kindred transference that some preachers make a fatal error, when they adopt the atmosphere of the college or seminary classroom as the pattern for the services of the church and of their ministry. Of course, we realize the necessity for emphasis on excellence of performance in an institution of learning, or in any course of formal musical study and training. But the music of the church calls for more than excellent performance; it demands the expression and conveyance of a divine message. Musicians who would make an adequate and desirable contribution to the music of the nonformal churches must make this vital adjustment to the practical needs of the situation. They will do well to remind themselves frequently that in the actual operation of the church theoretical days are past, and now, "This is life." A mere performance will not suffice; they must deal now in reality on the highest level.

### 3. A Means of Spiritual Expression for the People

This is of vast importance in the free church. It represents a legitimate idea and ideal. Through music the people have their principal opportunity to express themselves in worship, praise, thanksgiving, and testimony. Through music they may give expression to their spiritual emotions as by no other corporate means.

In this connection there are those who criticize what they call egocentric songs among the more modern gospel compositions. But such should remember the appropriateness of testimony in almost any circumstance. By such critics' measurement, many scripture passages could also be called egocentric, for in both the Old and New Testaments there are numerous uses of the personal pronoun "I." But in song as in scripture, the "I" is used to declare some relationship with Christ, in redemption, comfort, guidance, or some other phase of the heart's need or experience.

### 4. The Sense of Participation

And not least among the values of music, particularly as represented by congregational singing, is the sense of participation. In formal churches, where everything is quite "cut and dried," such participation may mean little, and the people may feel much like spectators watching others go through the forms of worship, while they themselves hold an objective relationship to it all. But where full recognition is given to the possibilities of the divine presence and the immediate ministry of the

Holy Spirit, where the right of every individual to be an active agent in the service and the response of the people is vital, this sense of participation is fundamental.

This leads us directly to the declaration of the responsibility of the people to participate. As they bear a Christian responsibility for participation in other phases of church life such as attendance, tithing, witnessing, and praying, so, at the appointed time, when the congregation is to sing, every Christian should feel a responsibility to sing. What a difference it would make in thousands of churches if everyone would feel this responsibility and would co-operate in singing every word of every song!

## 5. Music Leading to Decision

It is obvious that this point has no meaning for any group not interested in soul winning. But, as has been observed repeatedly, we are not interested in such in this treatment of church music. We believe that the major mission of the church is soul winning. No amount or quality of excellence in any other phase of Christian activity can compensate for failure to win souls to Christ.

Thus we are vitally interested in the value of music in evangelism, and especially in what are commonly known as invitation songs. Here again, unless there are instructions to the contrary by the minister, all should participate. Many times we have seen the effectiveness of an invitation nullified by a silent, neck-craning, curious congregation who were content to let the leader sing the songs by himself. Certainly there are times when a solo or choir number can be used to vary the invitation. But in the usual situation the singing of the congregation serves to develop and maintain a warm spiritual atmosphere which is conducive to a yielding, affirmative attitude on the part of those who need spiritual help.

While it is somewhat unusual, there are times when instrumental music may be used effectively during an invitation. Of course, if a solo instrument is used, such an assignment calls for competence and assurance, for that is no time to experiment with amateur bungling. Less is required of a pianist in such a situation, for as a rule the more simply such an instrument is played for invitation purposes, the better. After a period of invitational singing, it is often effective to continue the call with the simple playing of the song, giving to the congregation the opportunity of concentrating on prayer, and at the same time reducing the total volume of sound, which to some people constitutes a distracting influence.

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# **SINGING DISCIPLES**

## Toward Better Church Music

By  
**Hugh C. Benner**

### **Chapter 3**

## **CONGREGATIONAL SINGING**

#### 1. For the Congregation

The heart of church music should be the singing of the congregation. Special numbers, regardless of their beauty and meaning, never can take the place of congregational singing. Here is the element in the service that establishes the mood, the temper, the atmosphere for worship and soul winning.

In view of the importance of the congregational songs, more care and attention should be given to this portion of the service. In this the one who should be most deeply interested and most vitally concerned is the minister, for nothing in the service can do more to help him or hinder him. It is for this reason that we feel strongly about the minister's relation to the opening of the service. In every service, the first voice to be heard by the congregation should be that of the minister. However competent the song leader may be, he does not bear the final responsibility for the service. That belongs to the minister, and therefore he should establish the opening "tone" of the service, by a call to worship, a verse of scripture, or a brief exhortation by which he invites and urges full participation by the congregation in the singing. From that point the song leader can easily and appropriately move into the song service.

Earlier we have emphasized the importance of everyone participating in the congregational singing. It should be regarded as a phase of Christian stewardship. Of course the usual excuse is that the individual is not musical and cannot sing. But all should be reminded of a very significant fact concerning human voices: that a group of people, not one of whom would be qualified to sing a solo, can join their voices and produce quite beautiful music. It seems that the Creator has provided for group singing a kind of mysterious "musical alchemy" which transforms individual mediocrity into group quality. So there is no valid excuse for failure to sing in the midst of the congregation.

And congregational singing should be with full voice. Scarcely anything in a church service is more depressing or disappointing than to hear a great hymn of praise or a victorious gospel song completely nullified in effect by a group of people mumbling the words in a desultory, half-hearted manner. Well might many congregations hear the ancient prophetic command, "Sing aloud." (And the phrase, "and shout," might not be amiss in some very quiet congregations.)

Finally, people should think as they sing. It is possible for a person to sing through a familiar song without more than an occasional awareness of what he is singing. The worshiper should pay attention to the truth expressed in the song, and relate himself to it with a sincere heart. Only thus can he make any real contribution to the service, or the service make a contribution to him. It was this idea which impelled the Apostle to declare, "I will sing with the understanding."

## 2. The Song Leader

While variety of personalities will inevitably (and desirably) produce quite a variety of song leaders, there are some general principles which should properly obtain for all who serve in this capacity.

**A Spiritual Ministry** — First of all, the song leader should understand that this service he is called upon to render is a spiritual ministry. It is not to give him a place of prominence. He is to lead the congregation in such a manner as to prepare the hearts of the people for the total values of the service in general, and for the ministry of the Word of God in particular.

Some song leaders act as if the song service were the main issue and all other portions of the service, including the sermon, were secondary in importance. But in the last analysis, all the music of a service is a means to a greater end.

A song leader can direct such an extended, vigorous song service that the people are exhausted mentally, emotionally, and physically before the time for the message has arrived. How tragic it is for the man of God to face a weary, depleted congregation, because a song leader has lost the true perspective of the service as a whole!

Many pastors and evangelists would do well to give more attention to the length of the musical portion of the service. In situations where the leader is also a featured soloist, or where a separate soloist has been engaged, two special numbers are sung at every service in addition to a song service of usual (or unusual) length. It is our feeling that song services should, in general, be briefer. And if there are to be two special numbers, certainly a commensurate adjustment should be made in the length of time taken for congregational singing.

**Securing Participation** — The song leader is responsible for securing participation by the people and should use every reasonable and appropriate means to secure this. It is not enough to lay the blame on the people by saying that "they just didn't seem to want to sing." Wandering thoughts must be drawn in, weariness must be overcome, distracting circumstances must be dealt with, and the people brought to a sense of privilege as well as responsibility in making this portion of the service meaningful.

**Authority** — The effective song leader must have a proper sense of authority. This is not to be confused with an arbitrary, demanding kind of attitude, or the impression of great musical superiority. If one has a true sense of authority, he is not under any necessity to prove it by obvious means. Authority in song leading represents a sense of assurance involving a thorough knowledge of the song with both the words and music, the "feel" of the correct tempo for that type of song, definiteness as to directing the opening notes, firmness in handling sustained notes, and a general impression of certainty throughout.

**Discernment** — Discernment of the temper and reaction of the people is important in the experience of the song leader. It is in this area that an alert, spiritual song leader can render invaluable service in leading the congregation into rich responses. If the singing of a certain verse of a song

seems to strike an unusually responsive chord in the hearts of the people, repeating that verse will be of more value and blessing to the people than doggedly singing every verse in a routine manner. Also the repetition of the chorus often results in a blessed response, as the heart of the song's message is emphasized to the participants.

**New Songs** — Teaching the congregation some new songs is a responsibility of the song leader. This is not easy but it can be done. Choose a new number; then sing a verse or two as a solo, or if a choir is available, have them sing a verse. In either case, encourage the people to hum as they listen, joining later in singing the words. Then repeat this process on two or three consecutive Sundays, and soon a refreshing new song will be available to strengthen the threadbare list of songs that have been used through the years.

A word of wisdom concerning choruses is not out of place here. In recent years these brief compositions have enjoyed a wide acceptance and use. However, they are not designed to bear much weight and should not be given any major place in a service. The use of a lively chorus of testimony is effective in a spirited song service. The singing of a meaningful chorus of consecration just before prayer can serve as a real means of grace. But to sing one chorus after another to the exclusion of the full-length songs is to tend toward shallowness.

**The Beat** — Since this is not a detailed technical treatment, our counsel here will be general but, we trust, helpful.

Keep the beat simple. Attempts at complicated direction for congregational singing are entirely superfluous and highly distasteful to those who are at all discriminating, and to all others distracting. The beat should be as smooth and graceful as possible. All peculiar, jerky motions are to be avoided. Some song leaders fall into the habit of using some little extraneous motion at some point in the beat. The use of a mirror for criticism and objective judgment is strongly recommended. Only thus can one see what the congregation sees.

There are situations in which the complete absence of a beat is desirable. In singing familiar hymns with a slow or traditionally irregular rhythm, the attempt to beat the time may become ludicrous to the singers. Also when the rhythm is regular, a cessation from beating the time can be refreshing, both to the leader and to the congregation. Of course the beat must be given at the beginning of the song, and it is desirable to give the direction at the beginning of the chorus. Also the length of a sustained note and the continuation of the music following the hold should be indicated in every case.

### **Some Detailed Advices**

1. Do not attempt to direct a congregation as if they constitute a choir. A congregation is not a choir, and the techniques of choral direction are completely out of place in leading congregational singing. Leaders should understand and recognize this basic difference and never mix the two types of direction. Choir direction demands great attention to detail — attacks, releases, varying tempo, dynamics, balance, accent, tone quality, and special effects. But all a congregation wants is to be given that minimum of direction by which they may begin the verses with reasonable unity, proceed



with the appropriate tempo, and then sing. Never forget this: congregational singing is to be congregation-centered, and never director-centered.

2. Which leads to the caution against gymnastics in song leading. Certainly different-sized groups call for varying treatment at this point. A congregation that is relatively small can be directed with gestures that may scarcely move above shoulder level because the leader is within easy sight of all. But if the congregation is very large, possibly numbering a thousand or more, then the hands must be lifted high and moved widely enough that those in distant places in the auditorium can see clearly the directions for the beginning of the verses and the tempo desired. There are few sights less appropriate than that of a song leader before a small congregation wildly waving his arms and hands, reaching high into the air, flailing vigorously to the right and to the left. Whatever the size of the crowd, a certain restraint in gestures is always in order; for definiteness of beat and a sense of authority, coupled with an encouraging smile, will do more to secure good congregational singing than a whole routine of gymnastic displays.

3. Song leaders should strive manfully against the temptation to engage in lengthy exhortations or to tell their favorite stories. Good songs have their own "built-in continuity," which for the most part is far superior to anything the song leader may add. Furthermore, it is the preacher's place to give the exhortations and tell the stories. Better not usurp his prerogatives.

4. Congregational singing should not be disrupted by numerous stunts or embarrassing surprises. No one ever has found any value — spiritual, musical, or emotional — in holding a note until everyone is completely devoid of breath. And what of abrupt surprises, as when, following a held note, the leader just does not lead and the people proceed to sing on, only to be embarrassed when they find they are not supposed to be singing at all, owing to a strange quirk of the leader by which he is impelled to call for an unexpected, lengthy pause — just to see whether they were watching him. There are means of varying a song service without marring the proper spirit and meaning of the singing. Antiphonal singing, alternating choir and congregation, or one portion of the congregation with another, is often interesting and stimulating. Having a solo voice sing a verse against the background of congregational humming can be beautiful and can give special emphasis to the truth involved. Especially in Sunday evening services, the interspersing of four or five brief testimonies between the verses of a song can provide a rich spiritual experience.

5. The song service is not to furnish the opportunity for setting a speed record. Leaders who are trained singers often prove to be the worst offenders at this point. Their training has enabled them to sing words rapidly, and they let their unusual ability set the pace. The song leader never should direct a song at a tempo beyond which the average person can sing the words with relative ease. The writer is not exactly slow of speech, but altogether too many times he has ceased singing, become mute, given up the struggle of trying to match speed of enunciation with some glib-tongued, racing leader.

Admittedly some leaders have gone to the opposite extreme, setting the tempo so slow that the normal flow of the song is completely disrupted. But there is a "golden mean," a proper tempo for any song, which gives due regard to the nature of the composition, the type of music involved, and which respects the right of the congregation to sing the song without undue strain.

### 3. The Congregational Accompanist

The importance of the instrumental accompaniment to congregational singing is not understood by many organists and pianists. It should be remembered always that the song really begins, not with the first word being sung, but with the instrumental prelude.

Obviously, a basic purpose for playing a prelude is to establish the correct pitch for the song, according to the key of the printed music. But it should be understood and always sensed that the purpose of the prelude and the responsibility of the player go quite beyond denoting the pitch.

The prelude should indicate the correct tempo or speed of the song. Accompanists are notably remiss at this point. Too many seem to feel that the tempo of the prelude is something completely detached from the song, and play it indifferently, and in many instances at a rapid pace, as if it were something to be done with as quickly as possible. But the instrumentalist should have a keen sense of the proper tempo for the particular song. Of course this involves careful attention to the words and the mood of the composition.

Then throughout the singing of the song the accompanist should give constant attention to the song leader, following his beat and undergirding the established tempo with a firm, accurate rhythm. The fact is that frequently, when a song is sung too rapidly, the fault lies, not with the song leader, but with an accompanist who is playing without regard to the leader or the reasonable rate at which the congregation can sing the words. And there is little that the average song leader can do with a situation in which a congregational accompanist either carelessly or deliberately sets and maintains a too rapid tempo.

The good player will "sing" the words as well as play the music, not with the voice, but with the mind. This habit will make the accompaniment more than a boring routine, but will lift it to the level of an intelligent spiritual service. Especially in the introduction or prelude when the instrument is a piano, a most helpful device is to emphasize the melody. Plenty of pianists have no idea that this can be done, and those who do know too often do not go to the trouble. The technique involved is that of a slight stiffening of the melody finger, which lifts the sound of the melody tone slightly above the other tones of the chord. Without emphasis on the melody, the people hear only a succession of chords with no ascertainable melodic line or sequence. Lifting out the melody always adds interest and meaning to the playing of a hymn or gospel song.

How long should the prelude be? If too brief, the prelude has a feeling of abruptness and uselessness. If too extended, it tends to become boring and to violate the psychological element of proper timing. Ordinarily the prelude should cover two full phrases or "lines" of the stanza. For a song in four-four or six-eight time, four measures are usually correct. Where the time is more involved, making the measures relatively long, such as in nine-eight or twelve-eight time, two measures are sufficient. However, the last chord of the prelude should always be a tonic chord. To state it in nontechnical terms, the closing chord of the prelude should be the chord with which the song ends.

And finally, **PLAY ALL CHORDS ACCURATELY**. Tones may be added to the chords, giving more strength and richness (provided this is done tastefully), but **NEVER, NEVER** tamper with the written harmony of a song when a congregation is singing it. If everyone sang the melody, it might be allowable to follow one's own fantasies. But in every congregation, however small or large, there are those who have not sufficient range to sing the soprano part, or who choose to sing, and enjoy singing, one of the other three parts.

There is nothing much more exasperating than to be singing the printed music and following the harmonization of the arranger, only to find the accompanist playing some other set of chords. It demands a hardy musical soul — and a patient one — to be frustrated harmonically at numerous intervals during the singing of a song and still continue to participate.

### **AS JOHN WESLEY SAW IT**

The following instructions were written by John Wesley for his choirs, and are equally applicable to congregational singing:

"Learn the tunes.

"Sing them as printed.

"Sing **ALL** ... Let not a slight degree of weakness or weariness hinder you. If it is a cross to you, take it up and you will find it a blessing.

"Sing lustily and with a good courage.

"Beware of singing as if you are half dead, or half asleep, but lift up your voice with strength. Be no more afraid of your voice now, nor more ashamed of its being heard than when you sang the songs of Satan.

"Sing modestly. Do not bawl... strive to unite your voices together so as to make one clear melodious sound.

"Sing in time. Do not run before or stay behind ... and take care not to sing too slow. This drawling way naturally steals on all who are lazy, and it is high time to drive it from among us, and sing all our tunes just as quick as we did at first.

"Above all, sing spiritually. Have an eye to God in every word you sing. Aim at pleasing Him more than yourself or any other creature. In order to do this, attend strictly to the sense of what you sing, and see that your heart is not carried away with the sound, but offered to God continually."

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**SINGING DISCIPLES**  
Toward Better Church Music

By  
**Hugh C. Benner**

**Chapter 4**  
**SPECIAL SINGING**

In all special singing, from solo to choir numbers, it should be kept in mind that such special music is always a means and never an end in itself. Special songs, to have any genuine value, must rise above the mere performance level. Certainly a competent performance is desirable, but far beyond the point of technical competence is the value of the—

**MESSAGE OF THE SONG**

Unless a message of truth and significance gets to the people, the time and effort involved are wasted. It is for this reason that, if a choice is possible or necessary, it is better to have a relatively rough performance that brings a response from the hearts and minds of the people than a polished, technically excellent performance that leaves the hearers cold and indifferent.

It should be understood by the ushers that no one is to be ushered to a seat during the singing of a special song. There should be NO EXCEPTIONS to this rule.

(This rule should be maintained strictly also during the reading of the Word of God, whether by the minister or the congregation.)

1. The Choir

Not all churches, particularly in their earlier years, are large enough to have a regular choir. However it is possible to develop a choir by means of occasional appearances. Special seasons, such as Christmas and Easter, lend themselves normally and easily to such experimental ventures. At such times musical friends of the church can be induced to assist.

But to the smaller churches we would recommend the use of a quartet, and later, or on special occasions, a double quartet, as a splendid addition to the musical program. Even a quartet of reasonably good voices can give excellent support to the song leader in the congregational singing and during the invitation. Also such a group can meet for rehearsal much more easily than a larger group. And they can become the nucleus of a regular choir in due time.

In the church large enough to man and support a regular choir, there are few investments of time and talent, if properly directed and utilized, that will return more lasting dividends. Such a group should begin singing simple numbers. It is far more desirable and effective to do something simple very well than to "butcher" a difficult composition. Too many choirs, or choir directors, have a "Hallelujah Chorus" complex without possessing commensurate ability. Frankly, this masterpiece,

and many more of like exalted and demanding character, were not composed for groups of ordinary size and ability, and NEVER should be attempted by them.

With a little imagination and musical ingenuity, much can be done with simple songs to make them interesting, different, and highly effective. A soloist singing a verse, with the choir humming the accompaniment, can be very beautiful. A simple but very effective device, and one that seems very mysterious to the uninitiated, is the continuous "ah." The choir is instructed to breathe at any point except where they normally would breathe. In other words, they are to breathe in the midst of a phrase, and never at the beginning of a phrase. By each individual breathing whenever he chooses, except between phrases, the result sounds as if no one ever takes a breath, and the sound is continuous from start to finish. Such an uninterrupted vocal accompaniment to a solo voice, duet, or trio, can be very striking.

It is interesting to take a song with three verses, using a soloist with continuous humming accompaniment for the first verse. Then utilize a trio with a continuous "ah" for the second verse. And on the closing verse, have the choir sing with full voice. The very nature of the varied treatment of the successive verses will provide a natural ascent in tone, power, and meaning to the climax in which the full potentialities of the choir are brought into action.

Probably an explanation should be given for the suggested use of the "ah," in addition to the hum. Humming has extreme dynamic limitations because the lips are closed. Thus the effects possible with the use of humming are very few. On the other hand, the "ah" is an open tone, having the advantage of the full range of the voice. It can be reduced to a whisper, or it can sound forth in full voice. So if a number is consistently quiet in mood, the hum is entirely sufficient. But if some dynamic range or effect is desired and appropriate, the use of the "ah" is far more effective.

Throughout all the activities of the choir there should be a deep sense of spiritual ministry. Before each service there should be a season of earnest prayer. In such group activity it is easy for the feeling of the routine to grip the members. For this reason special attention should be given to developing a sense of mission in the choir, and plans should be made by the pastor and director to develop and maintain morale.

Proper discipline is absolutely essential to the maintenance of an effective choir. If members are to sing on Sundays, they must be faithful to rehearsal attendance. When the choir appears, either regularly or occasionally, they should REMAIN IN PLACE throughout the service. The height of distraction in a service results from the disorder which is inevitable when a choir trails off in sundry directions, only to reappear in assorted places throughout the sanctuary. No plan ever has been devised by which to cover adequately the disturbance caused by a choir in "full retreat." And not least is the fact that, when that amount of personality vanishes from the front of the church, something is lost from the service which cannot be recovered.

The choir is seated in a very conspicuous area of the sanctuary. It is probable that every moment in the service one or more persons are viewing the choir. Therefore there must never be a careless, unguarded moment for that group. Whispering NEVER is in order among members of a choir. Craning of necks to follow the movements of those entering or leaving the choir is completely out of

order. Good posture is required at all times, with no semblance of lounging or of any other inappropriate attitude or activity. Unfailing restraint and composure, even under unusual circumstances, must be maintained.

Robes are being used increasingly, even in smaller churches. However, in many choirs such attire is not used in the evening evangelistic service. In the absence of robes, it should be impressed that restraint and good taste in attire are of great importance. The unusual, either as to style or color, should be avoided. This idea should be conveyed to the choir and a sense of fitness developed to the point where the members themselves will care for this matter. It should not be necessary to state that, for Nazarene choirs, beads, lipstick, earrings, and all kindred means of adornment are entirely out of order.

While the choir music for regular services in nonformal churches is almost wholly composed of hymns and gospel songs, there are special seasons when anthems and cantatas can be used to advantage. This is particularly true of the Easter and Christmas seasons. During recent years a much wider selection of cantatas has been made available than in earlier years. However, very effective musical services can be arranged by the use of separate numbers, if care is given to their proper placing and relationship. Usually it is most wise and effective to open and close the service with a number which possesses some power and sweep, giving a touch of the dramatic that captures the attention at the beginning and closes the service with an element of climax.

In this connection it should be added that the modern choir emphasis frequently is upon the quieter type of performance, in which the choir is almost never heard at full voice. But a choir should be given frequent opportunity and encouragement to sing vigorously, thus developing more than a quiet polish, but also the ability to achieve heights of musical power and almost startling effect.

And a final practical word — the songbooks to be used by the choir should be placed in their hands before they enter the sanctuary. This obviates the awkwardness and confusion of choir members stooping and searching for books after they have taken their places.

Children's and teen-age choirs offer excellent opportunities for securing the interest and participation of the younger folk of the church family, and can add much of variety and appeal to the life and outreach of the church. Such groups can be featured from time to time, especially in the evening services.

The provision of simple robes for the younger groups adds much to their appearance, and usually has a salutary effect on those who might be inclined to be difficult as to discipline. Which leads us to state that such groups must be disciplined firmly. The director should insist on quiet, order, and cooperation from the very beginning. Such a procedure will obviate serious difficulties later. Even with youngsters, a proper pride in the appearance and deportment of the group can be developed and maintained.

## 2. The Soloist and Small Groups

Today the soloist or small group has access to a wide range of excellent compositions in the field of gospel songs. For this reason we suggest that there be more moving out of the beaten trail in special songs. Of course there are songs that have achieved a wide popularity and can be repeated with relative frequency. But it is a soul-blessing, heartwarming experience to hear a new or relatively unfamiliar song.

One reason for the limited range of songs is the apparent aversion of special singers to anything like thorough rehearsals. There are those who mistakenly feel that rehearsals will take the freshness from a song. But just the opposite is true. The more familiar one is with a number and the more certain he is of his words and music, the more free he is to give expression to the meaning and message of the song.

Probably the large proportion of special numbers will continue to be solos. However, the use of small singing groups in duets, trios, or quartets offers excellent possibilities. Voices that are not of proper quality or strength for solo singing can be used to advantage in groups. Such combinations present the opportunity of appealing to young people to assist in the special music program of the church.

Frequently, even in smaller churches, young people from high school choirs are available for church groups. "Trial runs" for various combinations can be arranged with profit in connection with young people's society programs or services, where the responsibility is not so heavy as in the regular church service.

At this point a word of caution may well be given to the pastor whose wife and children are gifted musically. While these may turn in a better performance, and while they are always available, they should not monopolize the special music of the church. Others should be given opportunity to learn and to participate. And incidentally, one good way to develop opposition toward the pastor is in this area of music monopoly by the pastor's family.

The vocal trio constitutes a particularly attractive and effective form of sacred music, particularly in the area of gospel songs. Also it is relatively easy to organize and maintain. By a proper assignment of parts, almost any combination of voices can be used, involving men or women or both. Furthermore, three-part arrangements can follow a much freer use of harmonic progressions and intervals, while four-part harmony normally follows quite a strict set of harmonic rules. The fact is that even in a small church, if there are three people who are not monotones, there can be a trio.

Double or triple trios offer a wide range of possibilities. The advantages of the trio form are maintained, while the addition of voices provides increased richness and volume. The mixture of men's and women's voices in such multiple groups can provide additional variety of tone and effect.

To achieve the best results in the operation of these small singing groups, attention must be given to the balance of the voices. If one of the voices is heavier than the other two in a trio, either a substitution must be made or that individual must habitually subdue the voice. Of course, it is

essential that the melody voice be slightly more prominent than the accompanying voices, and if the melody should shift from one voice to another, then the balance of tone should shift accordingly. The application of just a little intelligence and discrimination in these matters will pay large dividends.

### 3. Accompanying Special Songs

As a rule, the larger the group involved, the smaller the problem of the accompaniment, and vice versa. Obviously, then, the major problem is in providing an adequate and appropriate accompaniment for a soloist.

A proper accompaniment demands far more than playing accurately the music provided. The accompanist must find a means of relating the instrumental music to the vocal that will result in a musical unity.

(a) First of all, the accompaniment is not to give the accompanist the opportunity of demonstrating musical prowess or of displaying technical facility. The accompaniment is to furnish background and support for the singer. The accompaniment never is to be primary, but complementary and subordinate. Any time the attention of the congregation leaves the singer and moves to the accompanist, something is wrong.

(b) Follow the singer. The singer's interpretation may not coincide at all with the accompanist's ideas, but the good accompanist will subordinate his feelings to that of the singer and will not attempt to force his version upon the soloist.

(c) Learn to anticipate the soloist. This can be developed into an almost uncanny sense of prediction as to what the singer will do. Even with a singer whom one is accompanying the first time without rehearsal, one verse is sufficient to determine his style and probable interpretation.

(d) Rehearse the accompaniment, and if possible, rehearse with the soloist. At this point, soloists could be much more thoughtful and helpful than they frequently are.

(e) Get the "feel" of the song, so that the general mood of the accompaniment can serve to undergird the message of the song.

(f) Be familiar with the words. Accompanists too often presume that familiarity with the music is sufficient. But the accompanist should be as familiar with the words as is the soloist, for in the last analysis the interpretation will be determined by the words rather than by the music. Such familiarity will obviate the exasperating situation in which an accompanist rushes ahead of the soloist where the word phrasing would clearly indicate a pause, a ritard, a held note, deliberation, or some other deviation from the normal rhythm.

(g) Give adequate support. This involves an intelligent evaluation of the voice of the soloist as to quality and volume, and calls for a wide elasticity in the playing of the accompanist. Watch for points of climax in the song, and vary the volume of the accompaniment accordingly. To have a soloist move up to such a point with volume and firmness only to find the accompanist playing a soft, tinkling bit



of harmony is like leaving him suspended in thin air. Also, if there is some considerable distance between the instrument and the soloist, be sure he can hear the instrument. Excellent singers sometimes find themselves embarrassingly off key, only because they are unable to hear the accompaniment.

(h) And what about the soloist who, because of limitations, tends to wander off key? In the first place, the accompanist should be alert to this possibility, and at the first sign of such difficulty should very discreetly and gradually increase the volume and accent the melody of the accompaniment. If the deviation continues, and the accompanist is sufficiently expert, a shift of key one half step can avert complete disaster.

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# **SINGING DISCIPLES**

## Toward Better Church Music

By  
**Hugh C. Benner**

### **Chapter 5**

## **INSTRUMENTS IN THE CHURCH**

The organ, or some similar instrument of the electronic variety, has come into wide use in recent years, even in smaller churches. On the whole this is good, for the organ tone adds much to the general atmosphere of a service, particularly when worship is the major interest.

However, the principal problem relating to the organ is the organist. Relatively few have had the opportunity to study the organ formally. Thus in the average church some pianist becomes organist and frequently with much less than satisfactory results. In the first place, too few understand the great and basic difference in technique between playing the organ and the piano. Fundamentally, the piano is a percussion instrument, for the tone is produced by a hammer striking the strings, and the hammer is moved by striking the key. Even when it may seem that the action on the key is mere pressure, there must be a sufficient stroke to force the hammer past the point of release in the mechanism; otherwise the hammer drops back without ever touching the string.

The organ basically is a pressure instrument. A heavier stroke on an organ key will make absolutely no difference in the volume of tone, for this is determined by the setting of stops and the pedals which affect volume control. Of course varieties of effects can be produced by varieties of releases, but the basic production of tone is by pressure. Also there is a fundamental difference between these instruments in the continuation or sustaining of tones. A piano tone can be sustained by the operation of the proper pedal. But there is no such "carry-over" on an organ. The tone continues only so long as the key is depressed.

It is obvious that when a pianist begins to play an organ, a whole set of new and different techniques is involved. If possible, some organ lessons should be taken to secure the basic principles of organ playing. Otherwise, appropriate books should be secured and the beginning organist should make a thorough study of them. As much time as possible should be given to practice and to familiarization with the tonal and dynamic control and possibilities of the instrument being played.

With all its values and possibilities, the organ never can take the place of the piano in services devoted to evangelism. It is for this reason that many churches utilize both the organ and the piano in the sanctuary. Frequently the organ is used for the Sunday morning service, and both instruments are played for the evening evangelistic service. The quality of the piano tone, and the possibility of rhythmic emphasis by the pianist, add much to the singing of the rhythmic gospel songs.

In most churches music is played during the receiving of the offering, under the general term offertory. In the more formal churches this may be quite an extended performance. But in a Nazarene service the offertory should be timed just to cover the period of the offering. While there are many appropriate secular compositions which may be played as offertories, we would emphasize the value

of hymns for this purpose. Beautiful instrumental arrangements of hymns are being published by many companies, and in increasing volume.

It should also be clear that the offertory should not be used as the occasion for demonstrating musical pyrotechnics. Loud or pompous compositions are to be avoided, and music should be chosen that will not introduce any interest or spirit not compatible with the basic purpose of the service.

If organ and piano are used together, thorough rehearsal is highly advisable. It is extremely distressing to hear two instruments seesawing through a number.

An instrumental prelude to a service should always be adapted to the atmosphere and purpose of the service. Thus, a series of lively, rhythmic numbers is completely out of place in the early moments of a worship service. On the other hand, the spirit of an evangelistic service can be greatly hindered by a prelude of slow and somber hymns. Care and planning in all these matters will pay big dividends. No musician is competent enough to rush to an organ or piano without planning or preparation and adequately fulfill the responsibilities incident to such an assignment in a divine service.

## **THE ORCHESTRA**

Some churches have been able to develop group instrumental playing to a point of real effectiveness. The problem usually is that brass instruments predominate, with the result that a heavy, strident tone militates against the best interest of the music generally. We suggest a greater emphasis on stringed instruments, such as the violin, cello, and double bass. As a rule, through Sunday school and young people's contacts, players who are not members of the church can be persuaded to join such a group and play for the evening service.

The smaller wood-wind instruments, especially the clarinet, flute, and smaller saxophone, can be used to advantage. With strings and wood-winds to soften and mellow the total effect, a brass quartet can furnish the solid base for an agreeable and balanced result. The brass quartet can be composed of two trumpets, a trombone, and some heavier instrument for the bass, possibly a baritone horn or an E-flat bass.

Of course, in the smaller church it is not usually possible to be very selective as to instrumentation. In that case it is a matter of balance in playing, with the heavier instruments using great discretion as to tone and volume.

The problem of sacred orchestrations is a considerable one, although several companies can furnish orchestrations of hymns and hymn medleys, as well as secular numbers which can be used for preludes and offertories. Our own Lillenas Publishing Company, in conjunction with the Nazarene hymnal, Praise and Worship, has pioneered a simple but effective form of "hymn-orchestration" in which one book serves all the instruments of a given key. In this way the number of parts or books to be purchased is limited, and furthermore, almost any combination of instruments can be used.

Those interested in orchestral development can do much in that interest by encouraging young people to study the instruments desired. Frequently this can be done in connection with the public

school music program. Otherwise, the church can provide for at least a limited period of instruction. Where larger instruments, such as the bass viol or tuba, are involved, the church may be wise to provide them, making it clear, of course, that the user is responsible for the proper care of the instrument.

In cases where a competent director for the orchestra is not available in the church, it is frequently possible to secure someone who can rehearse the group regularly each week, and then they can play without direction in the Sunday services. In a southern California church the writer co-operated in such a plan, providing for a weekly rehearsal, and training a first violinist to furnish simple direction for the group on Sunday. A competent orchestra averaging twenty members was maintained over a period of more than five years using this plan.

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# **SINGING DISCIPLES**

## Toward Better Church Music

By  
**Hugh C. Benner**

### **Chapter 6**

#### **TOWARD BETTER CHURCH MUSIC**

The gospel of Christ deserves the best in expression and promotion. Too often Christians are willing to be less proficient and effective in the work of God than they are in matters secular. But such an attitude is unworthy of the high and holy significance of the gospel.

In the total concept of the church, the ministry of the Word of God has the top priority. But second only to the preaching of the Word in the church services is the influence and significance of music. Thus a careless, incompetent, and inadequate musical program can do much to thwart and make relatively ineffective the highest type of preaching ministry.

The Apostle Paul by clear implication placed participation in the music of the church on an exalted plane, for immediately following his reference to music in the letter to Colossians cited in our opening chapter, he says, "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Col. 3:17). The fact that the next verse introduces a totally different idea makes it clear that Christian music was to be considered in the light of this exhortation.

Therefore, all who have anything to do with the music of the church, and especially those who hold major positions related to the planning and execution of the musical phase of the church services, should sense a thrilling challenge. While not all church musicians can be superior musicians, they can, through study, practice, prayer, and a more consecrated attitude, become better musicians.

God never is glorified by that which is less than our reasonable best. Carelessness, indifference, and unnecessary incompetence cannot honor Him and His cause. Certainly God is forced to work, in many instances, in spite of patent musical hindrances. But a little attention, time, and energy can improve the music to the point that it will enhance the service and become a contributing factor to the effectiveness of the gospel and its outreach.

#### **IN THE LARGER CHURCH**

While larger churches normally have a wider range as to musical personnel, they are not necessarily free from music problems and need a periodic evaluation of their music programs. In some instances the problem lies in an extended tenure of an important music position, such as song leader, organist, or pianist, by someone of limited ability. There have been instances where incompetent musicians held these posts for years, while competent, consecrated musicians sat in the congregation. Obviously, the effectiveness of the church was lessened greatly.

In this, or any other circumstance that so seriously affects the church and its service, the pastor and church board have a definite responsibility. While a Christian spirit must be maintained in solving

such problems, and patience and tact must be exercised, the time finally arrives when the best interests of the church must take precedence over the desires or ambitions of the individual, and such changes must be made as will utilize the available talent for the highest effectiveness of the church.

### **The Minister of Music**

Churches of sufficient size and with adequate resources are increasingly employing ministers of music or musical directors. This plan provides for paid leadership in developing the musical potential of the church, and can be a major factor in the enrichment of the services of the church, and also in the outreach of the church.

Frequently this is a part-time position, or the work is carried on in conjunction with some other assignment in the church. Individuals who are trained sufficiently to assume the direction of the music program of the church, but who also can serve to head up the church school administration, or who are capable in secretarial or visitation activities, can find numerous opportunities for Christian service on a remunerative basis.

In any case, and whatever the title, the musical assignment should be considered as a ministry. As such, it should be related always to the total concept of the work of the church, and never considered as a separate area, to be developed as an end in itself. In full accord with this idea, the minister or director of music should work closely with the pastor and should counsel with him as to plans and organization. While it is inevitable that the personality of the music director will influence the church and its services, he should recognize that in the last analysis the pastor carries the basic responsibility, and every reasonable effort should be made to strengthen and support the pastor's concept and plans for the work of the church.

### **IN THE SMALLER CHURCH**

We would now address ourselves particularly to the smaller church, for in such a church there is the temptation to feel that not much is at stake, and that the music, be it "good, bad, or indifferent," is of no special significance. But just the reverse is true. The small church needs all the help it can get to make effective contacts and to draw new people into fellowship. If people come and find evidences of carelessness, they will not be attracted permanently.

We have observed such a situation all too frequently in one or more of the following:

1. The song leader moving toward the platform, feverishly thumbing through his songbook, trying to find an opening song.
2. The minister apparently no better prepared for those all-important early moments of the service, when a strong, and frequently lasting, impression is given of the church, its pastor, and its service.
3. The organist or pianist rushing breathlessly toward the instrument from some earlier assignment, possibly as Sunday school teacher, and giving the unmistakable impression of complete unpreparedness.

4. The choir members moving to their places, either directly from the aisles of the sanctuary or evidencing enough of uncertainty and confusion to indicate an inadequate period for gathering and arrangement in proper order.

5. Hymnals or songbooks either out of the racks or looking as if they had been tossed into them.

6. Hymnals or songbooks ragged, dog-eared, mutilated, or marked by children.

7. A special number with the soloist or group acting as if they were not too well acquainted with the song and an accompanist providing quite the same impression.

NONE of these situations is necessary, and every one of them can be corrected by care and application worthy of service "in the name of the Lord Jesus."

Agreed that not too many churches are afflicted with all the above "musical ills," any one of them is too many for the best interest of the gospel of Christ. So it is wise to make a thorough and objective check of the musical situation in any and every church at frequent intervals, judging every detail critically and with complete candor. By such a procedure the musical phase of any church program can be strengthened and developed to a point of greater effectiveness in the worship and evangelistic experiences of the church.

Thank God for music! Thank God for the power, beauty, attractiveness, and blessedness of gospel music! But the best of gospel music cannot "carry its own weight." It must be brought to the people through human instrumentality. For this reason, all concerned with this vital ministry need to feel a deep sense of responsibility for doing their reasonable best, and for making every possible contribution toward better church music.

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# **SINGING DISCIPLES**

Toward Better Church Music

By

**Hugh C. Benner**

## **ENDNOTE**

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