

Grace Notes in Miniature

For Thursday, May 21, 2020

Dear friends:

Yesterday started me on a roll of engaging our senses. One of the first things I heard this morning was a bird singing so beautifully outside my window, and it made me think of so many sounds in nature, like wind soughing through reeds or grasses, water tinkling on rocks in a stream, crickets chirping or frogs peeping. Not all music is “orchestrated”! While visiting a friend one day I was intrigued by the musical phrase – one I thought I recognised – played whenever one flushed the toilet. I asked about such a device for the toilet tank and got a fair amount of laughter: it turned out this was an accident of the plumbing pipes! Composers have been inspired by the sounds of nature to write some beautiful and best-loved pieces. Can you hear the bird songs in this one? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-4kTei0XrCs>

I turned to the Bible to see what it said about music. First to mind is Psalm 100: I enjoy this arrangement: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vsiZq0djBwI>

¹ Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth.

² Worship the LORD with gladness; come into his presence with singing.

³ Know that the LORD is God.

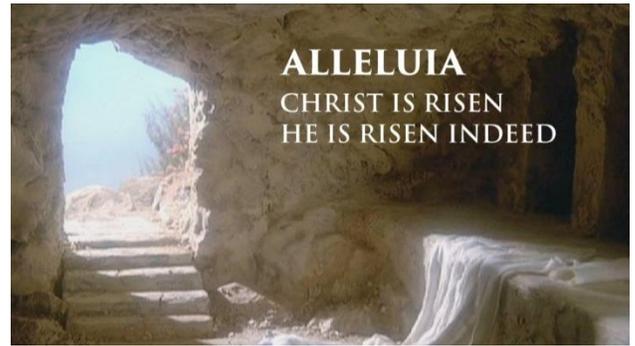
It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

⁴ Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name.

⁵ For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations. (NRSV)

In the book of Daniel (3:5) we learn ⁵ that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble, you are to fall down and worship the golden statue that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. Although we might reject the instruction, the information that these instruments were enjoyed historically is intriguing. I learned that Josephus Flavius, a First Century Jewish historian, wrote that “all details of the First Temple, including its musical instruments, were made and viewed as “symbols of the universe”, especially instruments like the kithara or lyre...[that they] represent a perishable “image” of the cosmos, or of “a cosmic Temple.”

Jubal, mentioned in Genesis 4:21, is considered the Father or patron of harpists/harpers and organists, and the harp seems to have been among the earliest of instruments. King David is recognised by many as being a player of the harp (modern day musicians identify those who play a concert harp with pedals as ‘harpists’, and those who play a folk instrument with no



pedals as 'harpers': no comment on the superiority of the music, just differentiating the styles). Stringed instruments of the biblical period would include the harp, lute, lyre and psaltery. Note that the last Psalm, 150, is about music: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LICDBT9LF_Y

¹ Praise the LORD! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty firmament.

² Praise him for his mighty deeds; praise him according to his surpassing greatness!

³ Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp!

⁴ Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe!

⁵ Praise him with clanging cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals!

⁶ Let everything that breathes praise the LORD! Praise the LORD! (NRSV)

Poet William Congreve (1670=1729) wrote "Music Hath Charms to Soothe the Savage Breast" and, according to Dr. Michael Miller, Director of the Center for Preventive Cardiology at the University of Maryland Medical Center, listening to music that makes you feel good could have health benefits that might prevent a heart attack.

Music therapy has come into its own in recent decades, not just because of its healing applications but also because it is recognised as calming agitation and helping with memory as it does with people dealing with dementia and Alzheimer's Syndrome. I believe I have mentioned before that my mother, who couldn't remember in her last years if she had had lunch ten minutes ago and would become agitated and confused, would calm very quickly and join in singing hymns and songs from her youth.

Many schools and malls have found that playing music can influence movement: I have seen the 1812 Overture used fairly successfully to get students to class, and certain types of music played in a shopping centre will discourage people under a certain age from loitering. (See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Mosquito)

There is evidence to support music as an aid in studying and in helping the recovery of brain function in those who have suffered brain injury. Musical stimulation also helps the development of very premature babies in acquiring skills like sucking and swallowing. Music may help people deal with medical procedures and dental visits, and many surgeons have preferences for playing music in their operating theatres because they find it helps their concentration.

In closing, these words of St Augustine surface quite often and in many forms: For he who sings praise, does not only praise, but also praises joyously; he who sings praise, is not only singing, but also loving Him whom he is singing about/to/for. (Cf. Sanctus Augustinus, Enarratio in Psalmum 72, 1: CCL 39, 986 (PL 36, 914).)

And just for fun, with thanks to Elizabeth Trolieo, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BISrGwN-yH4>

With every blessing,

Gillian