

Are You Gifted to Sing?
or
Why Have a Choir, Anyway?
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Fashion goes in cycles.

1) Fashion in Clothes is cyclical. My son Steven came home with a cool sweater vest two days ago. What I said: "Wow, nice vest!" What I didn't say: "It looked a lot like a sweater vest that I used to wear about 30 years ago".

2) Fashion in Music is also cyclical. There have been many times in the history of music when there has been a paradigm shift of styles. The Renaissance/Baroque boundary in 1600 saw the shift from the complexities of the High Renaissance Polyphonic Motet to the simplicity of early opera of the Baroque Era. Similarly at the Baroque/Classical boundary the choral complexity of Bach cantatas and Handel oratorios (such as Messiah) gave way to more simple sounds of the early Classical era (although they really weren't that much simpler in composition).

In modern music the Swing Era/Rock n' Roll boundary saw a dramatic change in style and instrumentation as well as a corresponding change in vocal quality and style.

Since the Beatles in the 60's contemporary music has moved cyclically between emphasizing the singer or the group.

Some music fashions go out of style and stay out of style - for good reason.

3) Fashion in the church is cyclical. Some eras emphasize Bible study, some eras emphasize Small groups, some eras emphasize reaching the unchurched, some eras emphasize worship.

4) Fashion in Music Ministry is cyclical. It has been historically true that music in the church usually lags music in the culture by about 8 to 10 years. The change in music during the beginnings of the Rock era saw a corresponding move away from choirs with piano and organ to Worship Teams with guitars and drums. Most churches have moved through that transition now, but in each church where that change occurred it was often grueling and fraught with controversy. I know, I lived it -- a number of times.

What never goes out of fashion - singing.

One thing is common - communication with our voices never goes out of style. Whether it is singing classical music in a school concert, singing in church, or shouting your lungs out at a rock concert, singing is a part of all cultures in all countries in all eras.

Singing is communicating text with pitch. Sometimes the pitch is not that important to the communication, and sometimes the pitch is essential to the communication and only those who can accurately control that pitch are allowed to be in performance situations.

Singing has been a part of church ministry for over 1000 years. From Gregorian chant, through Medieval organum, to Renaissance motets; from Baroque cantatas through Classical settings of Masses to Romantic large works with great orchestras; from 20th century with gospel music through the 1950's with John W. Peterson; into the 70's with Ralph Carmichael and into the 80's with Dave Williamson; and then into 90's Worship Team/Choir combinations; and now into the 21st century -- we're still singing.

What is a choir?

A choir is a gathering of singers who have a common passion to communicate with music, who are gifted musically, and who the process of making music.

Technically a choir doesn't have to sing harmony, but realistically that is the purpose. Voices combining with voices to make music.

My experience in working with voices.

For you to want to sing in a group that I direct, you have to have confidence that I know what I'm doing. So for those who don't know me, here is some background.

1) My own singing career. From early childhood I knew I could sing better than anyone else in my school and anyone else in my church children's choir. That's sounds braggadocious, but it is true. I knew it. I didn't know why I could, but I knew it was true.

I learned to read music very, very well because of my instrumental experience - I learned to play trombone in 4th grade, switched to French Horn in the 6th grade, was first chair in the All District Orchestra in 6th grade, then was voted Most Valuable Player twice in my Jr. High Orchestra, and played in the CSUN (then Valley State) Saturday Conservatory orchestra under Dr. Lawrence Christianson for four years while in 9th - 12th grade. I started my UCLA Music Major experience as a French Horn major before switching to choral music in my junior year.

I sang in every musical group at my church from Primary Choir, Junior Choir, Jr. High Choir, High School Choir, and College Choir. I toured with all of the choir musicals from High School through College, was in the auditioned small groups in both high school and college, including the Certain Sounds, with which I got to travel to Korea, Japan, England, Sweden, and various places in the western US, including two extended stays doing concerts in Hawaii. I sang in four Living Christmas Tree Productions, and had numerous solos, including songs I had written myself.

When I started graduate school at USC, I sang with a group called Pacific Standard for a year, then became absorbed in directing my own music ministries. I had sung for two years at UCLA with the UCLA A Cappella Choir under Roger Wagner (which did large works, and rarely sang a cappella, but rather did a lot of Requiem masses by various composers, including the Verdi Requiem, which is a huge work). At USC I sang with the USC Concert Choir, directed by Dr. Jim Vail.

I did some community singing with the Brentwood-Palisades Chorale, including a minor solo role in their presentation of Bizet's Opera Carmen with the Palisades Symphony. I have done

some studio work, but not as much as I had hoped to do in my youth - it turned out that I couldn't sing low enough to work as a bass nor high enough to work as a tenor. O well.

2) My education. (UCLA - BA; USC - MM w/o thesis; Western Seminary, M.Div.)
Private voice lessons: 3 years with Jack Coleman; a year with Mr. Eddy, a year with Dr. Tom Cleveland.

Vocal pedagogy: At USC - Doug Lawrence, Michael Sells - 2 courses in how to teach voice.

Conducting: I studied Instrumental conducting at UCLA with Dr. Clarence Sawhill. I studied Vocal conducting at UCLA with Dr. Don Weiss (choral conducting I & II) and took two Advanced Choral Conducting classes with Dr. Roger Wagner, founding director of the Los Angeles Master Chorale. In graduate school at USC I took Dr. Charles Hirt - Choral Development from Dr. Charles Hirt and two courses in Choral Literature from Dr. James Vail.

French Horn: I took 12 years of private instruction from Art Lebow at CSUN/Valley State, from Denny Acton and then at UCLA from Sinclair Lott, who at the time was the principal horn with the Los Angeles Philharmonic. I have played many seasons with the various community orchestras, including the Palisades Symphony; the L.A. Doctors Symphony; and currently with the Santa Monica College Symphony under Dr. Jim Smith

3) My ministry experience. I have served as music minister in 5 churches, not including Wings of Faith. In one of them, Calvary of Pacific Palisades, I served twice for a total of 10 years. I served at two churches in Oregon while in seminary, and 6 years at Valley Church in Cupertino, CA (Silicon Valley near San Jose). Also Cornerstone Christian Church upon returning to the Valley.

At Valley Church in Cupertino, CA, in 1989, I directed a music ministry of 17 different groups of choirs and small groups, including three children's choirs -- Cherubs (4's & 5's, K -- in fact, each group met separately now that I think about it); Primary (1st - 3rd grade); Junior (4th - 5th grade); Jr. High choir; High School choir; College-Career choir, and the Adult choir. We also had a senior adult women's chorale. Each choir had about 40 voices, give or take 20. From each choir we auditioned a 12 voice select ensemble, so the High School choir had "Seasons of Heart", the College-Career Choir had "Mirror Image", and the Adult Choir had "".

At Valley Church we also had a full instrumental program: an adult handbell choir, a youth handbell choir, the orchestra (auditioned - the Valley Sinfonia); our conservatory ensemble (intermediate players); and our beginning strings and beginning winds ensembles.

No, I didn't direct them all -- only 5 of them: the adult choir, the orchestra; the High school ensemble; the College-Career Ensemble; the intermediate winds; and the beginning winds; although in building the program I directed every other group at some time -- no, there were a couple of exceptions. I had a full-time secretary and a full-time assistant, plus 10 other volunteer directors.

Our motto was "every age, every ability level, vocally and instrumentally to the glory of God".

4) My own students: I have had over two hundred voice students over the years. Some have gone on to other great things, such as Lois Sakamoto Marella, who was the Overall National Grand Prize Winner at the Estes Park in 1989.

I have also taught French Horn, piano, and guitar. Currently one of my students, a doctor who started French Horn from scratch in 2002, is now playing regularly with the University Synagogue Chamber Orchestra and the Santa Monica Emeritus College Band.

I have taught Music 101: The Fundamentals of Music on seven different occasions for the University of La Verne at Fuller Seminary, where I wrote the curriculum for the class and a subsequent book using the principles of Measured Music, after the name of my company Measured Music International.

All of this to say, I hope you'll have confidence in my ability to conduct a choir that would be worthy of your time, effort, and commitment.

The Current Challenge: a new choir

As I have gravitated to the senior pastor position I have not done as much with music ministry, especially in the smaller churches where I have served the last 15 years. But I have an itch to get back and get going again.

We're going to start by building a strong choir.

I'm looking for 24 voices - singers who can hold their own part accurately and can also read music. Some will read well, and others will read some, but all will read (or learn to read very quickly).

I have already selected the music . Jesus Son of God is a dramatic musical for Easter created by Gary Rhodes. I have respected Gary's writing for years, and I feel that this work has the potential to communicate powerfully to our generation. The music is well written and the dramatic portion can be effectively done with our group without costumes and with little staging --it is written to be reader's theater, but we will memorize the lines.

Are you gifted?

God gives gifts which differ. Read the lists in Ephesians 4, Romans 12, and I Corinthians 12 and you'll discover a couple of things:

- 1) The lists are not exhaustive. Each list has different gifts, and no list has all the gifts. Therefore, there well may be other gifts that are not listed. I believe the music is a gift. God has given the gift to some and not to others, similar to athletic ability.
- 2) Gifts need to be used. The gifts are given for the building up of the Body of Christ. We need to exercise our gifts. There is no point in having a giftedness and then never using it. That's crazy.

3) There needs to be organization to facilitate the use of gifts on a large scale. For music, there needs to be a director and organizer.

The director needs to train the voices in how to deliver the music in such a way as to maximize effectiveness of communication and music aesthetics. (Which is why we will memorize our music.)

The organizer must get everyone together and make sure everyone has all of the materials that they need, such as music, recordings, rehearsal tracks, appropriate clothing and/or costumes, pencils ... all that stuff.

At this point I am doing both but I'd sure like to share the load! Who else would like to help build the Wings of Faith Music Ministry?

I am looking for gifted singers who have a passion to share the brilliant plan of God with the world. Are you one of them? Please work with me!