

MUSIC WORKSHOP conducted by Dr. Thomas Richner, organist for The Mother Church presented at First Church, San Francisco on Saturday, February 3, 1979

MUSIC IN A CHURCH OF CHRIST, SCIENTIST

(Message for 1900 by Mary Baker Eddy page 11:17-18)

"quality"

"variation in Tone"

"quantity"

"the unction of Love"

Strive for the "divine tone."

REQUIREMENTS OF THE CHURCH MANUAL

(Article XIX, Section 1)

The requirement against "operatic" was Mrs. Eddy's demand that church music be of an "appropriate religious character" because in her day church choirs and soloists and organists were using transcriptions of operas, which were a far cry from her standards of worship. This bylaw does not cut out the lovely arias from the oratorios and cantatas which were composed as religious music.

"an appropriate religious character"

"a recognized standard of musical excellence"

"music from the organ alone" answers the questions about other instruments

"eight or nine minutes" establishes the purpose of the prelude: to introduce the service. Anything longer becomes a recital. Musicians in a church service are not giving recitals, are not showing off their voices or manual dexterity or how well they do difficult compositions. The message of Truth should be transmitted by the musicians through the music for the service. Mrs. Eddy loved music and she expected it to be delivered fully prepared, in a "dignified and suitable" manner, relaxed, not rigid.

There is no such rule as "You can't play music written in a minor key in our church because it's too sad." Compositions in a minor key can be positive statements, majestic, peaceful, comforting. The minor key can always be resolved into the major at the very end, if the musician so desires.

Contemporary music is welcome. The congregation may not enjoy it, but with frequent hearing of more modern harmonies, they may learn to like and appreciate it. In Science and Health on page 304, line 25-26, "discord" is recognized as part of the "science of music" to be mastered; contemporary music may sound dissonant, but ~~they~~ have been composed by masters of discord.

HYMNS

Are the most important musical part of our service. (Science and Health 234:4)

Should be played in a lively, sing-able tempo. Tempo indications at the back of the Hymnal are guidelines only, not rigid requirements. We live in a fast-paced society; tempo should reflect our lives.

The organist is the leader of the hymns.

The hymns should be "announced" and played with registration of principal stops, then add registration for the first verse, but stick to foundation stops. Variation of color is suggested when verses suggest variation in thought (example: last verse of Mrs. Eddy's Communion hymn, "Strongest deliverer" can be played with fuller registration.)

The organist should judge by the acoustics of the auditorium, the size of the auditorium and the number of people attending to decide upon registration. "You aren't supposed to blow them out!"

People need to breathe when singing. Hymns are written in thoughts and phrases so the organist plays in phrases and allows breaks for breathing, but not PAUSES. (Rob the preceding note to allow a breath before striking the subsequent note.) It should allow for natural breathing so that the congregation is not forced to sing uncomfortably, and surely not without understanding what they are singing!

Hymns have a "pulse" rather than a metric "beat." Do not "beat out" a hymn. Play pedals as written.

Play hymns as written. (No descant, no modulation between verses.)

The "tag" or "sitdown" music ties the service together and covers the rustle.

The "tag" is played in a quieter registration (set registration on swell manual and immediately move there at the last of the hymn. Unda maris good.) There is no tag on the final hymn; the organist goes directly into the postlude.

Hymns should be practiced to perfection; 99% of the congregation knows them!

Use all the hymns, they are beautiful. If you don't know the hymns, have "hymn sings" and acquaint the members with the less familiar tunes. The Music Committee could chair these meetings. The Mother Church holds three or four a year; they are not regularly held, but spaced occasionally. The chairman tells something of the hymn, the organist plays through and the soloist sings through one verse, then everyone joins in. Hymn sings should not be held following any service, including the Wednesday testimony meetings.

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR ELECTRONIC ORGAN

Simulate the sound of a pipe organ by using foundation stops, principals.

Avoid loudness; too much volume distorts the sound.

Adapt the organ to the service and to the building, not the service to the organ.

Use the tremolo sparingly and judiciously to add color.

Strive for "quality."

The SOLO

Registration should accompany the type of voice for the soloist: principals the best. Some light voices go well with flutes; strings with principal make good accompaniment; strong male voice can take trumpet added to principals, but pay attention to the character of the solo. A good celeste adds warmth.

The solo is chosen not to exhibit the soloist, but for the message, just as the Readers do not impress us with their manner, but allow the Truth to flow through them. Should be delivered with humility, effortlessly. This comes with practice.

Select the solo according to the Lesson-Sermon.

In The Mother Church, the First Reader is shown the solo and if there are reservations about the words, the matter is sent to the Music Committee for decision.

The soloist never sings without the music. If required to memorize the music, it is wise to hold a small hymnal with the solo words written out. Again, we are not there to impress the congregation with our memory skills, but to give selflessly of our talent to contribute to the message of the service. The music and the message, not the person. By holding the music and referring to it, we are giving our attention to the message in the music and that shows we know it's important.

If you have access to a good recorder, it's helpful to rehearse and play back what has been practiced. A recorder is a "truth machine" for the musicians; what it plays back is what it heard!

The organ is part of the solo; musicians must work together.

The solo is an integral part of the service. Do not drop it unless extreme emergency arises. Preparation is essential.

PRELUDE, OFFERTORY, POSTLUDE

Study the Lesson-Sermon in advance. Do metaphysical work for the unfoldment of the music for each service.

The offertory is not cut off the instant the collection is finished; don't be rigid about this manual bylaw...be a musician and select a composition that will fit the time and play the music to its ~~conclusion~~ conclusion.

The offertory is an excellent time for healing message; renewal, affirmation of the Lesson.

A quiet postlude is effective for some Lesson-Sermons. The postlude doesn't have to be majestic always.

At The Mother Church, the organist does not play a hymn after the prelude to bring the Readers on the platform. It is regarded as ritual, which has no place in our services. The organist plays eight or nine minutes and signals to the Readers to allow them time to get to the platform, sit down and have a moment or two before beginning the service. The service must begin promptly at the stated hour.

Dr. Richner usually plays two compositions: the first majestic, glorious, full and the second a more contemplative in nature (but not dirgelike or slow or melancholy).

For lectures, the organist (or pianist) plays eight or nine minutes; anything longer is a recital and that is not the purpose of the music at a lecture. The same kind of music is considered as that for a church service: appropriate religious character and standard of musical excellence.

Organ recitals given by our churches are sharing music with our community; a recital is a gift to the community. They should not be held regularly, but may be scheduled occasionally. The church organist may present them or a musician outside the church may be invited to play. For recitals, choice is open for the kind of music to be played: music that will demonstrate the instrument's range, original compositions, beyond "religious" character.

The recital idea emerged in 1910 when The First Church directors were asked to participate with city churches by hosting one of their organ recitals. Mrs. Eddy was asked for direction and in her reply, after admonishing them to "stop bothering me with these details" she said go ahead, but "let it be the exception rather than the rule." The Board of Directors and the Department of Branches and Practitioners stress that recitals NOT be a regular, scheduled thing so that it does not become the rule.

Suggested reading in the periodicals:

June 1978 Journal "The Soloist and the Word"

Music in the Church by Wrightson April 1968 Journal Vol. 86

Importance of Church Music by Wise June 1978 Journal Vol. 86

Music in the Church Service (Annual Meeting) Richner Jan 1974 Journal Vol. 92