

## *Then Sings My Soul*

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The relationship between music and worship began with ancient peoples who drummed, chanted and danced to appease and praise their gods. Today, describing the relationship between music and worship depends on where you are, the traditions of your particular culture, and the restraints (or freedoms) of your religious affiliation.

According to Choral Artists Director Dr. Joseph Holt, today's concert is intended to highlight three religions of the world that share a common ancestry. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam each descend from the prophet Abraham. In Judaism, "Abram" is the prophet who convinced God to make a covenant with the Jewish people so they might multiply and continue to prosper. In Christianity, Jesus Christ is a direct descendent of the prophet Abraham. In Islam, Abraham (Ibrahim) is the prophet who cleansed the people from paganism and idolatry, a prophet with a direct link to Muhammad.

These three religions share the same God, although they call their God by different names and have vastly different worship traditions. All three share teachings that promote peace.

The early Christian (Roman) Church put restrictions on the use of music for worship. Chants similar in structure to both Judaism and Islam were performed by priests with little participation from the worshipers themselves. Musical harmony was treated with suspicion, to the point where a specific musical interval (the *tritone* or augmented 4<sup>th</sup>) was considered satanic.

These restrictions did not stem from a misunderstanding of the power of music, but rather from an acknowledgement of that power. Worshipers were expected to focus on a spiritual connection with God without being distracted by emotional reactions to the beauty and pleasures of the music itself. In Islam, similar restrictions continue today.

Christianity and Judaism (especially outside the Sabbath service) evolved into an opposite belief—that the beauty and power of music can provide emotional support, comfort and inspiration to worshipers. In parallel with secular music, sacred music grew from chants to the multidimensional experience that it is today, involving organs and choirs, orchestras and congregational singing.

One great musical tradition of the Christian church is its hymnody—straight-forward songs of praise, prayer or encouragement written to be sung by all worshipers. In today's concert you will hear modern arrangements of hymns written in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, when there was a great outpouring of sacred poetry. You will also be introduced to a few appealing contemporary pieces, and the concert will end with two well-known and beloved hymns, *Amazing Grace* and *How Great Thou Art*.

The poem *Amazing Grace* was written by John Newton in the 1770's. Newton was a slave trader who converted to Christianity after nearly drowning when his ship went down. His poem expresses the sincere feeling that he was a "wretch" who had been saved, who had been lost and now was found.

*How Great Thou Art* made its way to America by a circuitous route. The poem was written by Carl Boberg in Sweden in 1885 and was attached to a traditional Swedish melody. It was translated into German, then Russian, then into English by an English missionary who added two more verses. *How Great Thou Art* was re-set to a Russian melody, and ultimately was made famous in the 20<sup>th</sup> century during evangelist Billy Graham's televised crusades, ranking second in popularity only to *Amazing Grace*.

The music of Islam is based in chants; choral music does not really exist in Islam. *Prière*, is a modern arrangement of an ancient chant from Iran, sung in Farsi, with a great deal of meditative repetition both harmonically and rhythmically. In contrast, *Zikr* is not meant for a worship service, even though the text is a prayer for peace directed to “Light of Muhammad.” It is sung in Urdu, and its exciting, accelerating music is taken from the wild dances of the whirling dervishes.

*T’filah*, sung in Hebrew, is a prayer asking that the State of Israel be protected and its leaders guided to truth and peace. This piece was published in 1975 and is often performed as part of the Shabbat (Sabbath) morning liturgy. *En Kelohenu* is a modern arrangement of an ancient Hebrew chant from the Sacred Service of the Sabbath Morning.