

Music at Chilwell Road Methodist Church – a review

1. Initial Thoughts

Gary Thomas' book, [Sacred Pathways](#), identifies nine "Sacred Pathways to God", which clarify how different personality types most commonly relate to God.

- a. Naturalists: Loving God out of doors
- b. Sensates: Loving God with the senses
- c. Traditionalists: Loving God through ritual and symbol
- d. Ascetics: Loving God in solitude and simplicity
- e. Activists: Loving God through contemplation
- f. Caregivers: Loving God in loving others
- g. Enthusiasts: Loving God with mystery and celebration
- h. Contemplatives: Loving God through adoration
- i. Intellectuals: Loving God with the mind

To be effective, the Church needs to provide opportunity for all of these types of people to move positively along their Christian journey. We need to take a hard look at our worship and ask what elements of it cater for the needs of each of these kinds of individual. And we need to remember that music is a part of the answer – it works best within a specific context, which may be interpreted differently by each person who experiences it.

2. Background

Chilwell Road Methodist Church is blessed with many talented musicians who participate in making music within the context of worship and other events to the glory of God and as a means of coming to know him/her better.

Music, as a universal language, is immensely powerful – good music can do great things; the "wrong" music can destroy. It was felt that at this time of change in the life of the church, with a new minister joining us in September this year and the potential coming together of different churches around the circuit it was a good time to review what "good" means to the congregation at Chilwell Road and to take time to consider how to maximise the benefit that is derived by the church family from music.

In addition to simply asking people what they like or what "works" for them, in an attempt to take the dialogue to the "bigger picture", the question was asked about what a vision for music within the church would look like. A consultation was instigated, providing individuals with a "stimulus sheet" to encourage them to think around the different aspects of music within our community. Twenty two replies were received and the feedback is summarised below. The aim of the questionnaire was to "start the journey". I do not believe that it is right for a single person to "come up with the answer". The purpose of this document is to take the journey onto the next stage, by encouraging a conversation.

3. **A brief audit of the musical activities that take place within the Church Community**

- a. Instrumental activities
 - i. Organ
 - ii. Piano
 - iii. Worship Band
- b. Vocal activities
 - i. Congregational singing, sometimes unaccompanied
 - ii. Sunday Singers
 - iii. Hooley Singers
 - iv. Carol Choir
 - v. Special music for Good Friday and sung communions
 - vi. Special music at Christmas, e.g. Christmas Concerts, Nottingham Concert Band
- c. Recorded music on CD
- d. Music with young people
 - i. Music in Junior Church, Seniors and Youth Fellowship: percussion
 - ii. Nativity
 - iii. Participation in special services (e.g. Harvest)
 - iv. Church Family Concerts
 - v. "Young Folk"
- e. Music on "the premises"
 - i. The on-going concert series (Village Ventures etc.)
 - ii. Musical groups rehearse on the premises
 - 1. Noteability choir
 - 2. Nottingham Youth Band
 - 3. Korean Church
- f. Music outside Chilwell Road
 - i. Ecumenical activities, sacred and secular, with the other Methodist churches in Beeston, Beeston Parish Church and Attenborough Parish Church
 - 1. Joint concerts
 - 2. Attenborough flower festival
 - 3. Joint choir for Carol Service
 - ii. Events at other churches (e.g. Roger Jones musical at Wollaton Road)
 - iii. Many church members play and sing in local choirs, bands and orchestras
 - iv. Queens Road Panto

4. **Summary of questionnaire responses**

- a. What do we do well? / What do we want to keep?
 - i. Variety. We have plenty of it and we would be glad to have even more.
 - ii. A good balance and range of styles.
 - iii. Quality – The music is of good quality whilst fostering inclusivity.
 - iv. There is a mixture of sacred and secular music, but predominantly sacred. Whatever is performed should be appropriate.
 - v. It is felt that there is a sensitivity to the needs and preferences of all.

- vi. The church creates valued ecumenical links through music.
- vii. Music provides a medium for outreach (concert series / carol choir).
- viii. The band is much appreciated.
- ix. The organ is valued.

b. What do we want to change? / What different things would we like to do?

- i. Have a junior choir.
- ii. Get the children singing more in a worship context.
- iii. Look to get a wider input – recruit “new” musicians from the congregation / find out if there are other musical people around / have an event or fun-day.
- iv. Use instrumentalists more widely than just in the band.
- v. Be willing to take more risks.
- vi. Learn more new hymns.
- vii. Use music more often as an aid to reflection.
- viii. Beware not to let the music provision get too “cliquey” or exclusive.
- ix. Remember that music in worship is not “star of the show”.
- x. Ensure that recorded music is of a high quality and is used appropriately.
- xi. Have services that feature music of different styles, rather than lots of different styles within one service.
- xii. Have a music committee which takes a much more proactive role in choosing music for particular services, rather than leaving 100% of the choice up to the preacher.

5. **General Conclusion**

The sample of people who responded is happy with music at Chilwell Road at the present time. The variety of music that is used within the services is appreciated and the fact that all abilities are catered for is valued. The Worship Band in particular is seen as a very positive way of involving our young people in making “real” music. There are a number of good suggestions for how the musical life of the church could progress in an evolutionary rather than revolutionary way and if they were instigated, they would improve the richness of the musical experience in the church.

6. **A Challenge**

Chilwell Road Methodist Church is exceptionally blessed with the number of skilled musicians and other talented individuals who are part of the church family. Just as we see our church and its premises as a hub in the local community, we should see music as a significant element within this hub and challenge ourselves to explore ways to use music as broadly as possible as a means to fulfil our mission.

This means using music in a more proactive and systematic way as a tool to enable and deliver more fulfilling worship, more effective outreach and deeper links with the local, non church going, community.

Having taken care to celebrate the large amount of “good” music that we already have, we

should challenge ourselves, to find ways that we can develop from this fabulous base into areas that can have even more impact, reach more people and facilitate more community. From the foundation we already have, built on 100+ years of tradition at Chilwell Road and underpinned by the power of music in Methodism, we should be able to take some relatively small (but maybe challenging) steps now that will develop into a ministry of music which fundamentally supports the mission of the church.

Here are some ideas:

a. Within the community

- i. Speak to the Pearson Centre, with all their recording studio and electronic music facilities, to see if there are ways that our “traditional” music facilities could help them with their work with young people.
- ii. Encourage a group to establish a “Beeston Festival” which uses the church as its base.

b. Within our own church

- i. Approach members of the congregation who are from other countries and introduce hymns from their home churches into our services, sung in the native language (to remind ourselves that we are part of a world church).
- ii. Theme the music in our services, not just Taizé or Iona, but exploring other cultures and style of music to expand our horizons.

c. Within the circuit and district

- i. Organise a launch of the new “Singing the Faith” hymn book as the starting point for positioning Chilwell Road as a centre for hymn singing and music in worship.
- ii. Establish a circuit choir.
- iii. Use the organ as a way of encouraging organists (and aspiring organists) to develop their skills and talents.
- iv. Challenge ourselves to understand how music specifically can be an enabler in bringing together the Methodist church family in Beeston.

7. Finally

Adrian Juffs took the “vision” question very literally and came up with the following: “Music in the heart of all we do”. We should commit to exploring if this is the right vision for us and (having “improved” it if necessary) then develop plans and ideas for how we exploit the direction that the vision gives us. This should be a part of our broader set of aims for our church and provide a starting point for our relationship with the new minister. Music should become part of our toolbox that anyone within the church can call on.