

Fittingness-Intensity

What the Sacred Can Learn From the Secular

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### **Fittingness-Intensity: What the Sacred Can Learn From the Secular**

“That journey is an emotional roller coaster, twisting and turning through themes of hope and denial, anger and acceptance, cynicism and determination.”<sup>1</sup> In 2007 Adam R. Holz wrote a review of the popular “emo-rock” band *My Chemical Romance* (abbreviated *MCR*) for the Christian music magazine *plugged in*. In the above quote Holz is describing the story of the band’s album *The Black Parade*. The concept album tells the story of one man’s experience with death. Through this story *My Chemical Romance* addresses many of the tough questions that men and women (teenagers in particular) face throughout their lives. The purpose of music, at least in part, is similar. The journey of music ought to be “an emotional roller coaster, twisting and turning through themes of hope and denial, anger and acceptance, cynicism and determination.”

Music both sacred and secular ought to explore life’s adversities and its joys, the tough questions and then their answers. Given music’s power, regardless of its morality or amorality, the musician has a moral responsibility to use music and its subsequent power in an ethical way.

To begin to explore the purpose of music one must first become intimately familiar with music’s inherent power. Even without words, though especially with them, music has a tight hold over both the musician and the listener. The discussion of music’s power then turns to music’s morality. Music with text does purvey a moral message while music without text (absolute music) is by nature amoral.

After music’s power and ethics is how the musician is to use music responsibly. First as people and then as musicians, we can most effectively reach others by getting into the mire of the reality of their lives with them. To use a colloquialism, we need to

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<sup>1</sup> Adam Holz, “Chemical Reaction,” *plugged in*, January 2007.

use our music to “get down and dirty”. This idea then connects back to the article on *MRC* by Adam Holz. In his article he applauds the band for asking the tough questions and thereby giving adolescents (the band’s primary audience) a sense of hope. Therefore, the purpose of music is to deal with the full extent of the human experience including the harsher realities as well as its pleasantries, sin and redemption.

To conclude, the question must be asked “When is it appropriate for music to give answers to life’s tough questions?” The Christian worldview automatically assumes that the correct answer is Jesus Christ. That being said, “Christian music” will only be successful when it gives the answer of Christ *and* addresses the important questions about life. It cannot morally give answers without first giving proper credence to the questions. Here Christian musicians can and ought to learn from secular bands such as *My Chemical Romance*. There certainly are Christian musicians who are doing this very successfully but much of popular Christian music does very well at addressing how life should be but often at the expense of acknowledging how life is presently.

To reiterate, music has power beyond our imagination and therefore it is the responsibility of musicians to use that power in an ethical way by addressing life’s harsh realities. Then and only then is it morally and musically responsible for Christian music to provide its answers.

### **The Power of Music**

#### *How To Train Your Dragon*

An excellent example of the power music has over the emotions of its listeners is from the soundtrack of the DreamWorks film *How To Train Your Dragon* by John

Powell. Throughout the score Powell uses one theme in particular (shown below) in a variety of ways that take the listener on the earlier mentioned roller coaster ride.

The image shows a musical score snippet. The top part features three staves of strings (Violins I, Violins II, and Violas) with a 'SOLI' marking above the first staff. The strings play a melodic line starting on a middle C, moving up stepwise to a G, then down to an F, and finally to an E. The dynamics are marked 'mf'. Below the strings are three woodwind staves: Piccolo (Picc.), Flute 1 and 2 (Fl. 1.2), and Tenor Whistle (T. Whistle). The woodwinds play a similar melodic line, with the Flute 1 and 2 parts marked 'a2' and the T. Whistle part marked 'p'. The woodwind parts are also marked with dynamics like 'mf' and 'p'. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

The theme shown above in the flute/tin whistle parts is also doubled with quiet violins to create a feeling of airy lightheartedness as we are introduced to the protagonist Hiccup. However the exact same theme has at least two more very distinctive and very different appearances throughout the film. The second, and most common way this theme is used is when it is placed in the French horn, trumpet and trombone section doubled with high and expressive strings to show Hiccup's heroism. It certainly seems to be Powell's goal to inspire the audience to be courageous and show the world what they are really made of, just as Hiccup is doing. Lastly this theme appears near the end of the film to signal Hiccup's death. The theme is slowed down and played softly on the top end on a solo piano. By scoring the theme this way the audience is left breathless as tension builds without any dissonance. There is extreme sadness in music that only thirty minutes before was extraordinarily heroic and inspirational.

### *Columbine/Marilyn Manson*

<sup>2</sup> John Powell, *How To Train Your Dragon (Music From the Motion Picture)*. (Glendale, CA: DreamWorks Animation LLC, 2010).

However, film is only one medium through which we see the power of music. Another more common and unfortunate medium is through tragedy. The tragedy of Columbine High School is well known to most but not many know that there is great discrepancy of opinion about the role of certain music in this horrific event. Specifically the music of Brian Warner (aka Marilyn Manson) is often blamed for influencing Harris and Klebold's decision to kill that day. There were many sensationalist responses to the tragedy saying that Manson's music was entirely to blame.<sup>3</sup> Manson himself denied these claims saying "The [news] media has unfairly scapegoated the music industry and so-called Goth kids and has speculated, with no basis in truth, that artists like myself are in some way to blame."<sup>4</sup> Manson and his band even cancelled the rest of their tour at the time out of respect for the victims. Now while Manson's response is that his music had nothing to do with the incident, a closer examination of some of his lyrics may suggest otherwise. Following are several quotes from Marilyn Manson's songs off of his album *Mechanical Animals*, which was his most recent album at the time of the Columbine shooting:

"I wanna die young and sell my soul. Use up all your drugs and make me come."<sup>5</sup>

"They slit our throats like we were flowers...Lie with me, die with me, give to me. I would keep all your secrets wrapped in dead hair always"<sup>6</sup>

"Lifelike and pose able, hopeless and disposable."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Lisa France, "Columbine Left Its Indelible Mark on Pop Culture." CNN. April 20, 2009. <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/SHOWBIZ/04/20/columbine.pop.culture/index.html?iref=allsearch>. (Accessed October 10, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> James Sterngold. "Rock Concerts Are Cancelled." The New York Times. April 28, 1999. <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/04/29/us/terror-in-littleton-the-culture-rock-concerts-are-cancelled.html>. (Accessed October 10, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> Marilyn Manson, *Mechanical Animals*, I Want to Disappear. (New Orleans, LA: Nothing/Interscope Records, 1998).

<sup>6</sup> Marilyn Manson, *Mechanical Animals*, Speed of Pain. (New Orleans, LA: Nothing/Interscope Records, 1998).

Even though none of these lyrics contain outright direction to murder that the boys at Columbine could have taken as orders, the content of Manson's lyrics is clearly in support of violence and a devaluing of human life. Therefore, even though Manson denies it, his powerful music could very well have had an influence Harris and Klebold's heartbreaking decision though the action was still entirely their own. Nevertheless, Manson is not completely in the wrong in regard to this particular instance. Though his text is morally suspect, his personal response to the tragedy is admirable. In addition to cancelling the remainder of his tour, he was interviewed in a documentary called *Bowling for Columbine*. In this interview he is asked what he would say to the survivors of that day, he responded by saying "I wouldn't say a single word to them. I would listen to what they have to say and that's what no one did."<sup>8</sup>

Manson takes the moral high ground here of listening to people's tough questions instead of trying to immediately give them unwarranted and unwanted answers. Nevertheless, his upstanding personal views on the issue do not excuse his lyrical immorality.

### **The Morality of Texted Music**

Marilyn Manson serves as a good transition from the power of music to the morality of music. It is clear from looking at Manson's lyrics that texted music can convey a moral message. Any speech contains and purveys morality, including musical lyrics. According to professor and author Harold Best "Music... attaches itself... to whatever surrounds it. And by repetition, it is eventually perceived to equate with the

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<sup>7</sup> Marilyn Manson, *Mechanical Animals*, New Model No. 15. (New Orleans, LA: Nothing/Interscope Records, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> *Bowling for Columbine*, directed by Michael Moore (2002; USA: Alliance Atlantis Communications, Dog Eat Dog Films, Iconolatry Productions Inc., 2003), DVD.

context. Through its expressive power, it draws the context up into itself to the extent that the meaning, *originally generated by the context itself*, appears to come directly from within the music.”<sup>9</sup> Regarding texted music, the lyrics are a large part of the context that music is taking on. It is not the musical elements conveying morality but the contextual combination of the music and the lyrics. For example, a series of major chords played in succession does not alone have moral implications, though it may express various emotions. Only once these chords are paired with lyrics does morality come into play. These chords could accompany lyrics about the forgiveness of a friend. The same chords though could accompany a long string of profanity directed towards the same friend. These are two very different moral messages but could not possibly be expressed without the lyrics. The power of the lyrics is really brought to life by the “expressive power” of the music. At this point many will say that secular music is by nature immoral and Christian music is moral, but this is not necessarily the case. What makes a moral message in the arts is how well life’s tough realities are addressed, not just how many context-free answers are thrown around lyrically. Below are four songs to be examined in this light. Two are secular and two Christian, two moral and two immoral.

*Marilyn Manson “This Is the New S\*\*t*

The lyrics of Marilyn Manson’s song “This Is the New S\*\*t” read “Babble babble bi\*\*h bi\*\*h. Rebel rebel party party. Sex sex sex and don’t forget the ‘violence’. Blah blah blah got your lovey-dovey sad-and-lonely.”<sup>10</sup> These lyrics clearly convey a moral message. Manson is pounding away at a message of hedonistic nihilism. According to this song nothing matters so we might as well partake in any vulgar and violent action

<sup>9</sup> Harold M. Best, *Music through the Eyes of Faith* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 54.

<sup>10</sup> Marilyn Manson, *The Golden Age of Grotesque*, *This Is The New S\*\*t*. (New Orleans, LA: Nothing/Interscope Records, 2003).

that pleases us. That being said, at the same time that Manson preaches this immoral message he is addressing life's tough questions. The song is asking "What matters and what should we do about it?" For a moment Manson acts in a moral way by tackling a "dark side/view" of life but then quickly goes too far with the answers that he purports. Manson's audacity though is one example of what Christian music can learn from secular artists. Christian musicians need to be willing to take on the same questions that Manson seems very willing to deal with.

*My Chemical Romance "I'm Not Okay (I Promise)"*

On a personal note, *My Chemical Romance's* song "I'm Not Okay (I Promise)" and Adam Holz's article on *MCR* are in a way the inspiration for this paper. I always felt as a troubled teen myself that this song just "had it right". The lyrics read, "Forget about the dirty looks, the photographs your boyfriend took. Remember when you broke your foot from jumping out the second floor? I'm not okay. I'm not okay. (etc.)"<sup>11</sup> The beauty of this song is that it is asking tough questions which resonate with people, as it did me. It asks with the listener "What do you do when you want to run away? When you feel guilty? When you are not okay?" Furthermore it does not give any answers other than "Its okay to be where you're at. Its okay to not be okay." This can be an extremely comforting message to those who are not okay.

*Horatio Spafford/Philip Bliss (Music) "It Is Well With My Soul"*

For the same reason the Christian hymn "It Is Well With My Soul" is a moral song. It absolutely deals with the toughest of questions. Horatio Spafford wrote the lyrics after losing his job, home and all of his children. His daughters and wife were on a ship

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<sup>11</sup> My Chemical Romance, *Three Cheers for Sweet Revenge*, I'm Not Okay (I Promise). (Burbank, CA: Reprise Records, 2004).



that sunk leaving only his wife alive. He wrote these words at the same spot where they died: “When peace like a river attendeth my way, *when sorrows like sea billows roll*; whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say ‘It is well, it is well with my soul.’”<sup>12</sup> Given the context and lyrics this song is asking, “What do I do when I’ve lost everything?” Contrary to *MCR* this song does offer an answer, that being that it is well with my soul because of Christ. The morality of this song is that it offers this answer in reference to very pertinent and tough questions. The answer is not arbitrary and without context.

*Brian Doerksen “Come Now Is The Time to Worship”*

Contrarily, “Come Now Is the Time to Worship”, another popular Christian song uses the power of music irresponsibly. Before I begin though it is important that I note that I have a strong personal bias against this song due to my own life’s circumstances and therefore my subsequent analysis of this song is possibly a bit too harsh. That being said, “Come Now Is The Time to Worship”.

The full lyrics of this song read, “Come, now is the time to worship. Come now is the time to give your heart. Come, just as you are, to worship. Come, just as you are, before your God. Come. One day every tongue will confess you are God. One day every knee will bow. Still the greatest treasure remains for those who gladly choose you now.”<sup>13</sup> There are several aspects of this song that I believe make it morally suspect. The first is found in the line “Come, just as you are, to worship.” Though this could be taken similarly to *MCR*’s “I’m Not Okay (I Promise)” it actually comes across to me as just the opposite. Instead of affirming that it is alright to be hurt and imperfect, these lyrics suggest that man’s troubles are idle and he ought to simply put them away and worship

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<sup>12</sup> Philip Bliss & Horatio Spafford, *It Is Well With My Soul*. (Public Domain, 1876). (emphasis added).

<sup>13</sup> Brian Doerksen, *Come Now Is the Time To Worship - EP*, *Come Now Is the Time To Worship*. (Mobile, AL: Integrity Media, 2007).

because that is the moral high ground. However by doing this, this song forsakes the moral high ground and risks dismissing the harshness of reality and struggles someone may be enduring. It is ignorant of a human understanding of hardship. This thought is not strictly because of the lyrics but more so because of how the music is used to accompany the lyrics, a thought that will be developed more later on.

Still, Christian doctrine does make the point that regardless of how we “Come just as we are” God accepts us anyway. The love and mercy of Jesus is not predicated upon man either denying his troubles or acknowledging his brokenness. This song seems to me though to favor the former. However, it rightly does not reject man’s brokenness. Here would be to say, “I am alright. I do not need God’s help.” This is an attitude found more in Marilyn Manson’s lyrics that is suspect in the eyes of God.

Unfortunately this song does take another wrong turn in the line “Still the greatest treasure remains for those who gladly choose you now.” The theology of this line suggests that our turning to God is necessarily a pleasant experience. While this may be the case for some, it certainly is not universal. A conversion experience (and a general worship experience) is often painful and very tough to swallow. Many, including myself, turn to God out of necessity rather than pleasure.

### **The Amorality of Absolute Music**

Clearly music with lyrics can carry a strong moral message with it, but what about music without words? Harold Best makes the point that music only has the morality of its context. In his book *Music Through The Eyes of Faith* Best tells a story of a young man who was accustomed to hearing Bach at his Satanist church so when he became a

Christian and heard Bach played there he had to rush to leave.<sup>14</sup> This was because the music of Bach, which is normally associated with Christian worship, had become contextualized with Satanism for this man. Music has no moral message except that which it has taken from its context. Dr. Schantz, in his book *Music, the Arts, and the Bible*, takes this a step further by claiming, “In the case of absolute music (non-representational art and dance) used for aesthetic delight, artistic excellence begins *and ends* with aesthetic excellence.”<sup>15</sup> He is correctly articulating the point that what makes ‘absolute music’ (which he defines as “instrumental music without words”<sup>16</sup>) excellent is exclusively its aesthetic and musical quality. There is no moral message in non-texted music that makes it any better than other music.

#### *Fittingness-Intensity*

However, the amorality of music does not limit the qualities that can be found within aesthetic excellence by which we can judge a non-texted musical work. One of these qualities, and arguably the most important quality, is a piece of music’s *Fittingness-Intensity*. Dr. Schantz gives us the following general definition of fittingness intensity: “Fittingness-intensity is how strongly the use of the raw elements and form reflect patterns that are built into human experience.”<sup>17</sup> Some of these “raw elements” that Dr. Schantz lists in *Music, the Arts, and the Bible* are “rising tension, climax and release”<sup>18</sup>. In other words, a large part of a piece of music’s fittingness-intensity is its dramatic shape. Just as our lives rise and fall so must excellent music. For example, on the piano something as simple as an ascending C major scale can be played with no expression. By

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<sup>14</sup> Best, *Music through the Eyes of Faith*, 39.

<sup>15</sup> Allen Schantz, *Music, the Arts, and the Bible* (Aesthetic Arts Press, 2015), 48.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 40.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 40.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 40.

doing so the “piece of music” sounds like what it probably is, an exercise. On the contrary however, the scale can start slowly and almost inaudible but get louder and faster as it ascends. Suddenly this simple exercise has dramatic shape. It represents a part of the human experience.

Nicholas Wolterstorff, a professor of philosophy at Calvin College, speaks extensively on this topic in his book *Art In Action*. In describing this characteristic of life, which he refers to as *fittingness*, he says, “we are comparing the *closeness* of fittingness between qualities or complexes of qualities.”<sup>19</sup> He goes on to illustrate this through a concept called *synesthesia*. In *Journal of General Psychology* 2, Mary Collins gives the following example of synesthesia, “Color plays a very important part in S’s life, and she is always conscious of a colored background.... The color does not remain constant, but varies in regular manner according to the person spoken to, the conversation listened to, the music hear, or according to the task in which S is engaged.”<sup>20</sup> Synesthesia is an example of listeners responding to the fittingness of a certain stimuli (often music) in a visual way. Musically synesthesia is reported in many ways, a few of which are “a) Increase in brightness tends to accompany rise in pitch...[and] quickening tempo. c) ...graceful lines accompany smooth music, jagged lines accompany staccato music or syncopation.... h) Colors may fit the ‘mood of the music, or its pleasantness.’”<sup>21</sup> Looking at the reactions of a person’s synesthetic response to music is one way to gauge a piece’s fittingness-intensity. The most common way to judge a piece of music’s fittingness-intensity is to examine the emotional reactions to any given musical phenomenon.

### *The Picardy Third*

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<sup>19</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art In Action* (Grand Rapids: Michigan, 1980), 98.

<sup>20</sup> Mary Collins, *Journal of General Psychology* 2, A Case of Synesthesia, (1929), 12.

<sup>21</sup> Karwoski and Olbert, *Psychological Monographs*, Color Music, (1938), 50.

The Picardy third, often used in Christian liturgy, is a musical device where a song that is in a minor key ends on the parallel major chord. In the liturgy this often represents the hope of life after death in Christ, an example of a musical attempt to insert into music fittingness-intensity relating to Christian hope. This may seem like a moral message given simply by a musical device, once again though that is simply because of the context most associated with the Picardy third. Were a non-Christian (and/or non-western) person listen to a hymn with a Picardy third in it and it might simply sound strange. It may make them feel happy, or conversely uneasy, but it will not convey a moral message. The fittingness-intensity of the Picardy third for some is that it represents the whole of their existence, including the afterlife. Conversely for others it comes across as an inaccurate representation of life on earth. Many hear a Picardy third as a musical fairy-tale ending that simply is uncharacteristic of a human reality. Once again however, fittingness-intensity has nothing to do with a moral message but is a question in how well, or how poorly, music represents human experience. Keeping in mind this definition of fittingness-intensity let us re-evaluate the texted songs listed earlier (recordings available<sup>22</sup>).

*Marilyn Manson "This Is the New S\*\*t"*

Musically Manson actually has strong fittingness intensity in "This Is the New S\*\*t". Beginning with the overall soundscape, the timbre of the song itself is very dark.

The guitars are distorted in such a way that it is difficult to distinguish what notes are

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<sup>22</sup> Marilyn Manson, "This Is the New S\*\*t" Nothing/Interscope Records, 2003.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4kQMDSw3Aqo>

My Chemical Romance, "I'm Not Okay (I Promise)" Reprise Records, 2004.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9aLdsAV\\_Xc4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9aLdsAV_Xc4)

Philip Bliss & Horatio Spafford, "it is well with my soul by Jeremy Riddle and Horatio Spafford" Vineyard Music, 2010. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BX\\_50AERr8M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BX_50AERr8M)

Brian Doerksen, "Come is the time to worship-Brian Doerksen" Integrity Media, 2007.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PsMINXLfsG0>

actually being played. This as a whole is Manson's style and it fits very well with his angry and nihilistic message. There is also one instrument that is a form of synthesizer that also helps to drive along the darkness and ambivalence of the text. It sounds rather alien but at the same time like a rave party. The beat is very driving and repetitive during the repeated refrain of the song (lyrics on page 6) so that along with the words this song sounds like subliminal messaging. In terms of dramatic shape of the song, it is very repetitive in that it repeats the driving but very flat refrain discussed above. Then the chorus hits hard, though without much build up. There is just tension and climax without much release at all. One last element to note is the timbre of Manson's voice throughout the song. During the repeated verse refrain and the bridge his voice is very ragged (vocal fry) mixed on top of him whispering. This again reinforces the subliminal messaging. Then during the chorus he is screaming, a choice serving to get his listeners involved and riled up. Lastly as a microcosm of Manson's tense form there is one pervading riff happening throughout most of the song played by the synthesizer. Below is my



transcription of that riff:

The last A of the

melody is only sometimes played leaving the line unresolved and tense. Even if it is played though, and especially if the notes are allowed to resound, you can easily hear the dissonance between the A and the B<sup>b</sup>. However in regards to fittingness-intensity this works quite well as Manson's music does not resolve just as his lyrical message is one of non-resolution. Overall "This Is the New S\*\*t" has very accurate fittingness-intensity within itself and within the life-style Manson is portraying lyrically. It is ambivalent, it is

dark, it is in a sense, a musical orgy (an idea which Manson himself explores in the song's music video). However, in regards to the whole extent of human experience this song does lack a broader fittingness-intensity. Not all of life is pointless, nor is all of life a party.

*My Chemical Romance "I'm Not Okay (I Promise)"*

"I'm Not Okay (I Promise)" has an immense amount of fittingness-intensity. Everyone has had times in their life where they are "not okay". This song is accurate both lyrically and musically in representing the more difficult realities of human experience. The most characteristic musical element of this song is Gerard Way's (*MCR's* front-man) voice. His voice is scratchy, it is raw, but above all it is passionate. Way sounds like he is in pain as he sings. As a vocalist it takes extreme effort to produce the same vocal tone that he does. Audibly his "passion" is evident in this fact, that he has put overdrive on his voice without any digital help (similar to writing *cuivre* for a brass instrument). These vocal characteristics, typical to *MCR*, make their music and emotions come across as unbridled. Secondly the rhythm of this song, particularly as it climaxes, is very driving, almost march-like. The snare drum is pounding out half notes, which gives the song the feeling of an anthem. This seems to emphasize the consistency of the band's (and listener's) hardship and outcry. At the same time the guitar is ceaselessly strumming fast eighth notes. This develops throughout the song from fast eighth notes to heavy syncopation in the guitar. These two rhythms fit strongly with the emotional agitation of the lyric "I'm not okay". As a whole the dramatic shape is a very natural build to a climax and then a sharp drop at the end. Interestingly, though, there are short musical breaks throughout the song that allow the song to breathe. The most notable of these breaks is in the bridge of

the song when all of the driving and distorted instruments cut out for only two measures to be replaced by a quiet piano. On beat 3 (4/4 time) of the second measure of this though a feedback loop is run through the guitar quickly followed by Way flat out screaming that he is in fact okay. This is musical parody of what *MCR* seems to perceive as “being okay” (the music video is once again further evidence of this point). The musical elements of the song from the near crying sound of Way’s voice to the steady rise and sharp falls of the form accurately represent the feeling of “not being okay” and accepting that as a reality that is itself okay for a time.

*Horatio Spafford “It Is Well With My Soul”*


The hymn “It Is Well With My Soul” similarly acknowledges a fuller extent of human reality. In the case of this song many of the elements change depending on which group is performing the song. Therefore, the main musical elements to examine in the song separate from a particular performance are the melodic structure and form of the song. The melody throughout the song is very simple but at the same time emotionally laden and very representational of the message of the song. The text painting of the melody is a strength for this song’s fittingness-intensity. Below is an expert of “It Is Well with My Soul” showing the melody of the verse and beginning of the chorus.<sup>23</sup>

The image shows two staves of musical notation for the hymn "It Is Well With My Soul". The first staff contains the melody for the verse, and the second staff contains the melody for the beginning of the chorus. The lyrics are written below the notes.

When peace, like a riv - er at - tend - eth my way, When sor - rows like  
 sea - bil - lows roll; What - ev - er my lot, Thou hast taught me to

<sup>23</sup> Philip Bliss & Horatio Spafford, *It Is Well With My Soul*. (Public Domain, 1876).  
<https://www.songsandhymns.org/hymns/sheetmusic/it-is-well-with-my-soul>





say, "It is well, it is well with my soul."  
state, And hath shed His own blood for my soul. It is well\_\_\_\_\_

During the verses where the lyrics are very sorrowful yet hopeful the melody rises and falls as the author and singer express both their sorrow and their peace. Both sorrow and hope are shown musically by how the melody acts in the larger harmonic context of the song. Looking at the melody on its own the tonic of the key does not even appear until the second phrase. The melody cadences most often are on the third and fifth of the key. This treatment of the melody implies a modal harmonic structure of E-phrygian or G-mixolydian, both of which are more sorrowful tonalities. The tonality also undergoes a change in measure 6 with the appearance of an F#. This would now suggest either E-aeolian or more likely G major. However, given the G<sup>7</sup> chord in the next measure the F# really functions as the third of a D<sup>7</sup> chord, V<sup>7</sup>/V in the key of C. Even so, given the hint at the key of G, the later melodic emphasis in the third and fourth phrases is on the C, which would now be the fourth of the key. This emphasis on the fourth is a rather hopeful sound reminiscent of the "Amen cadence" which is a plagal cadence (IV-I) that typically appears at the end of hymns on the text "Amen". The melody is not clearly in one key, even though the larger harmonic structure clearly denotes the key C, and it is by these means that both sorrow and hope are portrayed in the melody.

As the song rises into the chorus the melody rises symbolizing the triumph of hope in this equation. The chorus is of particular interest because pitch-wise the melody is static. The G is repeated in the soprano and then lower voices echo forming the musical progression I-I<sup>6</sup>-V. The unmoving soprano voice musically illustrates the feeling of being at peace. It is content to stay where it is at even though, being the fifth of the key, this

note is not perfectly resolved. Furthermore there is still tension in the alto and tenor voice both which begin on a consonant (but not tonic) note and move to an unresolved tone.

The bass voice is actually the most stable of the four voices arpeggiating a I chord.

Combined with the text, this is a musical repetition of man and God echoing each other as well as man and his soul echoing each other saying that “it is indeed well”. The form of the song on the grand scale is very much an arc. The big picture echoes the details of the song in that it begins simple and sorrowful steadily rising to a passionately hopeful climax. Then it descends again to bring this peace into the full reality of the person’s experience of life.

*Brian Doerksen “Come Now Is The Time to Worship”*

Not all Christian music is so accurate in its portrayal of the whole of human experience however. “Come Now Is the Time to Worship” is sorely lacking in fittingness-intensity. Lyrically it risks dismissing as trivial many ugly parts of the human experience because of how the music interacts with the lyrics. Melodically the verse of the song in solfege goes *Mi, re mi fa mi re **fa mi**. Re, re mi fa mi re **fa mi** do. Do*. The primary element of this melody is a prominent 4-3 suspension at the ends of phrases. Here there is some fittingness-intensity to be found in this melodic structure. The message of the lyrics is to come and surrender to God. Musically a 4-3 suspension does give a strong sense of tension and release, which is what the song is calling for. Unfortunately this suspension in particular happens over a I chord that is played for the first four full measures of the melody. While a suspension in and of itself communicates a sense of resolve, this particular treatment of the suspension detracts from that. The harmonic progression is too static for the proper tension to be built up to make an

effective release using the prominent suspension. Harmonically the whole verse happens over the chord progression I I<sup>4-3</sup> V ii IV. This chord progression is a fairly typical one often found in many secular pop songs and as a whole has little correlation with the text beyond the mediocre suspension. It does not “fit” very well. Perhaps then more fittingness-intensity is to be found in the rhythm of the song, similar to *MCR*. However here there is not much else that gives the song the sense of surrender and peace that the lyrics reference. Rhythmically the verse has a guitar arpeggiating the predominant I chord and the congregation clapping beats two and four along with the snare drum. While this is all fine it has little fittingness-intensity in terms of the message of the lyrics.

However, the situation does change some, for the better, when the song reaches the chorus. Harmonically there is a strong emphasis on the IV chord and melodically the tone *La* within that chord, which similar to “It Is Well With My Soul”, is used to here denote happiness and praise (the main lyrical idea of the chorus). The rhythm picks up the pace as well in the melody with the most common note length becoming eight notes instead of quarter and half notes. In regards to the form of the song as a whole it is a simple ABAB pattern that can be repeated as many times and the performer wants to. This being the case, there is not much dramatic shape musically built into the song. Being primarily static, the main instance of variety built into the structure of the song itself comes in the excitement created by the harmonic and rhythmic changes in the chorus. Beyond that instance though the pattern simply is what it is and it is up to the performer to create more musical interest. All in all, “Come Now Is The Time To Worship” has a rather mediocre fittingness-intensity which, when paired with lyrics that border on exclusivity makes for a good case of musical irresponsibility.

*Andy Park “In the Secret”*

It is unfortunate but this musical irresponsibility is not an isolated incident in the world of Christian music. Another example of the mediocrity in Christian music is the song “In the Secret” by Andy Park. Lyrically the verse of the song goes, “In the secret, in the quiet place, in the stillness you are there. In the secret, in the quiet hour I wait, only for you because I want to know you more.”<sup>24</sup> Musically Park sets this over the chord progression I, iii<sup>9</sup>, IV<sup>9</sup>, vi<sup>7</sup>, V, IV<sup>9</sup>, which is a rather musically intelligent chord progression (far more than that of *MCR*’s “I’m Not Okay (I Promise)”). The addition of chord-sevenths and ninths is actually far from musical mediocrity. The problem of this song lies in its rhythm and orchestration. The lyrics are about waiting for God in the “quiet place” (even though the lyrics never explicitly mention God and could very well be referring to any other loved-one which for “worship music” is very morally suspect). Musically you would want to reinforce the message of the lyrics by writing a quiet, and still song. The rhythm ought to be slow and the chord progression should take a while to move through. Park however, goes in the opposite direction (recording available).<sup>25</sup> The tempo sits right around Quarter-note=130 bpm, far from slow and reflective.

DRIVING

IN THE SE - CRET, IN THE QUI - ET PLACE, \_\_\_  
I AM REACH-ING FOR THE HIGH-EST GOAL \_\_\_

<sup>26</sup>As shown, the melody is very syncopated and the song is rhythmically driven (which is also the notated expression for the song). To reiterate the point made by Dr. Schantz, “Fittingness-intensity is how strongly the use of the raw [musical] elements and form reflect patterns that are built into

<sup>24</sup> Andy Park, *In the Secret*, In the Secret. (Sugar Land, TX: Vineyard Music, 2004).

<sup>25</sup> Andy Park, “In the Secret – Andy Park” Vineyard Music, 2004.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=92P3i9cQolc>

<sup>26</sup> Andy Park, *In the Secret*, In the Secret. (Sugar Land, TX: Vineyard Music, 2004).

human experience.”<sup>27</sup> No matter how musically complex and interesting the harmonies may be a driving rhythmic syncopation is not an accurate musical representation of a human experience of waiting and stillness. This song and “Come Now Is the Time To Worship”, along with a large portion of Christian music has sacrificed fittingness-intensity for an easy-to-participate-in, happy “worship” experience. Filmmaker and artist Franky Schaeffer, son of Francis Schaeffer, writes “Any group that willingly or unconsciously sidesteps creativity and expression gives up their effective role in [their] society....their ability to be the salt of that society is greatly diminished.”<sup>28</sup> This thought ought to terrify Christian musicians. Simply as musicians we have a responsibility to use music to accurately represent reality as best we can. As Christian musicians we have a responsibility to use music to reach truthfully into the lives of the audience member/participant and then lead them to worship. We cannot be satisfied with mediocre theology, mediocre fittingness-intensity, and mediocre music.

### **The Expressive Power of Music**

Within the idea of music’s fittingness is the idea of music’s expressiveness. Harold Best touched on this earlier saying, “Through its expressive power, [music] draws the context up into itself to the extent that the meaning, *originally generated by the context itself*, appears to come directly from within the music.”<sup>29</sup> By saying this Best is articulating that music has inherent qualities that it expresses. These are not moral qualities but expressive qualities. In the score for *How To Train Your Dragon* John

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>28</sup> Franky Schaeffer, *Addicted To Mediocrity: Contemporary Christians and the Arts* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1981), 24.

<sup>29</sup> Best, *Music through the Eyes of Faith*, 54.

Powell used the musical expressiveness inherent in certain instruments and timbres extremely well. Similar to the idea of synesthesia, by scoring his theme lightly in the high range of a piano Powell brought out the music's expression of sadness amongst other emotions. However when theorists speak of expression "they are pointing to...an inherent, perceptible feature of the work of art. Thus expressiveness is not to be identified with the phenomenon of *being an expression of* some state of consciousness."<sup>30</sup> In other words music cannot *be* sad, rather music such as this music of Powell's expresses sadness because of its musical fittingness with sadness.

This idea is developed further by author Jeremy Begbie. In his book *Voicing Creation's Praise Towards A Theology of the Arts* Begbie argues that "there is a dynamic interaction or transaction between the work of art and the spectator."<sup>31</sup> Begbie's understanding of musical expressiveness is that expressiveness alone is nothing without a listener to be expressive towards. Music is made expressive by its interaction with the listener. Therefore, music is powerless without the listener but with the listener it can alter a person's present state or even their understanding of the world around them. "[A] work of art has its true being in the fact that it becomes an experience changing the person who experiences it."<sup>32</sup>

Conversely, there are still very competent musicians who rail against this idea of expressiveness. Once such musician was the 20<sup>th</sup> Russian century composer Igor Stravinsky. In his autobiography Stravinsky writes, "I consider that music is, by its very

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<sup>30</sup> Wolterstorff, *Art In Action*, 110.

<sup>31</sup> Jeremy Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise Towards A Theology of the Arts* (New York, NY: T&T Clark Ltd, 1991), 200.

<sup>32</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with Special Reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer and Wittgenstein* (Exeter, England: Paternoster Press, 1980), 92.

nature, essentially powerless to *express* anything at all, whether a feeling, an attitude of mind, a psychological mood, a phenomenon of nature, etc....*Expression* has never been an inherent property of music.”<sup>33</sup> Stravinsky’s point here is that we have confused this idea of expression with music’s essence and purpose. He acknowledges that music may seem to have expressive power but according to him this is merely contextual illusion. According to Stravinsky “music is the sole domain in which man realizes the present.”<sup>34</sup> To him the purpose of music is to portray and thereby preserve the present state of reality in its construction. Interestingly though he could not escape the idea of expressiveness in the perception of his own life’s work. He describes this as a matter of ignorance on the part of his audience saying, “Most people like music because it gives them certain emotions.... They want a drug....Music would not be worth much if it were reduced to such an end. When people have learned to love music for itself...they will be able to judge it on a higher plane and realize its intrinsic value.”<sup>35</sup> He perceived his music as having no more value or message than a work of architecture does. It simply is and if people did not understand that or tried to ascribe meaning that was not there than that was their own fault. Still, for all of Stravinsky’s effort to write music for music’s sake, his idea of music describing the present is not dissimilar to Dr. Schantz’s fittingness-intensity in which expressiveness is found. In both ideologies music is meant to represent reality. Therefore if music is not accurate in its representation of the human experience, then it has fallen short of its purpose. In a combination of Begbie’s and Stravinsky’s ideas,

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<sup>33</sup> Igor Stravinsky, *Igor Stravinsky: An Autobiography* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 1962), 53.

<sup>34</sup> Igor Stravinsky, *Igor Stravinsky: An Autobiography*, 54.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*,164.

music ought to be both describing the present reality of (a) man's existence at the same time as interacting expressively with him.

### **Using Musical Power Responsibly**

Given the immense expressive power of music and its ability to represent (however accurate or inaccurate) human reality, it is therefore the responsibility of the musician to use music, even amoral music, in a moral way. As musicians begin to understand the power that they wield they ought to be encouraged to create with purpose. Whether that purpose is to convey a moral message or to simply write for aesthetic enjoyment, musical creativity should be intentional and purposeful. Secondly, musicians who understand their music's power and can create purposefully will simply be better equipped to make better music. There are two main directions that musicians can take this musical intentionality. They can fear the power of music and therefore restrict their creative outlets or they can use music's power to impact the listener in a significant and influential way.

#### *Fear: The Wrong Answer to Musical Power*

Unfortunately fear is a common response to musical power (primarily from Christians) by those wishing to restrain music. In her book *Music and morals: Dispelling the Myth That Music Is Amoral*, Kimberly Smith writes, "Music has such a powerful effect over our behavior and emotions that we need to look a little closer at the music itself... because our actions, not just our emotions or feelings, change with different types of music. And these actions...are one objective indicator of whether the music is



moral or immoral.”<sup>36</sup> Smith uses this basis to argue that the only kind of music that is moral is that which encourages moral behavior both emotionally and physically. She goes on from this point to say that various musical choices such as swing rhythms and slow vibrato are “messages of immorality”<sup>37</sup> because they encourage sensual bodily action. In an appendix of her book she gives a list of ways to evaluate music morally on an aesthetic basis.<sup>38</sup>

- Is the melody the priority, with any other rhythms in support and subjection to it (no backbeat or repetitious rhythm patterns)?
- To what are you reacting, the melody or the drum rhythms? (It it’s a march, remember the drum rhythms are ONE, two, ONE, two, and support the melody.)
- How does your body want to react (morally or immorally)?
- Are the rhythms played “straight”? If there is syncopation, is it used properly (without excessiveness, and delivered crisply and cleanly)?
- If there are vocals, are they honest (i.e., without pretense, sensuality or “showbiz”)?

These extreme examples demonstrate that it is possible to be scared into musical submission by music’s power, thus rendering the musician “creatively-dumb”. The power of musical expressiveness is not to be shied-away-from, but instead it needs to be embraced.

### **Getting Down and Dirty: Using Musical Power Ethically**

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<sup>36</sup> Kimberly Smith, *Music and morals: Dispelling the Myth That Music Is Amoral* (Enumclaw, WA: WinePress Publishing, 2005), 5.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 92.

<sup>38</sup> Smith, *Music and morals: Dispelling the Myth That Music Is Amoral*, 118.

The most effective way to impact someone is to get into the mire of life with them, or in other words, to ask the tough questions of life. Music ought to follow on the same lines. Referring back to Adam Holz's article on *MCR*, Gerard Way is quoted saying, "Remember the first time you went to a show and saw your favorite band? You wore their t-shirt and sang every word. You didn't know anything.... All you knew was that this music made you feel different. ...Someone finally understood you. This is what music is about."<sup>39</sup>

### *Jesus Christ and Fittingness-Intensity*

For the Christian musician there is not only an artistic responsibility to create with accurate fittingness-intensity, but also a religious one. In Philippians chapter 2 verses 5-8 it is written that "Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."<sup>40</sup> Jesus intimately experienced the sinfulness and death that we all crawl through. The language of Christ "emptying" Himself is of particular importance. According to commentary in *The Zondervan NASB Study Bible*, the wording of Jesus "emptying Himself" means that He "[lay] aside His glory and [submit] to the humiliation of becoming man."<sup>41</sup> Christ suffered in the full extent of our humanity and gave of His whole self. The Christian life calls for believers to bear the image of Christ in all that they do. This passage itself is introduced by Paul saying, "Have this attitude in yourselves

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<sup>39</sup> Adam Holz, "Chemical Reaction," *plugged in*, January 2007.

<sup>40</sup> Philippians 2:5-8 (New American Standard Bible)

<sup>41</sup> *The Zondervan NASB Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1999), 1732.

which was also in Christ Jesus”.<sup>42</sup> Musically this task is one where Christian musicians can learn from artists such as My Chemical Romance and even Marilyn Manson. Both of the songs that have been analyzed by these artists, though Manson’s is clearly lyrically immoral, prove to be far more effective at musically portraying the human experience (particularly its harsher/fallen aspects) than the example of “Come Now Is the Time To Worship”. This song does lyrically discuss a large portion of the human/Christian experience in worshiping God, but its musical representation of this reality pales in comparison to the extent of *My Chemical Romance*’s, Marilyn Manson’s and Horatio Spafford’s fittingness-intensity. As a whole Christian musicians should learn from the fittingness-intensity and textual content of much of the secular musical repertoire.

#### *Secular Art vs. Christian Art*

I once attended a performance of the Broadway musical *American Idiot* and after the performance had the pleasure of speaking with some of the actors. I approached the lead of the show, Van Hughes, and asked him what he thought the message of the show was. He answered, “Nothing. There is no message. The point of *American Idiot* is to ask questions. It resonates with us as we ask ‘We’ve been given this f\*\*\*ed up world and now what the hell do we do with it?’”<sup>43</sup> Much of secular art exists only to ask questions that resonate with the audience.

Conversely much of Christian art exists only to give answers. The song “Trading My Sorrows” comes to mind where the chorus simply goes “Yes Lord! Yes Lord! Yes yes Lord!”<sup>44</sup> Not only is this artistically bland but it is without context either lyrically or with regards to fittingness-intensity. Logically speaking a question can exist, make sense

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<sup>42</sup> Philippians 2:5 (NASB)

<sup>43</sup> Van Hughes, Interviewed by Jason Rohona. Personal Interview. 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Theatre, Seattle, WA, 2012.

<sup>44</sup> Darrell Evans, *Freedom*, Trading My Sorrows (Yes Lord). (Mobile, AL: Integrity Media, 2007).

and have significance. An answer however, cannot exist with purpose without a question. An answerless question is at worst trouble and at best profound. A question-less answer is nonsense either way.

Dr. Schantz says, “the Christian worldview tells the bad news and the *good news*, the minor theme and the major theme.”<sup>45</sup> He then quotes Francis Schaeffer saying that “1) The ‘*minor theme* is the abnormality of the revolting world,’ and 2) the ‘*major theme*... is the meaningfulness and purposefulness of life... Christian [music] is the expression of the whole life of the whole person who is a Christian. What a Christian portrays in his [music] is the totality of life.”<sup>46</sup> Put into action however this is often not the case and so long as Christian music only addresses the major theme it will be stuck in its mediocrity. Christian music ought to be superior to secular music in its ability to address life’s minor themes *and* its major theme. Franky Schaeffer writes, “It is time that we Christians who claim to have such an interest in life after death begin to show some interest in a little life before death.”<sup>47</sup>

### **Concluding Remarks**

For too long Christian music has been content to give the answer of Christ through mediocre participatory music. This is both musically and religiously irresponsible. Music ought to have fittingness-intensity and therein expressiveness that represents the whole of human experience. Christian musicians have much to learn from secular artists in this area. Musicians like *My Chemical Romance* and Marilyn Manson are not afraid to take on the bitter challenges of life in their music and thus they are able

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<sup>45</sup> Schantz, *Music, the Arts, and the Bible*, 47.

<sup>46</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer, *Art & the Bible* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 56-57, 61-62.

<sup>47</sup> Franky Schaeffer, *Addicted To Mediocrity: Contemporary Christians and the Arts*, 66.

to communicate with their listeners in a much more authentic way. Music is an extremely powerful force that has the ability to influence and mold the hearts of the listener in a way that nothing else can. It can express emotion, thought, and most importantly, reality. As musicians (especially Christian musicians) we have a moral responsibility to take this power seriously.

The responsible way to use music's expressive power is to accurately use fittingness-intensity in music to represent the whole of the human experience. This begins with addressing life's "dark side". When musicians create with an acknowledgement of life's tough questions and a willingness to resonate with the listener on these less pleasant levels, the power of music is used responsibly. However as Christians we cannot stop there. As Dr. Allen Schantz has said, it is the task of the Christian musician to tell both the bad news and the good news of Christ. While the good news holds much less meaning without the bad news the good news is far from unimportant. Answers need to be given to life's tough questions. These answers should not be looked for in artists that purport immoral messages, such as Manson and his nihilistic hedonism. Nor should answers be sought where none are being offered, such as *My Chemical Romance's* music in which the answer is the question. Accepting that you are "not okay" may for a time be okay but as Christians we have a responsibility to go further. Christ came because our "not okay-ness" is, in the end, not okay.

Referring back to Adam Holz's article on *MCR*, "[Christians] should prepare for the tough questions young people are asking and show them that Jesus offers hope *My Chemical Romance* can never provide."<sup>48</sup> Given the power of music, it is the responsibility of the Christian musician to give listeners the answer of Jesus Christ, but

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<sup>48</sup> Adam Holz, "Chemical Reaction," *plugged in*, January 2007.

only after giving credence to life's tough questions and a full understanding of human reality. The great 20<sup>th</sup> century composer Aaron Copland wrote in his book *What to Listen for in Music*, "What is it that he [the composer] gives us, then? Only one answer seems possible to me: He gives us himself. Every artist's work is, of course, an expression of himself, but none so direct as that of the creative musician. He gives us, without relation to exterior 'events,' the quintessential part of himself—that part which embodies the fullest and deepest expression of himself as a man and of his experience as a fellow being."<sup>49</sup> Copland, without necessarily meaning to, articulates what I would call "macro-fitting-ness" perfectly. In the music that the composer writes he/she gives themselves. They use their music the "fit" the "fullest and deepest expression of themselves".

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<sup>49</sup> Aaron Copland, *What to Listen for in Music* (New York, New York: New American Library, 1985), 212.



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