

# Sound Decisions

Evaluating Contemporary Music for Lutheran Worship

Dori Erwin Collins  
Scott C. Weidler

Developed by the  
Division for Congregational Ministries of the  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

© 1997 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. All rights reserved.

Portions of this document may be reproduced for use in congregations  
with the following notice:

Reprinted from "Sound Decisions: Evaluating Contemporary Music for Lutheran Worship"  
© 1997 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. All rights reserved.

Additional copies may be ordered through Augsburg Fortress  
distribution center (800-328-4648).  
Order number 69-2339.

# CONTENTS

3	.....	Preface
5	.....	Evaluating Contemporary Music for Lutheran Worship
6	.....	Overview of a Discernment Process
8	.....	The Principles in Detail
11	.....	The Questions in Detail
14	.....	Demonstrating the Process
20	.....	Liturgical Use
23	.....	Performance Practice
27	.....	Music Access and Copyright Licensing
29	.....	Sources: Songs Referred to in this Book
31	.....	Looking Ahead

## PREFACE

*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God — what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

— Romans 12:2

*For I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.*

— 1 Corinthians 9:19-23

**S**ince New Testament times when the Apostle Paul first wrote these words, Christians have lived with tension. How are we to live in this world while not conforming to the world, and yet become like the world in order to win the world for the sake of the gospel?

Much of what we are experiencing in the late twentieth century concerning worship and music is not really new. Throughout the history of the Church there has been an apparent contradiction between inward, personal faith and outward, corporate expressions of worship; between worship for the insider (the “faithful”) and worship for the outsider (the “seeker”). Because of advances in technology, the juxtaposition of these perspectives may seem more jarring to us today, but the issues are not new. It is good to examine history and learn that despite our differing opinions, God always accomplishes the mission of the church.

The church is often accused of moving into the future with 20/20 hindsight. It is critical that history and the tradition we've received remain a part of our vision for the church. It is through remembering the past that our present brims with God's presence, and we gain the courage to move into the future. Unfortunately, we often become enamored with the past and forget to move on. But we must. When planning worship, the juxtaposition of old and new, known and unknown, traditional and contemporary, can be a daunting task. Yet, it is not merely a good thing to do — it is necessary! It is essential that we employ a breadth of expression for the full witness to the gospel.

This book is about making decisions. It is about choosing theologically sound songs for Lutheran congregations to sing in worship. It is the result of conversations between staff members on the Education/Evangelism and Worship

teams within the Division for Congregational Ministries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. When discussing ways to assist worship planners in managing the vast and varied repertoire of music available, the question that kept emerging was: How can we help worship planners discern which music is acceptable for singing by a congregation in Lutheran worship? The time-honored way of doing this is to have a committee decide and publish a book. While we still support the notion that unity can be expressed through a common body of song, such unity is increasingly difficult to achieve given the sheer volume of songs available and the speed at which they appear. Rather than decide for worship planners, we agreed to tackle the more difficult task of helping planners make those decisions themselves, in light of the contexts in which they live and worship.

### What this book attempts to do

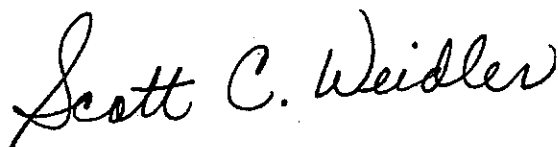
This book outlines a process. This process helps worship planners look critically at the text and the music of all songs they consider for congregational use in Lutheran worship. The process is then demonstrated by annotating specific contemporary worship songs. Annotations were compiled primarily from the reactions and comments of ELCA musicians and pastors who reviewed many examples using this discernment process. The remainder of the book gives helpful information on the liturgical use of contemporary worship songs, performance practice of contemporary worship songs, music access, and copyright licensing.

### What this book does not do

There are definite limitations to this book. It does not print out the texts and music for the examples commented on. The cost, as well as the legal and ethical concerns involved in doing so for the sake of critique, prohibit such

reproduction. This book does not consider liturgical settings, choral, ensemble, or solo literature. It focuses on the song of the congregation, the primary musical ensemble in Lutheran worship. The examples in this book do not reflect a broad range of styles; they focus primarily on worship music composed in idioms of the popular culture. Despite these limitations, the process outlined, with its accompanying principles and questions, should be valuable to all Lutheran worship planners as they evaluate music in many styles, including hymns from *Lutheran Book of Worship*, for use in many situations.

I would like to offer thanks to many people who helped shape this resource by reviewing the principles, questions, and/or specific pieces of music: Norma Aamodt-Nelson, Janice Bunting, Bill Chouinard, Erik Floan, Mark Glaeser, Jan Janzow, Terri Bocklund McLean, Wayne Miller, Mark Mummert, Anne Roser, Mark Sedio, Brian Stoffregen, and Richard Webb. Special thanks to Dori Erwin Collins who collaborated with me throughout the entire project and did a great deal of the writing.



Scott C. Weidler  
Associate Director for Worship and Music  
Division for Congregational Ministries  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

# EVALUATING CONTEMPORARY MUSIC FOR LUTHERAN WORSHIP

*They do indeed possess many admirable, fine musical compositions and songs, especially in the cathedral and parish churches. But they have adorned them with many foul, idolatrous texts. Therefore we have removed these idolatrous, dead, and nonsensical texts, have divested them of the fine music, and have used this for the living, holy Word of God, to sing, to praise, to glorify therewith, so that this fine ornament of music might be put to proper use and serve its dear Creator and His Christians, that He might be praised and glorified and that we might be bettered and strengthened in the faith through His holy Word, driven into the heart with sweet song.*

— Martin Luther, 1542

**T**hose who select music to be sung in worship have been entrusted with an awesome task. Lutherans have always taken seriously Luther's conviction that the songs of the people were greatly influential in shaping belief and forming faith, as the Word of God was "driven into the heart with sweet song." Even some of Luther's fiercest opponents quipped that Luther sent more people to hell because of his hymns than his preaching.

Technology has opened to us many musical possibilities from around the globe and has made it possible to widely distribute new compositions, good and bad, instantly. Ecumenical movements have awakened us to a variety of resources once ignored or considered inappropriate for use in Lutheran worship. Worship planners must be constantly engaged in a discernment process, determining the strengths and weaknesses of all music they consider for the people of God to sing.

Because we "hold these treasures in clay jars" (2 Corinthians 4:7), no individual song or hymn will be perfect in every way. For that reason, it is crucial always to consider a song or hymn in combination with the other music, language, and action surrounding it in a given service. When identifying your local contexts, you must consider the nature of the congregation (long-time members, new members, visitors from other churches, unchurched), the event itself, pastoral concerns, the locale and its particular cultural environment, the size of the assembly, the season, and the Scripture readings for the day. For example, at a synod or churchwide assembly, where faithful Lutheran Christians gather, there should be little problem singing songs of the faith laden with churchly imagery. But an evangelistic event, where many unchurched people are expected, may require a careful examination of texts with veiled meanings. Regular

weekly services in most congregations include a combination of these concerns. Balance is a key component in worship planning, both within individual services and over the long-term. Theological and musical expressions that are familiar and new, figurative and literal, complex and simple, must be held in balance within the overall repertoire of a congregation.

## About the word "contemporary"

The word "contemporary" refers to anything happening in the present. There is a great deal of music available for worship, and in one sense, it is all contemporary if it is being performed today. For this project, we are employing the colloquial use of the word, as it refers to a specific body of music.

## What do we mean by "contemporary worship music?"

The distinguishing feature of contemporary worship music is the presence of a "beat" as we know it in music of the popular culture. Despite its increasingly varied styles, almost all contemporary worship music is written with a backbeat and inner pop rhythmic structures in mind. This is true for music of any tempo, as even the slowest pieces have a percussive element.

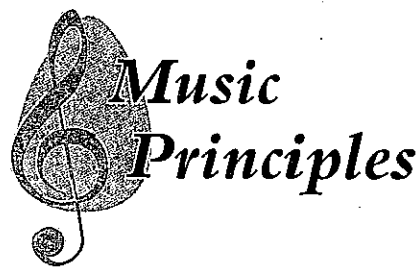
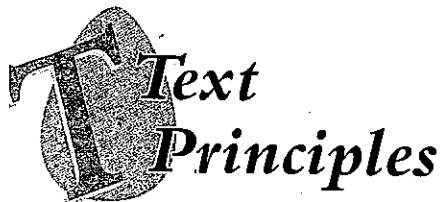
# OVERVIEW OF A DISCERNMENT PROCESS

Here is four-step process for discerning the suitability of music for Lutheran worship.

When considering a song for worship, worship planners should

- 1 Agree upon foundational principles of Lutheran worship.
- 2 Apply a set of questions to a specific song in order to determine its textual and musical characteristics. The purpose of this step is only to gather information, not to make judgments.
- 3 Compare the characteristics identified in step 2 with the principles in step 1, always taking into account the particular worship context.
- 4 Discern the song's suitability for use in worship.

## 1 Agree on principles.



Texts to be sung in Lutheran worship should

- Speak the gospel clearly, pointing to the crucified and risen Christ.
- Express the necessary relationship between law and gospel; embrace justification by grace through faith; and acknowledge God's presence in Word and Sacrament.
- Express both the lament and the glory of the Christian journey.
- Acknowledge worship as a communal act of proclamation.
- Employ the vast array of scriptural images for God and God's people using language that is both literal and figurative.

Melodies for assembly singing should

- Be singable by a large group.
- Lie within a range that both low and high voices can sing.
- Support and match the text in temperament, affect, natural accents, and the like.
- Be memorable without getting in the way of the text.
- Embrace both simple and complex structures that can sustain repetition.

Both texts and music should

- Be well crafted.
- Give primary voice to the congregation.
- Be drawn from both the church's historic repertoire and newly written literature, originating from a variety of cultures.

## 2 Ask these questions.

### *Text Questions*

- Does the text name God's saving acts, specifically the gospel proclamation of the death and resurrection of Christ? Does anything in the text hinder clear communication of the gospel?
- How many theological messages are expressed in the text? What are they?
- Is the text complete in one verse, or does it require more than one verse/stanza to complete the message?
- Which person(s) of the Trinity is/are active or referred to in the text? Are the references clear?
- What expressions of lament are evident in the text? What expressions of glory?
- If brokenness is expressed, does the text refer to sin (separation from God), or does it simply refer to human struggles?
- Is this text theologically sound? Is the text theologically strong?
- Does the text help the worshiper focus on God? Is the text an individual or communal expression?
- What images of God are present?
- Are there theological terms in the text? Are the meanings clear? Are there popular American cultural expressions? Are they clear? If so, what are they?
- Does the text employ metaphor or other forms of imagery? If so, what are they?

### *Music Questions*

- What is the range and primary register of the tune?
- Does the melody fit the natural accents and phrasing of the text?
- Is the tune versatile? Can it be stylized in different ways?
- Does the melody use repetition consistently and artfully? Does the melody use syncopation in a natural (artfully predictable) way?
- Is the tune worthy of bearing God's Word?
- From what culture does the tune originate? What is the style of the music?

## 3 Go back to the principles. Compare your answers to the principles.

## 4 Discern the song's suitability for worship.

## Text Principles

*For over four hundred years Lutherans have embraced an array of song texts that proclaim the Word of God. This proclamation continues to be at the heart of Lutheran identity. It is critical that the actual words we give our congregations to sing be consistent with what we teach and believe, because texts containing inaccurate or even weak expressions of Lutheran theology, when sung week after week, year after year, can misdirect a community of faith.*

Texts suitable for Lutheran worship should

Speak the gospel clearly, pointing to the crucified and risen Christ.

Luther's theology of the cross insists that we can only know God through Jesus' death on the cross. Our worship texts must always be viewed through this particular lens. There are excellent paraphrases of psalms and other scripture texts, but by themselves they may not directly proclaim the gospel message. There are also texts that speak worthwhile messages, but not necessarily the unique Christian message of Jesus. Care should be taken that the majority of texts in a congregation's repertoire pronounce a clear gospel message, and no text should ever hinder such a proclamation.

Express the necessary relationship between law and gospel; embrace justification by grace through faith; and acknowledge God's presence in Word and Sacrament.

It is certainly not necessary that every song we sing in worship provide a complete exhortation of Lutheran doctrine! The doctrine should be explicitly stated on occasion, however, and no text should conflict with Lutheran theology.

Common problems with texts include

- subtle (sometimes blatant) references to works righteousness, that is, our salvation depending upon what we do, rather than complete confidence in God's grace.
- a lack of balance between law and gospel — the commandment of obedience and the gracious word of justification.
- a lack of sacramental focus, that is, God's grace offered freely to us through Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, which connects us to the body of Christ, the church. Sacramental texts that focus only on a relationship between God and the individual are not complete.

Express both the lament and the glory of the Christian journey.

Contrary to some popular thinking, our lives and faith are not always "upbeat." The texts we expect our assemblies to sing must reflect the realities of human experience.


Acknowledge worship as a communal act of proclamation.

In a culture that glorifies individualism, the church offers a countercultural alternative. In worship, we gather as a community, offering one voice to the glory of God. Our texts should reflect our oneness in Christ.

Employ the vast array of scriptural images for God and God's people using language that is both literal and figurative.

We achieve the use of a variety of images over an extended period of time. It is important to employ literal language that is simple, direct and clear. It is also important to employ metaphorical speech. Many valid scriptural images have long been used to the exclusion of others. Consider the heavy emphasis on masculine and military images found in Christian literature. We need not discard these images, but rather enrich, expand, and balance our vocabulary.





# Music Principles

*Within Lutheranism, singing — whether proclamation, praise, or penitence — is primarily an act of the whole community. Vigorous singing by an assembly is an identifying hallmark of Lutheran worship. Songs should facilitate, rather than hinder, the fullest possible communal song.*

Melodies for assembly singing should

**Be singable by a large group.**

A song may be awkward for a variety of reasons. If a song was written for a soloist or ensemble, it probably will not work for a congregation. The design of steps, leaps, and syncopation also affects its singability. Generally, it's easier to sing stepwise melodic movement. Leaps add interest and need to be supported and treated consistently. Large groups can sing syncopation when it is artfully sequenced and not random or unpredictable.

**Lie within a range that both low and high voices can sing.**

In previous generations, people often sang hymns in harmony, so the range of a piece didn't matter as much as it does today. Most Americans do not have the skill to sing confidently in harmony and often stop singing if those around them do. There is no definitive range for congregational singing. Church musicians should analyze a sampling of songs that their congregation sings well and determine the comfortable range, as well as an "outside" range for expanding the congregation's abilities.

**Something to remember:**

Context is a key element in this process. If a text or tune is generally good but weak in a particular area, it must be surrounded by words, actions, and other music that offer clarity, depth, and balance.

**Support and match the text in temperament, affect, natural accents, and the like.**

Often a great text is coupled with a great tune and still doesn't "work." Are the text and tune appropriately matched in terms of their affects and other characteristics?

**Be memorable without getting in the way of the text.**

If we agree with all that Luther says about the communicative power of music, then we must be committed to using excellent melodies in worship. We must be wary of music that calls attention to itself at the expense of the text.

**Embrace both simple and complex structures that can sustain repetition.**

Much of a congregational repertoire is repeated week after week, year after year. It must be straightforward enough for fairly accessible communal singing, yet substantial enough to withstand much repetition.

## *Text And Music Principles*

Songs for worship should

Be well crafted.

There are fundamental rules for the composition of music and text that guide our understanding of quality. These rules will not necessarily be the same in every musical style and literary genre. You need to know the features of a particular style in order to make judgements about it.

Give primary voice to the congregation.

Something is wrong if the sound of a choir, ensemble, or organ is so complete, or so loud, that it makes no difference whether the congregation sings. The proclamation of the Word in song belongs, ultimately, to the congregation.

Be drawn from both the church's historic repertoire and newly written literature, originating from a variety of cultures.

The church encompasses an infinite breadth of languages, cultures, images, and musics. If music truly holds communicative powers as Luther so believed, then it is valuable and worth the effort for our congregations to sing texts and music that truly reflect the nature of the church universal. Rhythmic chorales from sixteenth-century Germany need to stand side by side with contemporary styles from America, Africa, and elsewhere.

## **T** *Text* *Questions*

Does the text name God's saving acts, specifically the gospel proclamation of the death and resurrection of Christ? Does anything in the text hinder clear communication of the gospel?

How many theological messages are expressed in the text? What are they?

Is the text complete in one verse or does it require more than one verse/stanza to complete the message?

### Something to remember:

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions! The purpose of this step is to look critically at a text and determine its characteristics.

Which person(s) of the Trinity is/are active or referred to in the text? Are the references clear?

What expressions of lament are evident in the text? What expressions of glory?

If brokenness is expressed, does the text refer to sin (separation from God) or does it simply refer to human struggles?

Not all texts need explicitly to name and focus on God's saving activity in Christ to be considered appropriate. However, if none of our texts name God's saving acts, there is a problem.

Sometimes too many messages can be confusing or they may be inadequately treated. Sometimes one message can seem simplistic or incomplete. There is a definite problem if a text has no identifiable theological message.

Texts with multiple stanzas/verses are often more complete (or complex, depending on one's perspective) than texts with one verse. The context will determine what is appropriate. Texts with only one verse are often repeated several times. Is the text worthy of repetition?

Worship planners sometimes assume that pronoun references to God are clear. Are they always clear to the worshiper? To the unchurched? Many contemporary texts focus on God the Creator, while explicit references to the redemptive work of Jesus and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit are often lacking. Strive for a balance of trinitarian references.

The psalms exquisitely balance the emotions inherent in a faith journey. Although they do not name a specifically Christian message, they are an excellent model for us in expressing both lament and glory.

In our culture we have a difficult time acknowledging and naming sin in the world and in ourselves. We often disguise the all-pervasive reality of sin with talk of human struggles (depression, loneliness, family crisis). While these struggles are a real part of life, and we bring them to worship, naming them is not the same as acknowledging our sin, the need to repent, and the promise of redemption.

Is the text theologically sound?  
Is the text theologically strong?

Many texts come to us from Christian traditions that may not share theological particularities Lutherans consider important. From time to time, we must discard otherwise acceptable texts because of one problematic phrase. We must also be cautious of texts that aren't really wrong but do not present the fullest message possible. These texts require careful contextual treatment.

Does the text help the worshiper focus on God? Is the text an individual or communal expression?

In our narcissistic culture, we have a natural tendency to focus on ourselves, our thoughts, needs, and desires. This is not always a negative. There are appropriate times to concentrate on our response to God. But given the nature of our culture we must be careful to focus not only on ourselves, but primarily on the activity of God at work in our lives, the church, and the world.

What images of God are present?

There is a multitude of imagery in Scripture and in sacred speech that describes God. In the past, Christian literature has employed very few of these images, often misusing them. Be aware of the images in a text in order to offer a balanced vocabulary.

Are there theological terms in the text? Are the meanings clear? Are there popular American cultural expressions? Are they clear? If so, what are they?

Many theological terms (such as "justified" or "sanctified") are important enough to the life of the Church that we need to keep them on the lips of God's people. Intentional catechesis is required to keep these terms alive and active in our vocabulary. In some contexts, however, it may be prudent to use more colloquial expressions (such as "the Savior's lost and found" to mean "the redeemed of the Lord"). All terms, whether old or new, must be understandable. If cultural expressions are used they must always communicate the gospel with integrity, and adequately verbalize eternal truths. Because colloquial expressions can change rapidly, some expressions may have shorter life than others.

Does the text employ metaphor or other forms of imagery? If so, what are they?

There are several reasons to employ both literal and figurative language:

- The Bible uses both literal and figurative speech.
- Literal language is useful because it is direct and clear.
- Metaphorical speech can stretch the limits of literal speech.



# Music Questions

What is the range and primary register of the tune?

This question is purely objective. What are the lowest and highest pitches to be sung by the congregation (the range)? Does the majority of the melody lie in a comfortable register for most people?

Does the melody fit the natural accents and phrasing of the text?

This is an especially important question when dealing with a strophic (more than one stanza repeated to the same melody) text. Rhythms that hinder clear declamation of a text or interfere with its meaning should be avoided. In many contemporary strophic texts the number of syllables in the same line is different from stanza to stanza, creating some confusing and awkward challenges for a congregation. Such songs may be better reserved for a solo or choir.

Is the tune versatile? Can it be stylized in different ways?

One hallmark of an excellent melody is that it can withstand many kinds of treatment. However, the specific style of a particular song may be so strong and unique that performing it in a different way would destroy the integrity of the piece.

Does the melody use repetition consistently and artfully? Does the melody use syncopation in a natural (artfully predictable) way?

Too much melodic or rhythmic repetition can be wearisome, and too much new material can be difficult to maneuver. Well-crafted melodic and rhythmic motifs are important musical elements that bring unity to a piece and assist in ease of singing.

Is the tune worthy of bearing God's Word?

This is the most difficult question on which to achieve agreement. Ultimately, this is a completely subjective evaluation. One should at least be able to identify and name a particular feature (rhythmic motif, arching phrase) that gives a tune distinction.

From what culture does the tune originate? What is the style of the music?

When available, this information is helpful in creating an overall balance of repertoire and discerning an appropriate performance practice.

# DEMONSTRATING THE PROCESS

*Twelve Lutheran pastors and church musicians were asked to take a serious look at examples of contemporary worship songs currently being sung in many churches. Using the questions suggested in this resource, they reviewed the songs and provided their comments. The following material is not the work of one person, but material compiled from the reviewers. The intent is to demonstrate the discernment process at work, positively and critically. It is important to note that the reviewers did not always agree. In fact, they rarely agreed. This reinforces the importance of context: where and how a piece is introduced, employed, explained, and balanced.*

## **Alleluia**

Jerry Sinclair  
© 1972 Manna Music

- An example of a piece from the oral tradition. The congregation should sing without text or music, allowing stanzas to be added or omitted, as appropriate.
- As is true with much of the music from this genre, the images for God are predominantly male. "He is worthy" might be stronger as "God is worthy."
- We make many assumptions about what our worshipers know. In this text, who is worthy? Why is he worthy? This must be placed within an appropriate context of actions and words where these questions are answered.
- The focus is clearly on God, but only in relation to the individual (I/my), rather than the community (we/our).
- The music is certainly simple enough to be sung easily by a congregation. Perhaps it is too simple to endure much repetition.
- Stanza one ("Alleluia") could be used as a Gospel Acclamation (see Liturgical Use).

## **Amazing Love**

Graham Kendrick  
© 1989 Make Way Music  
(adm. in US and Canada by Integrity's Hosanna! Music)

- While "my debt he pays" is not wrong, it is lacking as a full expression of atonement theology. In American culture, which immediately conjures up commercial credit notions, the image does not express the fullness of God's complete self-giving love.
- "Come wash your guilt away" could be construed as works righteousness. Only God washes our sin away. The author missed a good chance for baptismal imagery.
- Expressions of lament are evident throughout the text. Sin is implied ("I the guilty one") but not explicit.
- There is good emphasis on God's saving activity, but only in relation to the individual ("That I might live").
- Generally interesting melody, but the long held notes could be tricky for a group (see Performance Practice).

- The inclusion of C naturals in the refrain add interest to the harmony.
- This melody needs a better accompaniment (see Performance Practice).
- May be a better solo with the congregation singing the refrain.

## **As the Deer**


Martin Nystrom  
© 1984 (arr. © 1986) Maranatha! Music

- The first stanza is a weak paraphrase of Psalm 42:1.
- Who's the "you" in the refrain and stanzas 2 & 3? Jesus is implied, but never stated clearly. This is very confusing, especially in relationship to the psalm paraphrase in stanza one.
- The psalms say that we are the apple of God's eye. This text says that God is the apple of our eye.
- The pronouns are all individual (I/my) which is common in psalm texts. Must be balanced with corporate references.
- This text uses many images, but never develops them.
- The text is strophic, so there is repetition between stanzas, as well as within.
- The melody is in an AA'BA' form, which is a classic shape for congregational singing.
- Generally singable and interesting melody.

## **As We Gather**

Mike Fay and Tom Coomes  
© 1981 (arr. © 1986) Maranatha! Music/Coomsietunes

- Vague paraphrase of Psalm 122:1.
- "We'll be blest because we came" is simply not true. This puts the focus on our activity rather than on what God has done.
- This text is written from a corporate perspective ("as we gather") which is good for congregational use.
- The form of the melody is AABCC. Good use of repetition for congregational singing.

A (  ) by a title indicates songs that received generally favorable comments in text and music.

- Generally singable melody in a comfortable range.
- There is an awkward syncopated rhythm on “gather, may” but it is done consistently.

### **Come and See**

Lenny LeBlanc

© 1989 (arr. 1990) Doulos Publishing  
(a div. of Maranatha! Music)

- General praise song with nothing explicit about God’s saving activity. The text does attempt to tell why we should praise God (“He is Lord above the heavens, Lord in all the earth, Lord of all the angels.”)
- Good balance between two images of God: Lamb and King; and two qualities: glory and mercy.
- The text is calling the assembly to action, but the focus is on God.
- The melody has some tricky rhythms, but uses them consistently.
- There is a good balance between interesting melodic/rhythmic ideas and repetition.
- This could be a solo or choir piece, with congregation repeating the “Alleluias” over and over, perhaps as a gospel procession.

### **Come and Taste**



Handt Hanson/Paul Murakami

© 1991 Prince of Peace Publishing, Inc.

- Partial paraphrase of Psalm 34 with implied reference to Holy Communion.
- The simple repeated text would be good to accompany action, like receiving Communion.
- Good focus on God and corporate “we.”
- Wide leaps are interesting and used consistently.
- Interesting syncopation, but is tricky with frequent rests. It would need careful and clear leadership, instrumentally and vocally (see Performance Practice).


### **Come To Me**



John Ylvisaker

© 1992 John Ylvisaker

- This text is primarily lament, but with a hopeful edge (“Sing the melody that will set me free”).
- Brokenness is acknowledged (“come to me, make me whole”) although sin is not explicitly mentioned. It would be very effective if set within the context of Confession and Forgiveness.
- It is unclear to whom the text is addressed until stanza two (“Jesus hear my plea”).
- The gentle, haunting, repetitive melody is a very effective pairing with the text.
- As is true with much of Ylvisaker’s music, it is very folk-like and should be accompanied appropriately.

A (  ) by a title indicates songs that received generally favorable comments in text and music.

### **Create in Me**



Mary Rice Hopkins

© 1989 (arr. 1991) Big Steps 4 U (adm. Music Services)

- Reminiscent of Psalm 51. It would be nice if more of it were included.
- Acknowledges separateness from God (sin) in the words “bring me back to You.”
- There is a balance between focus on God’s activity (“create in me a clean heart, O God”) and our response (“that I might serve You”).
- Interesting, yet consistent syncopation.
- Rhythm and melodic motif works naturally with the text.
- The form is AA’BA’, which is a good form for assembly singing.

### **Dancing at the Harvest**



Ray Makeever

© 1990 Ray Makeever

- This text is full of biblical imagery: “peace kissing justice,” “truth shall spring out from the earth,” “dancing at the harvest,” “footprints of salvation.” Long-time Christians, as well as the newcomer, may need some help in understanding these images.
- There are some inconsistencies in pronouns and to whom the text is addressed: “I will hear what God proclaims...come to those who fear your name.” Presumably, the “your” is God. All the references to God are vague. Context would be important.
- This simple melody can easily be sung by a congregation, especially the refrain. Each verse contains call and response with the people echoing the leader.
- This melody is very folk-like and could easily be stylized as country western.

### **The Feast**



Graham Kendrick

© 1989 Make Way Music (adm. in US and Canada by Integrity’s Hosanna! Music)

- Implied in the imagery is God’s activity through the Eucharist. Would work well if set clearly within a eucharistic context.
- There was concern over the phrase “He’ll turn your water into wine.” Some reviewers thought it was a confusing mix between the wedding at Cana, “your water,” and the Eucharist. Others found it to be an affirmation of God’s presence today, coming through common elements in our world.
- The “He” references to God are vague at first. At the bridge we find out clearly that “He” is “Jesus.”
- Highly celebratory, but lament is implied (“The hungry heart He satisfies, offers the poor His paradise”).

- This piece could work well as an Offertory, accompanying the setting of the table and/or as the gifts of bread and wine are presented.
- This text focuses strongly on one image — heaven as a banquet feast — and uses it consistently and well.
- Highly syncopated. Unfortunately it is not consistent. It is likely that congregations will sing the rhythm at the beginning of each phrase like it is at the beginning of the song.
- May be best for a choir or solo to sing with the congregation entering at the bridge, which is call and response. The congregational responses would need to be taught and led carefully.

### **Give Thanks**

Henry Smith  
© 1978 Integrity's Hosanna! Music

- “Give thanks because He’s given Jesus Christ, His Son” clearly names Jesus, but assumes we know what Jesus is given for. Therefore, the context is important. It would be better late in a service, perhaps as a post-communion song, as the altar is cleared. Simple texts with repetition work well when accompanying an action.
- There is a hint of lament expressed (“let the weak say, ‘I am strong!’ Let the poor say, ‘I am rich...’”), but its connection to sin is unclear.
- The text is addressed to the assembly (“Give thanks”), but God (“because He’s given Jesus Christ”) is always the focus of our thanks.
- The melody is quite simple and singable.
- Each section of this two-part song is to be repeated several times (AABBAABB). Does this brief song bear that kind of repetition?

### **Great is the Lord**

Michael W. Smith and  
Deborah D. Smith  
© 1982 (arr. 1987) Meadowgreen Music Co.

- Good focus on God’s activity (“By His power we trust in His love”).
- There are two stanzas, but the second says nothing particularly different. In fact the differences are so subtle, they could be confusing.
- The presence of sin is implied (“by His mercy he proves He is love”). We assume that the worshiper knows this is referring to Christ’s death on the cross. The context should make it clear.
- Does God need to “prove” anything to us? Perhaps “by His mercy he shows us His love” would have been more accurate.
- Generally strong, singable melody in the A section with

- interesting harmonic shifts within the B section.
- High notes held for many beats could be difficult for a congregation. Needs careful leadership.
- 6/8 meter makes it rhythmically energetic, yet manages to avoid the frequent “sing-songy” effect.

### **I Will Delight**

Walt Harrah and John A. Schreiner  
© 1991 Maranatha! Music

- A partial paraphrase of Psalms 1 and 42.
- One of the few texts that gives a helpful view of the law, but needs a fuller explanation. Context could do this.
- As with most psalm texts, it focuses on what “I” do.
- This very brief text could be used as an acclamation when focusing on the law (Easter 6, Year B).
- There are lots of syncopated rhythms, but they follow a clear sequence.
- The B section is generally weaker than the A section, with some awkward melodic leaps.
- There is some repetition (AA’BB’), but would be stronger for assembly singing if it ended with the A section.

### **The Journey of Praise**


Larry Olson,  
David Lee Brown, Karol Baer  
© 1990 Dakota Road Music

- Good corporate use of “we.”
- This text has a good balance of lament (“we can feel suffering”) and praise (“let our hearts praise the Lord”). It even states why we should praise God (“the price he had to pay”). Jesus’ death and resurrection is implied. Set within a Christological worship context this would be clear.
- Singable melody. The range of the melody is quite narrow and the register low, which effectively works with the text.
- The rhythms could be tricky at first, but there is interesting contrast between slow, straight phrases with quicker, syncopated ones. This pattern is repeated consistently and helps to naturally interpret the text.
- A delightful new rhythm is introduced in the refrain on the words, “Oh let our hearts praise the Lord.” This pattern is repeated consistently throughout the refrain.

### **Lord, I Lift Your Name On High**

Rick Founds  
© 1989 (arr. 1990) Maranatha! Music

- Again “my debt to pay” is not wrong, but is not a full understanding of atonement, especially in a culture that

A (  ) by a title indicates songs that received generally favorable comments in text and music.



probably relates such imagery to a commercial credit transaction, which is not a full representation of the complete self-giving love of God.

- There is a quick survey of God's saving activity: "from heaven to earth...to the cross...to the grave...to the sky." This could be perceived as too simple a presentation of the pivotal events of our faith.
- There was general agreement that this text is quite weak and not substantial enough to use in worship.
- There are tricky rhythms that may not be worth the effort with a congregation.
- There is a fairly wide range which provides interest, but may not be wise with a congregation.
- The opening motif has many leaps but, because they consistently outline the same chord, are quite singable. Because they outline the same chord, it lacks variety.

### ***Mourning Into Dancing***

Tommy Walker

© 1991 Integrity's Hosanna Music

- There are no uniquely Christian references at all.
- The difference between stanza one ("He's turned my...") and stanza two ("You've turned my...") is unclear and confusing.
- This is basically a praise text, but does name the reason for praising: he's healed our hurt, comforted our pain, and pierced our darkness with love.
- Any implied reference to sin is unclear.
- The music has a calypso feel. A sense of integrity would urge us to not stylize this differently.
- Complex rhythms and syncopation need careful rehearsal to do them justice. It might be better as a choir or ensemble piece.
- It certainly has unique characteristics and is interesting — it is memorable!

### ***Name Above All Names***



Jay Beech

© 1988 Baytone Music

- This text simply states names for God. Verse one is "Jesus" with additional recommended verses: "Prince of Peace," and "Lamb of God." Additional names could be added freely.
- Although the text states no deep theological or biblical details, the message is clearly proclaimed ("the only name by which we must be saved").
- There is much syncopation, but it is used consistently and fits the text naturally.
- There are frequent rests and long-held notes that would need to be handled carefully through the use of rhythm.

- No keyboard accompaniment is given in this edition, so assume that guitar should be the foundational instrument. Unfortunately, no guitar chords are given either.

### ***Now We Remain***



David Haas

© 1983 GIA Publications, Inc.


- An example from the contemporary Roman Catholic repertoire.
- Clear focus on the community of faith with pronouns that are corporate ("we hold the death of the Lord") but always in relation to Jesus ("now we remain with Jesus the Christ").
- The text is entirely in the third person, except for one moment in stanza one when Jesus ("you") is addressed ("by your cross we were saved"). The clear statement of redemption is excellent. The shift in address may be momentarily awkward.
- There is lament expressed that is rooted (by implication) in sin ("we were people afraid, lost in the night").
- There is a clear connection between God's Word, Holy Communion, God's saving grace, and the necessity for us to die with Jesus ("for to live with the Lord, we must die with the Lord"), an implied reference to Holy Baptism.
- The refrain/verse format is generally easy for a congregation. The verses could be done by a solo, especially since there are several awkward moments with unequal numbers of syllables between verses. However, it would be unfortunate for the congregation not to sing the words, "for to live with the Lord, we must die with the Lord."
- A singable melody, although the drops of a 6th (B-D) could be difficult at first. The 6ths happen regularly so you can learn them quickly.
- The ends of many phrases have long-held notes that need to be led carefully (see Performance Practice).

### ***Refiner's Fire***

Brian Doerksen

© 1990 Mercy Publishing

- The phrase "I choose to be holy" is an example of works righteousness that has no place in Lutheran worship. It would be more appropriate to say "I want to be holy" or "Lord, make me more holy."
- It is unclear to whom this text is addressed. Late in the text we sing "Lord" and "master."
- The primary focus is on the individual singer, not God.
- "Refiner's fire" needs definition (to the long-time Christian also!).

A (  ) by a title indicates songs that received generally favorable comments in text and music.

- The accent on “Re” in “Refiner’s” is misplaced and awkward.
- There are several places in the notation where the melody and accompaniment get confused, but generally, an appealing tune.

### **Stand in the Congregation**

Bill Batstone  
© 1988 (arr. 1989) Maranatha! Music

- This is a paraphrase of Psalm 22:22.
- The text is strophic (three stanzas to the same melody) so you get the chance to really know it.
- The address to God (“you”) is vague.
- Excellent shift from “I” to “We,” which demonstrates the building of community as we gather. However, that subtle shift between stanzas could be confusing.
- This melody needs a gospel accompaniment. It could possibly be performed in different styles, but perhaps shouldn’t be.
- There is a lot of syncopation that fits naturally with the text.
- There is good use of repetition and sequence.

### **There Is A Redeemer**

Melody Green  
© 1982 Birdwing Music (a div. of the Sparrow Corp.)

- It is too bad that this song about Jesus as Redeemer doesn’t name any need for redemption or even mention Christ’s redemptive work upon the cross. It merely states names for God, some of which imply saving activity (such as “Redeemer,” “Lamb of God,” “Hope for sinners slain”).
- The text is strophic (three stanzas to the same melody), but has an inconsistent number of syllables between stanzas, which is confusing.
- It has clear references to Father, Son, and Spirit.
- The meaning of the last line is unclear: “And leaving Your Spirit ‘til the work on earth is done.”
- There is no mention of sin! How can you talk about redemption without it?
- There is inconsistent language usage: “Thank you, O my Father, for giving us Your Son.”
- All the names listed need explanation and context. Some are quite archaic.
- The music attempts to combine hymnic style with some pop twists, which is confusing.
- It is generally a simple, singable melody.
- There is one little rhythmic twist, but it occurs consistently in verse and refrain.
- The AA’BA’ form is good for assembly singing.

### **This Is What I Believe**

Walt Harrah and  
John A. Schreiner  
© 1992 (arr. 1993) Maranatha! Music

- At first, this appears to be a paraphrase of the Apostles’ Creed, but omits any reference to the Holy Spirit.
- In the second stanza, it says: “On a cross He was crucified, He descended into Hell; But the third day Jesus rose again. He’s alive and all is well.” This is clearly objectionable theology. All is not well yet. Sin is still present in our lives.
- The different number of syllables between the two stanzas creates a forced fit between text and tune.
- While “I believe He’ll come and meet us in the air” is not a very Lutheran way of describing the end times, it is a direct reference from 1 Thessalonians.
- This cannot be a substitute for the Apostles’ Creed. Following a biblical reading that describes a confession of faith (such as Paul or Mary & Martha) it could be a reaffirmation, followed by the Apostles’ Creed.
- It was generally agreed that there is nothing truly artful about this tune.
- It is not particularly easy to sing by a group. Perhaps it would be better as a solo, but that doesn’t make sense with a creedal statement.
- The harmonic writing is weak. Beginning on an E2 chord is not strong.

### **Thy Word**


Amy Grant and Michael W. Smith  
© 1984 Bug and Bear Music

- The refrain is a direct psalm text and could function as an antiphon to Ps. 119 or as preparation for the readings (see Liturgical Use).
- Knowing this is a psalm text tells us that “Thy” in the refrain refers to God the Father. Context is important. The shift to speaking of Jesus in the verses is confusing.
- The verses focus on individual, human condition but the refrain keeps bringing the focus back to God. Reference to sin is through a colloquial phrase, “I’ve lost my way,” meaning “I have sinned.”
- The refrain has a strong singable melody. However, the printed rhythm is not exactly what you would normally hear on a recording. The verses are better sung by a soloist.

### **We Are An Offering**

Dwight Liles  
© 1984 Bug and Bear Music

- There are limited biblical and salvific images here, but the text focuses solely on our offering to God. It makes

A (  ) by a title indicates songs that received generally favorable comments in text and music.

an excellent point that we (good corporate reference) are the offering, not just the material things we bring. The point is very clear if sung as the gifts are presented and followed by the prayer: “we offer with joy and thanksgiving — our selves....”

- There is a challenging wide range, with interesting harmonic shifts, but may be worth the effort.
- This tune definitely needs good melodic leadership since the melody is not present in this accompaniment (see Performance Practice).
- The AABAA is an excellent form for congregational singing, especially with some sequential repetition within B section.

### **You Alone**

Handt Hanson/Paul Murakami  
© 1991 Prince of Peace Publishing, Inc.

- There are no specific Christian references, therefore it needs a Trinitarian context.
- The text is solely glory and praise, so it needs careful balance.
- The colloquial phrase “You alone are the reason we sing” may seem trite to some, but is another way of saying that we worship God because God is God — a good point frequently made among liturgical thinkers.
- The syncopations don’t always feel natural with the text. It is probably easier to learn by listening than by looking at the music.
- The many periods of long rest can be confusing (see Performance Practice). It requires strong, clear leadership. This is perhaps better as a solo or ensemble piece.
- There are complex, yet consistent, syncopations.

The strongest way to employ contemporary worship music is to do so within the shape of the liturgy, a pattern of worship the Christian church has employed for centuries:

Gathering  
Word  
Meal  
Sending

This pattern has endured for so many years because it is archetypal in nature. We find a similar “flow” in all sorts of experiences in daily life: meetings, Scouting rituals, community gatherings, athletic events, dinner parties, great literature, even political speeches. The flow gathers us from our broadly varied conditions and places, and leads us into some specific focus or purpose. The wonder of this particular liturgical flow is that it leads us to an encounter with Christ.

## Things to Consider:

It is important that the texts you choose completely fulfill the function and meaning of each part of the liturgical pattern.

It is also important that the action of the assembly be considered along with the music. For instance, a new song with a lot of words would not be a good choice when large numbers of people are moving in and out of their seats during Communion. Conversely, a brief, one-verse chorus at the gathering may not be long enough to help people make the transition from the outside world to the particular world of a congregation in worship.

## Service Music

There is great flexibility within the liturgical shape, as we know from the “informed and imaginative use” encouraged in the introduction to *Lutheran Book of Worship*. That flexibility is encouraged in Setting 6 of *With One Voice*, where one chooses from a list of possibilities a piece of music for each portion of the liturgical pattern. We should approach contemporary worship music in the same way. The suggestions listed below demonstrate how one might employ this genre of music within a liturgical framework.

## GATHERING

### Entrance

#### *Stand in the Congregation* (Bill Batstone)

A lively, singable song, with reference to Psalm 22:22. Serves the function well of gathering people for worship.

#### *Spirit Song* (John Wimber)

Mellow in style and tempo. Refrain acts as an invocation. Would work well as an introduction to the Prayer of the Day.

### Hymn of Praise

#### *We Praise You for Your Glory* (Rick Founds and Bill Batstone)

Almost a direct statement of the Hymn of Praise, “Glory to God...” Upbeat tempo. Particularly lends itself to an ensemble.

#### *How Majestic Is Your Name* (Michael W. Smith)

Singable, syncopated paraphrase of Psalm 8.

## WORD

### Readings/Psalm

#### *I Will Delight* (Walt Harrah and John A. Schreiner)

Makes a nice introduction to the Old Testament reading. The refrain could be repeated after the reading, or, depending on the psalm, as a psalm refrain as well.

#### *Good Soil* (Handt Hanson)

A wonderful introduction to any scripture readings of the day.

#### *Thy Word* (Amy Grant and Michael W. Smith)

Singable, buoyant song. The refrain could stand alone as a psalm refrain, or as an introduction to any Scripture reading.

### Gospel Acclamation

#### *Seek Ye First* (Karen Lafferty)

A simple, versatile song. Would stand alone as an introduction to the Gospel reading because of its “Alleluia” refrain. Could be used as a psalm refrain.

*Alleluia* (Jerry Sinclair)

Another simple song that works well as a Gospel Acclamation (verse one only). The appointed verse for the day could be sung between "Alleluias."

**Prayers***Lord, Listen to Your Children* (Handt Hanson)

Well-crafted text and tune. An invitation to prayer. The final phrase "Lord, listen to your children, listen to your children" could become the prayer response after each petition.

*Lord, We Pray* (Gerrit Gustafson)

A beautiful, gentle prayer, with recurring phrase "Let your kingdom come." Intended to be a dialogue song: the choir, ensemble, or soloist sings the first part of each phrase, and the congregation responds. The phrase "Let your kingdom come" could become a prayer response after each petition.

**MEAL****Presentation of Gifts***We Are an Offering* (Dwight Liles)

Well-crafted tune with strong message. Works well to accompany the offering of gifts: bread, wine, money, and ourselves.

*The Feast* (Graham Kendrick)

A calypso piece. Wonderful with Latin percussion. Wonderful for setting the table, and presenting the gifts. The dialogue section in the middle works well with soloist, choir, or ensemble calling the first phrase, and the congregation responding.

**Communion***Come to the Table* (Claire Cloninger and Martin J. Nystrom)

Nice piece for choir or congregation. Works well right after the Lamb of God. Unusual, because of its inclusion of lament, and its sacramental focus.

**Post-Communion Canticale***Give Thanks* (Henry Smith)

Good marriage of melody and text. Works well at this point in the liturgy.

**Blessing***Spirit Song* (John Wimber)

The first half only (without refrain)! Could couple a spoken blessing and/or be sung as the ministers move from front to back of the church before dismissal.

**Dismissal***Go, Make Disciples* (Handt Hanson)

Musically strong, with wonderful rhythmic vitality and biblical texts. Great sending piece.

**Hymns**

A hymn is a song we sing in a communal setting in order to join with others in mutual proclamation. It doesn't matter if its origins are folk or formal, its rhythms syncopated or straight, or its number of verses one or seven! Some hymns ("Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands") chronicle a theological journey. Other hymns ("Amazing Grace") say essentially one thing. Contemporary worship song publications often include songs written for solo artists. For the most part, these are not congregational in nature. Many contemporary worship songs originate in worship settings, and many are suitable for Lutheran worship. As you peruse the music, here are some typical questions you might encounter.

**What about all the songs that only have one verse?**

If the assembly you serve is one that has been shaped by the liturgy, a diet of one-verse hymns will not be enough. Conversely, if the assembly is largely comprised of previously unchurched folks, with many new worshipers each week, a diet of textually dense hymns may be too much. Contemporary worship songs with several verses may better serve the song of one congregation, while simpler songs, with one well-spoken point may better serve another congregation. Most likely, a well-planned palette of both simple and complex will be best. Simple songs may be repeated, or linked with other songs. For that matter, a contemporary worship song may be linked with a song from classic hymnody in such a way that one enlivens the other. Be cautious and remember balance!

**Why are medley suggestions given in so many publications?**

In many of the environments in which contemporary worship songs originate, it is common to link several songs

together as a medley. Unfortunately, this is often done without rhyme or reason, and most of the medley suggestions are weak. With careful consideration to text content, the affective “tone” of the music, and key relationships, you can link songs together yourself. As stated above, contemporary worship songs and classic pieces also work well together. Here’s an example of a linkage of songs that function beautifully together, and spans several cultures in the process:

*You Alone* (Handt Hanson)

*Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God, Almighty* (LBW 165)

*Holy* (or *Santo*; Argentine)

What about all the rests and whole notes? And what about syncopation?

Contrary to what we might initially think, rests and whole notes do not categorically sabotage congregational song. Nor does syncopation. These are matters of craft and performance practice. For a full discussion see *Performance Practice* beginning on the next page.

How can I find songs to complement the readings of the liturgical year?

Almost all contemporary worship song collections contain indexes in which songs are listed according to topic, key, and scripture reference. *Indexes for Worship Planning*, [(3-400) Augsburg Fortress, Publishers] will show you where scripture references fall within the liturgical year.

**T**rial, error, and education over many centuries of our strong tradition have produced performance practices that give voice to the church's song. Some organists have considerable experience and know how to negotiate the ends of phrases in hymns; how to help the congregation breathe; how to color a melody so the congregation will hear it; how to enhance character and employ dialogue in a hymn; and how to signal aurally that it's time for the congregation to either sing, or refrain from singing. But as the canon of the church's song expands, our knowledge of performance practice must expand with it.

We are still on the initial incline of a learning curve in not only responsible use but the performance practice of contemporary worship music (as well as worship music from ethnicities other than those of northern Europe). When considering performance practice of contemporary Christian music, it's crucial to understand these two things:

- The learning and practice of contemporary worship music is basically an oral tradition.
- Contemporary performance practice needs to maintain Lutheran standards for congregational song.

Understanding the first point affects how we will play a song, and understanding the second point impacts how we will lead a congregation in singing it.

## Learning Contemporary Worship Music: An Oral Tradition

In the same way that most African worship songs are meant to be supported by drums rather than an organ, most contemporary worship songs are meant to be supported by a piano, or a piano and other instruments. As in an oral tradition, the knowledge of contemporary worship music is passed from person to person.

### Building an Instrumental Ensemble

Given certain acoustic considerations, a piano can support the congregation's song. If the worship space is resonant and small to mid-sized, a good instrument may be adequate. In mid to large resonant spaces, a grand piano is almost certainly needed. If the space is large and not at all resonant, you may need to amplify the piano, using a good condenser microphone.

Although contemporary worship songs can be led with

piano alone, there are good reasons to add other instruments. Involving the gifts of the whole congregation creates a unique vitality in worship. Developing an instrumental ensemble is yet another way to invite people's gifts into the service of God. Also, in larger spaces, the added instruments provide greater support to the singing. The styles and cultural origins of contemporary worship songs warrant the ensemble sound. To lead them with an ensemble is to treat them with the greatest musical integrity. Where an organ achieves expression and texture from various registrations, an ensemble does so in the differentiation between instruments. Contemporary worship songs will have more durability over time when played by an ensemble, because they will have greater musical interest and variety.

If you choose to build an ensemble, begin with the piano and add instruments as you are able, maintaining the same commitment to excellence that you would in other areas of worship leadership. Add the bass guitar second, and after that, a drum set. Then you will have the tonal and rhythmic support needed to undergird the congregation's song, as well as instrumentation that can properly characterize the music. Acoustic, and then electric, guitar follow. From there, a synthesizer adds a host of musical colorations. It's important to think of the synthesizer as an auxiliary, not a primary instrument. It's also important to learn to use the synthesizer as an instrument in its own right and not as a substitution for other acoustic instruments. The simplest way to do this is to listen to a wide variety of recorded contemporary worship music and note how the synthesizer is employed. At this point, any variety of melody instruments (saxophone, violin, flute) can add wonderful texture and expression and are especially valuable when introducing the tune to the congregation.

A hearty choir or vocal team is a necessary part of the ensemble from the onset. It is primarily responsible for carrying the tune — a crucial need, since neither keyboard should trace the melody in this performance practice. In large and small resonant spaces you do not need to amplify the instrumental ensemble or the choir with a sound system, but it will take concentrated practice and experience for the musicians to achieve sensitivity to and balance with one another and with the congregation. In large spaces with no resonance, you will need a sound system, but arguably, with less volume than is often used. We would do well to challenge ourselves with the lowest possible level of amplification, with the faith that it will

encourage the greatest possible level of congregational singing.

### Learning from Other Musicians

Unfortunately, in contemporary worship music you will not find many musical directives on the printed page! Most musicians of popular styles learn the performance practices from other musicians, and from recordings. Using the song, "Thy Word," let's compare the sort of information you would find in the printed music, with what you would learn from someone who knows how to perform it.

*Thy Word* (Amy Grant and Michael W. Smith)  
from *Praise Chorus Book* (3rd Edition)  
Maranatha! Music

#### *What you find on the printed page:*

Soprano voice traces tune.

Alto voice is occasionally present in harmony.

Bass voice moves in broken chords.

There are guitar chord symbols above each system.

#### *What you would learn from a mentor:*

The printed music must be treated like a score reduction. We can likely assume the broken chords suggest the sound of a guitar "picking." Therefore, the acoustic guitar picks instead of strums the chords. Always analyze the piano part and check to make sure the harmonies match those in the guitar part. If it's a bad key for guitars, a capo may be necessary.

Instead of tracing the melody, the right hand keeps a metronome-like beat with quarter note block chords. Since the guitar is picking, the left hand does not play broken chords as written. Instead, it plays a rhythmic pattern (let's say repeated dotted quarter/eighth, throughout) in the bass voice, on the roots of the chords given in the guitar symbols.

The bass guitar must play the same rhythms and pitches as the bass in the piano.

A melody instrument (saxophone, flute, violin) then plays the tune, and the choir sings the tune as well.

A synthesizer plays half note and whole note chords (called "pads") on a string setting — probably in a mid register — depending on its timbre and sound when played with the other instruments.

Drums provide the beat, tempo, and desired character. Sticks or brushes would work on this piece.

Other performance practices come into consideration as well. For instance, in a contemporary worship song it would be typical to:

- Layer — On a slower piece (such as "Amazing Love") start out with piano and guitars only; on verse 2 or the refrain add synthesizer; then add drums at a later juncture.
- Spontaneously Repeat a Refrain or Section — In "Amazing Love," the refrain would be a natural section to repeat.
- Change Key — At judicious moments, and certainly not in every song in a service, one might modulate and then repeat the song or its refrain.

#### *Learning from a Recording*

Virtually all contemporary worship music is available on recording. This a valuable way to hear a song done in its purest stylistic form. Refer to the piano score as you listen, and take notes on what each instrument is doing. You will find that guitarists and drummers (because theirs has always been an oral tradition) will naturally adopt the nuances and "riffs" in the recorded music. Aurally adopting a piano or synthesizer part may come a bit more slowly for keyboard artists.

#### *Other Helpful Sources*

Some of the most popular contemporary worship songs are arranged and available in octavo collections. These are valuable, most specifically, for their arrangements of the piano and vocal parts, and together with the recordings, they can really help you gain a sense of style in a given song. Marty Haugen also has written an extremely useful, educational text with accompanying tape on ensemble instrumentation. One of the best sources for learning performance practice is to attend conferences where you can experience ensemble-led worship, network with other musicians, and attend workshops that provide information and hands-on experience.

#### Octavo Collections

<i>Praise Series</i>	Maranatha! Music
<i>Praise Band Series</i>	Maranatha! Music
<i>Alleluia Series</i>	Integrity Music

#### Textbook and Tape

*Instrumentation and the Liturgical Ensemble*  
(Marty Haugen) G-3674  
GIA Publications, Inc.



## Leading Contemporary Worship Music: Supporting the Congregation's Song

Liturgical worship, because it is the people of God in service to God, inherently values the song of the congregation. We need to consider all performance practice in light of this value, no matter what the instrumentation or song. Let's consider some primary aspects of contemporary worship music and examine how performance practice must support the congregation's song. Our time-honored standards remain the same.

### *Volume and Amplification*

In our culture, high volume (loudness) is a stylistic feature of live popular music, even if it precludes other things such as conversation or fellowship. In worship, volume is not a question of instrumentation, it is a question of power. The power of sheer volume must be harnessed into a role of support rather than domination. Of course this is nothing new. From time to time over the years, many congregations have hosted a conversation as to whether the organ is "too loud." If you lead worship with an organ, guitars and piano, or an ensemble with electric instruments, this is a good rule of thumb: If you can't hear the congregation, you are probably too loud. It takes great care to be sure that you are not overpowering your congregation, and you need to find a way to welcome feedback on the subject. Many congregations make the mistake of amplifying an ensemble through a sound system in a worship space that is already resonant. Most of the time, this is simply not necessary. It may take a bit of courage to try using electric and nonelectric instruments together as acoustic sound, but here is your chance to break some new ground. Enjoy the adventure!

### *Vocal Teams*

Churches that teach concepts of contemporary worship often suggest that a group of four to eight singers (a vocal team) using individual microphones join the ensemble in leading the congregation's song. Whatever the combination of musicians, the operative notion must be "leading the congregation's song," for an entertainment mindset knows no limits, and can pervade the finest liturgical choir as well as a vocal team of six people. Here are some questions to guide any group or musician(s) leading worship:

Is the congregation the primary voice of proclamation, or is it an addendum to an already complete sound package?

Can the congregation be heard over the instrument(s) and choir or vocal team?

What is front and center? Is it the Lord's Table, font, and place of the Word, or is it musical instruments and

musicians? Any teaching that God is the center of worship is nullified by a physical setup that does not communicate the same thing.

Are the worship songs congregational in nature?

Musicians can do all the right things to serve the assembly, but if the music is unsingable, the congregation is forced into a spectator role.

Is the vocal support woven throughout the fabric of the service, or is there a "moment" when the singers become the center of attention (the weekly anthem) in a way that their role is misunderstood?

Do the musicians understand their role? Do you nurture their understanding with ongoing conversation and catechesis? Have you ever asked them to describe their role? You may find you've made some inaccurate assumptions about what they think!

Worship can be led with a vocal team, but you will find that a choir can serve the same function in contemporary worship music without the technical, musical, and social challenges. Whatever choices you make, remember to always insist on the highest possible standards and exercise humility.

### *Rests, Whole Notes, and Syncopation*

The melodies of contemporary worship songs are organized differently than many songs in classic hymnody. Phrases may be separated by several resting beats, if not entire measures, and phrases may end with whole notes followed by more empty measures. If you know the appropriate performance practice, a congregation will manage these places without musical groping. A good organist knows how to give aural signals at the ends of phrases to indicate what is coming next. A congregation will sense an interlude between verses and will naturally refrain from singing. As a result of more aural signals, they will just as naturally resume with the next verse. In a similar way we need to understand the spaces in contemporary worship melodies as places of activity, not musical voids. The piano and drums are primary instruments for giving aural signals to the congregation. These signals are called "fills" and function in various ways, depending on the song. When done properly, fills aurally signal a congregation with the same results described above. In any style, the musician's responsibility is to know the performance practice and strive for musical integrity. Lack of musical integrity encumbers congregational participation.

Because they often draw from idioms of the popular culture, contemporary worship songs employ, on the whole, more syncopation than do most classic hymns. Congregations will sing syncopation enthusiastically when the song is well crafted and well led. Use these questions

when considering a song with syncopation:

- Is the syncopation (whether simple or complex) artfully predictable?
- Does the syncopation seem more natural with each repetition, or is it always awkward?

*How Majestic Is Your Name*, by Michael W. Smith, is a good example of a singable, syncopated worship song. Whatever the piece, it's important that you know the correct rhythms and that you play and sing them the same with every repetition. Syncopation in contemporary worship music needs to be accurate but not "stiff." We can think and talk about songs at great length, but ultimately we must sing them. The more you sing contemporary worship songs, the more you will discern which ones are well crafted and why.

#### *Arrangements and Accompaniments*

The text, tune, and arrangement are more closely linked in contemporary worship songs than they are in other types of hymns. Contemporary texts and tunes are not interchangeable, as they often are in metric hymnody, and in some cases a contemporary tune may seem incomplete without its accompaniment. Because of this affective link between text and tune, well-crafted contemporary songs hold a great power to communicate. The burden is on us to offer them in such a way that it is the Word of God in the text, and not something else, that is communicated. As always, with power comes great responsibility.

# MUSIC ACCESS AND COPYRIGHT LICENSING

## Worship Song Collections

Listed below are some important contemporary worship resources and the companies that publish and distribute them.

*Borning Cry: Psalms, Hymns & Celebrations* (Vol. 1-3)  
 YLVISAKER, Inc. (John Ylvisaker)  
 Box 321 319-352-4396  
 Waverly, Iowa 50677

*Dancing at the Harvest* (Ray Makeever)  
 Augsburg Fortress 800-328-4648  
 426 S. Fifth St.  
 Minneapolis, MN 55440

*Praise Worship Series*  
 Integrity Music 800-239-7000  
 P.O. box 851622  
 Mobile, AL 36685-1622

*Praise Chorus Book* (3rd Ed.)  
 Maranatha! Music  
 (Order through a distributor or local Christian bookstore)

*Rock Hymnal* (Vol. 1 & 2) (Jay Beech)  
 Baytone Music 320-231-2478  
 5991 15th St. NE  
 Willmar, MN 56201  
 Baytonemus @Willmar.com

*Servant Songs: Work of the People*  
 Dakota Road 605-331-4420  
 PO Box 282  
 Brookings, SD 57006

*Spirit Calls, Rejoice!* (Hanson/Murakami)  
 Changing Church Forum 800-874-2044  
 200 E. Nicollet Blvd.  
 Burnsville, MN 55337

*Worship Songs of the Vineyard* (Multiple volumes)  
 Mercy/Vineyard Publishing 800-852-8463  
 209 Chappelwood Dr.  
 Franklin, TN 37064

Upon request, the following companies will send a music catalog.

Augsburg Fortress 800-328-4648  
 426 S. Fifth St.  
 Minneapolis, MN 55440

Baytone Music 320-231-2478  
 5991 15th St. NE  
 Willmar, MN 56201  
 Baytonemus @Willmar.com

Dakota Road Music 605-331-4420  
 PO Box 282  
 Brookings, SD 57006

GIA Publications, Inc. 708-496-3800  
 7404 S. Mason Ave.  
 Chicago, IL 60638

Integrity Music 800-239-7000  
 P.O. box 851622  
 Mobile, AL 36685-1622

Lillenas Publishing Co. 800-877-0700  
 P.O. Box 419527  
 Kansas City, MO 64141

Mercy/Vineyard Publishing 800-852-8463  
 209 Chappelwood Dr.  
 Franklin, TN 37064

NALR (North American Liturgy Resources)  
 10802 N. 23rd Ave. 602-864-1980  
 Phoenix, AZ 85029

YLVISAKER, Inc. 319-352-4396  
 Box 321  
 Waverly, Iowa 50677



## SOURCES: SONGS REFERRED TO IN THIS BOOK

Unless otherwise noted, the following sources can be ordered at your local Christian bookstore.

- |   |                              |  |                                 |
|---|------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| <i>Alleluia</i><br><i>Praise Chorus Book</i> (3rd Ed.)<br>Maranatha! Music                                      | (Jerry Sinclair)             | <i>Give Thanks</i><br><i>Praise Chorus Book</i> (3rd Ed.)<br>Maranatha! Music  | (Henry Smith)                   |
| <i>Amazing Love</i><br><i>Praise Worship</i> Book 5<br>Hosanna! Music   | (Graham Kendrick)            | <i>Glory, Glory</i><br><i>Praise Chorus Book</i> (3rd Ed.)<br>Maranatha! Music   | (Anne Barbour)                  |
| <i>As the Deer</i><br><i>Praise Chorus Book</i> (3rd Ed.)<br>Maranatha! Music                                   | (Martin J. Nystrom)          | <i>Go, Make Disciples</i><br><i>Spirit Calls, Rejoice!</i><br>Order from Changing Church Forum (listed above)                            | (Handt Hanson)                  |
| <i>As We Gather</i><br><i>Praise Chorus Book</i> (3rd Ed.)<br>Maranatha! Music                                  | (Mike Fay/Tom Coomes)        | <i>Good Soil</i><br><i>Spirit Calls, Rejoice!</i><br>Order from Changing Church Forum (listed above)                                     | (Handt Hanson)                  |
| <i>Come and See</i><br><i>Praise Chorus Book</i> (3rd Ed.)<br>Maranatha! Music                                  | (Lenny LeBlanc)              | <i>Great Is the Lord</i> (Michael W. Smith/Deborah D. Smith)<br><i>Praise Chorus Book</i> (3rd Ed.)<br>Maranatha! Music                  | (Michael W. Smith)              |
| <i>Come and Taste</i><br><i>Spirit Calls, Rejoice!</i><br>Order from Changing Church Forum                      | (Handt Hanson/Paul Murakami) | <i>Holy</i> (See <i>Santo</i> )  |                                 |
| <i>Create in Me</i><br><i>Praise Chorus Book</i> (3rd Ed.)<br>Maranatha! Music                                  | (Mary Rice Hopkins)          | <i>How Majestic Is Your Name</i><br><i>Praise Chorus Book</i> (3rd Ed.)<br>Maranatha! Music  | (Michael W. Smith)              |
| <i>Come to Me</i><br><i>Borning Cry</i> (Vol. 2)<br>Order from YLVISAKER, Inc.                                  | (John Ylvisaker)             | <i>I Will Delight</i><br><i>Praise Chorus Book</i> (3rd Ed.)<br>Maranatha! Music   | (Walt Harrah/John A. Schreiner) |
| <i>Come to the Table</i> (Claire Cloninger/Martin J. Nystrom)<br><i>Praise Worship</i> Book 6<br>Hosanna! Music |                              | <i>The Journey of Praise</i><br>(Larry Olson/David LeeBrown/Karol Baer)<br><i>Servant Songs: Work of the People</i><br>Dakota Road Music |                                 |
| <i>Dancing at the Harvest</i><br><i>Dancing at the Harvest</i><br>Augsburg Fortress                             | (Ray Makeever)               | <i>Lord, I Lift Your Name on High</i><br><i>Praise Chorus Book</i> (3rd Ed.)<br>Maranatha! Music   | (Rick Founds)                   |
| <i>The Feast</i><br><i>Praise Worship</i> Book 5<br>Hosanna! Music  | (Graham Kendrick)            | <i>Lord, Listen to Your Children</i><br><i>Spirit Calls, Rejoice!</i><br>Order from Changing Church Forum                                | (Handt Hanson)                  |
|   |                              | <i>Lord, We Pray</i><br><i>Praise Worship</i> Book 8<br>Hosanna! Music   | (Gerrit Gustafson)              |

- Mourning into Dancing* (Tommy Walker) *There is a Redeemer* (Melody Green)  
*Praise Chorus Book* (3rd Ed.)  
 Maranatha! Music
- Name Above All Names* (Jay Beech) *This Is What I Believe* (Walt Harrah/John A. Schreiner)  
*Servant Songs: Work of the People*  
 Dakota Road Music  
*Praise Chorus Book* (3rd Ed.)  
 Maranatha! Music
- Now We Remain* (David Haas) *Thy Word* (Amy Grant /Michael W. Smith)  
*Gather* (2nd Ed.)  
 GIA Publications, Inc.  
*Praise Chorus Book* (3rd Ed.)  
 Maranatha! Music
- Refiner's Fire* (Brian Doerksen) *We Are an Offering* (Dwight Liles)  
*Worship Songs of the Vineyard* (Vol. 2)  
 Mercy/Vineyard Publishing  
*Spirit Touching Spirit*  
 Order from Changing Church Forum (listed above)
- Santo* (composer unknown) *We Praise You For Your Glory* (Rick Founds/Bill Batstone)  
*Many and Great: Songs of the World Church* (Vol. 1)  
 GIA Publications, Inc.  
*Praise Chorus Book* (3rd Ed.)  
 Maranatha! Music
- Seek Ye First* (Karen Lafferty) *You Alone* (Handt Hanson/Paul Murakami)  
*Praise Chorus Book* (3rd Ed.)  
 Maranatha! Music  
*Spirit Calls, Rejoice!*  
 Order from Changing Church Forum (listed above)
- Spirit Song* (John Wimber)  
*Praise Chorus Book* (3rd Ed.)  
 Maranatha! Music
- Stand in the Congregation* (Bill Batstone)  
*Praise Chorus Book* (3rd Ed.)  
 Maranatha! Music

## LOOKING AHEAD

The Lutheran Reformation left its mark on liturgical history. The proclamation of the gospel in song was given back to the people. Fervent singing by a congregation became a hallmark of Lutheran worship. Unfortunately, community singing is rarely a regular activity in today's society. Therefore, spirited singing in worship is not as prevalent as it once was. Worship planners should look for every possibility in the life of a congregation, within and beyond the liturgy itself, to encourage communal singing.

The unique Lutheran contribution to liturgical development was the addition of a Hymn of the Day — a song, sung by the people of God, which proclaims the gospel along with the Scripture readings and Sermon. Most of the literature reviewed in this resource noticeably lacks biblical and theological content substantial enough to serve as Hymn of the Day. This is not the fault of the music, because it was not conceived to fulfill such a task.

It is our hope that Lutheran writers and composers will use this resource not only to study the strengths and weaknesses of the existing literature, but also to begin creating a new generation of congregational song that speaks the fullness of the gospel.

Gordon Lathrop offers several suggestions to help put our work in perspective.

- Is what we're doing clearly serving the gospel of Christ?
- What we receive from the past is a gift. It is constantly being sorted in the present.
- Nothing is to be compelled. Doing the right thing by compulsion is ultimately doing the wrong thing. Change comes slowly, and by love.
- Christianity always uses more than one thing to express the truth about God:

Word and Table  
Bread and Wine  
Water and Word  
Law and Gospel

There is always a multiple witness to the Living One. This fullness brings us to an alternative vision of the world itself.