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NEWS MENU

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Does the Adventist Church have music guidelines?

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Q: Are there guidelines about what kind of music can be played in Adventist churches? Many are using rock bands with bass and electric guitars. It feels as if the church is more like a café or a pop/rock concert. What is your point of view about Seventh-day Adventist music? — John, from Indonesia

Q: How should I deal with the redundant lyrics and painful volume of music in Adventist churches across America today? I go to church to give God my worship, but the music is detrimental. — Karen, from the United States

A: Music has a way of reaching down into the very soul of our being, often expressing what we ourselves cannot put into words. As someone once said, "Music is what feelings sound like."

As Christians, worship is also core to our experience with God, and for millennia music has provided a powerful way for God's people to worship Him. Music even plays a vital role in heaven, where celestial beings lift their voices in praise to the Creator (see Revelation 4, 5, and 15).

Perhaps one reason why discussions regarding worship and music can become very passionate, even volatile—is because these are issues that touch us very deeply.

Some say that choice of music is simply a matter of personal taste, or of cultural conditioning. Others believe that there is a moral element to music and that not all musical styles are acceptable to God.

In the church's voted Guidelines document titled, "[A Seventh-day Adventist Philosophy of Music](https://www.adventist.org/en/information/official-statements/guidelines/article/go/-/a-seventh-day-adventist-philosophy-of-music/) (<https://www.adventist.org/en/information/official-statements/guidelines/article/go/-/a-seventh-day-adventist-philosophy-of-music/>), we read:

"Music is not morally and spiritually neutral. Some may move us to the most exalted human experience, some may be used by the prince of evil to debase and degrade us, to stir up lust, passion, despair, anger, and hatred.

"The Lord's messenger, Ellen G. White, continually counsels us to raise our sights in music. She tells us, 'Music, when not abused, is a great blessing; but when it is put to a wrong use, it is a terrible curse'. 'Rightly employed ... [music] is a precious gift of God, designed to uplift the thoughts to high and noble themes, to inspire and elevate the souls.'"

It is no secret that over the past three decades or so, music has changed dramatically within many Adventist churches, academies and universities, and at Adventist-sponsored events around the world. What would have been considered sacrilegious in Adventist churches everywhere a few decades ago could now be considered commonplace, even preferred, in many places.

The "Praise and Worship" movement, featuring contemporary Christian music, with its rock-style bands and swaying musicians, has taken on the task of "ushering worshippers into the presence of God." This type of music emphasizes feelings and focuses more on the performers ("Praise Team") rather than congregational singing.

This movement has not only affected the Seventh-day Adventist Church. While its roots arise out of Pentecostalism, Praise and Worship, and contemporary Christian music have infiltrated nearly all Christian churches.

Those who have had the courage to raise concerns about this type of music and experience coming into the church are often labeled as "legalists" or worse, accused of driving away the youth, and shamed into silence.

It is interesting, however, that in many non-Adventist churches, this type of "worship" and music is declining. In an article, titled "[3 Reasons Contemporary Worship IS Declining, and What We Can Do to Help the Church Move On](http://www.patheos.com/blogs/ponderanew/2015/09/04/3-reasons-contemporary-worship-is-declining-and-5-things-we-can-do-to-help-the-church-move-on/)" (<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/ponderanew/2015/09/04/3-reasons-contemporary-worship-is-declining-and-5-things-we-can-do-to-help-the-church-move-on/>), author and musician Jonathan Aigner writes:

"Contemporary worship is an unstable and non-theological movement. To be thoroughly contemporary necessitates a slavish allegiance to the new, the current, the hip, the cool, and the commercial. It requires a thorough rejection of what is old, passé, not current, not cool, and what doesn't make money. ... This constant need to reinvent yourself is a pretty tough row to hoe for any church, and few besides the largest and wealthiest are able to [do it] with any continued success."

As God's remnant, last-day movement, we need to consider carefully what it means to "Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water" (Revelation 14:7).

In the book of Revelation, we have the privilege of gazing into the very throne room of God. There we hear the four living creatures proclaiming, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" (Revelation 4:8). We see the twenty-four elders casting their crowns before God's throne, saying, "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created" (Revelation 4:11).

How then, should we mortal beings approach the King of Kings and Lord of Lords? What type of music will bring honor and glory to Him through worship?

The Psalmist tells us in Psalms 96:1 to "sing to the Lord a new song," and reminds us that "the Lord is great and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are idols, But the Lord made the heavens. Honor and majesty are before Him; Strength and beauty are in His sanctuary. ... Oh, worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness! Tremble before Him, all the earth. . . For He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples

with His truth" (Psalms 96:4-6, 9, 13).

It is so important that we allow the Holy Spirit to guide our thinking rather than allowing contemporary culture and music trends to influence our own music styles and direction. This applies whether we are talking about personal music preferences or music used for worship.

God invites us to fully surrender to Him and He will use us to influence others for Him. It is so important to engage in finding God's answers to the questions on music from the Bible, the Spirit of Prophecy, through prayer, and allowing the Holy Spirit to impress our minds.

In reference to beloved Adventist singer Del Delker, it is interesting to analyze why her music and that of many other Christ-centered musicians have had such powerful and positive influences on others and what principles undergirded these musical presentations. In my opinion, these principles are eternal and can be applied today. I would like to underscore some personal observations that can help us understand what God intends for us to experience with music:

- Seventh-day Adventists need to live the spiritual music that we sing. It is so important that we personally model the message that we sing or present showing our love for Christ and that this come through in our music so that "self" and pride are not seen but only Jesus.
- The lyrics in music we use should have strong biblical and religious content which speaks to the heart. The lyrics should have strong religious substance and not simply repeat a few words over and over. The lyrics should be clear with a full biblically inspired message.
- The actual music compositions we play, sing, or listen to should be melodious and carefully arranged. The music should not partake of an unbiblical, inappropriate "worldly" nature or "rock" style. It should lift us to heaven and point to God and not to us. The Spirit of Prophecy has some wonderful counsel regarding music and its influence including the use of drums.
- Our music should speak to the heart and the head and should be balanced according to instructions and counsel from the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy. It should be "faith-building" music.

May God give each of us a better understanding about how music — depending on the principles that undergird the music and lyrics — can either destroy our spiritual lives or build us up in our relationship with God.

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Send your questions to [askpastorwilson\(at\)adventist.org](mailto:askpastorwilson@adventist.org) (<mailto:askpastorwilson@adventist.org>) and they might be in the next Q&A column!

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