

# Music Education is Needed in the Church

By Lu Lee Hui

It is easy to agree and say that music education is something important and very much needed in the church. Only few people would, probably, severely oppose and contradict this statement. However, the thought of “music education is important” needs more concrete ground. For example, if budget is to be considered for church music education activities, or extended to demands such as “Music education for all church members, especially children and youth!”, or, “Music lessons in Sunday School curriculum!”, the meaning of the word ‘important’ receives a slight compromise. Music education is no longer important in the sense of “a necessity”, but rather, in the sense of “an enrichment”. This still implies that music education is something meaningful, but remains as an individual’s choice. Thus, Music education appears as optional and becomes a pleasure and luxury goods.

Before we discuss any further, let us first define what education is. Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary provides us with the following definition: “a process of training and instruction, which is designed to give knowledge and develop skills.” In this definition, we could identify some important points for our discussion of music education in the church. “Music education”, as defined earlier, is described as training and instruction. Students who attain a certain skill level in musical performance or an understanding of notation, theory or history are the product of this education.

Let me start off by asking, have we, as church musicians, music pastors, or music lovers, truly understand the importance and significance of music education in the church? Are we well aware of the effects of music in our lives? If we do not exactly agree with such a point of view, we suddenly need arguments and rationales as we examine the need for “music education” in our churches.

## The Effects of Music

First of all, it is undeniable that music leaves great impact in our lives. Most of us witnessed that listening to music, singing in a choir, or playing in a group, can leave a significant psychological effect on our mood and being. Dishes are more likely to be done quickly while listening to a light piece of music. Memories from the past are called up when we hear a song from the old days. Upbeat music can effectively eliminate fatigue. And music is certainly one of the most effective ways to condition people to spend money. Retailers, grocery stores and shopping malls not only choose their music to give their stores an identity and a feeling of completeness but to literally make one shop faster or slower. condition people to spend money.

Apart from the above examples, more effects of music have been further investigated and verified in numerous studies. There is a well-known study from the early 1970s – rock music being played to one group of plants and soothing classical music to another. The “rock music” plants were sickly and small whereas the other group grew large and healthy, with the plants actually leaning towards the radio just like they bend towards sunlight. To further emphasize the effect of music on living creatures, another study has shown that dairy cows produce more milk when listening to Beethoven’s “Pastoral Symphony”!

Even the Bible gives testimony of the effect of music. The famous example is King Saul, who in his dark and troubled hours called for David to play the harp. David's music brought consolation and peace to Saul's troubled heart. This is we call 'music therapy' – a method of clinical intervention. Another example is the falling of the walls of Jericho after the Israelite army marched around the city blowing their trumpets.

Should we elaborate further of the effects of music in our lives? If only we could acknowledge the impact of music – how it works on our subconscious and attitude – we would come to realize and admit that music education is “a necessity” rather than “an enrichment”. It is sad to say, for many reasons, music education in Asia is becoming non-essential. It is seen as “enrichment” or “luxury of the rich” but not part of the core curriculum.

### **Short Term and Long Term Impact**

In the context of our discussion, it is also important to point out that all the examples mentioned above represent experiences of short-term effects of music. They occur in individual while he or she performs, or listens to the music and often disappear soon after. So what do we desire? Long term impact of music education in the church. If only the church would teach her members, especially our children and youth, the skill and understanding of choosing good quality music that will enrich their mind, body, and spiritual lives. If only they be given the tools and abilities of reading music for themselves. If only, we are aware that the focus on music education in our church means equipping our fellow Christians to receive God's Word and Sacrament through music in worship.

### **A Challenge**

We have before us quite a challenge. If we do not educate and give the church the right tool, the state of music appreciation, education and skills in the secular world will overrule the state of music-making in the church. As we have observed, the secular music has already invaded and left a great impact on church music.

I hope by now we would see that music education is very much needed in the church. It is up to us to take up the challenge and “run with endurance the race that is set before us.” (Hebrews 12:1)

(To be continued)

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