

## Music Education is Needed in the Church (II)

By Lu Lee Hui

Walter Thomas (W.T.) Conner (1877-1952), Southern Baptist theologian and professor, stated, “The first business, then, of a church is not evangelism, nor missions, nor benevolence; it is worship.” All other aspects of ministry are motivated by worship, and without worship the church will die.

As we know, worship is often associated with music. How wonderful it would be, if the members of the church are able to read and understand music for themselves. With this ability, they can then concentrate on the living experience of worship, and not be handicapped by their inadequacy in singing or understanding the music that is being presented.

In this respect, we strongly agree that music education *is* needed in the church. It is a necessity, not an enrichment or optional.

### A Quick Overview

Education, according to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, is explained as “a process of training and instruction, which is designed to give knowledge and develop skills.” If we fit it into the church context, it would mean providing music education, i.e. giving musical training and instructions. Students attain a certain skill level in musical performance or an understanding of notation, theory or history are the product of this education.

### The Philosophy & its Convictions

- **Music education as part of the Christian Education curriculum**

A systematic and detailed curriculum that includes basic music theory, sight-singing skills, church music history and a study of Christian worship are indispensable for an understanding of oneself, the church and its ministry. Ancient Greeks believed that music was one of two centers of all learning – gymnastics and music. Music was the natural synthesis of the emotions and the intellect. Through the course of history, we have witnessed changes in the significance of music in the education system. Despite that, music continued to play the fundamental role in influencing the intellectual, emotional, physical, social and spiritual development of every human.

- **Music belongs to everyone**

This is a central tenet of Zoltán Kodály (1882-1967), a prominent Hungarian composer, musician, teacher, linguist, and ethnomusicologist, who directed a significant portion of his creative endeavors to the musical education of the Hungarian nation – an interest that permeated his life. Kodály strongly believed that having an education in music is the right of every human being and it cannot be left to chance. The same conviction should apply to the church, where a music education system should be in place for all members of the church.

- **Music education should begin as early as possible**

Ideally, it should begin in the home; the nursery and kindergarten are just as good if they can design systematic approaches to develop a child's musical sensitivity at an early age. It is to the best interest of

the church, if music education can be introduced during the formative years of early childhood. Such lessons or classes can also become an out-reach tool to the non-believers and it is never too late to start, even from youth.

- **The aim for music literacy**

Just as everyone has the ability to hear, speak, read, and write a language, they also have the ability to hear, sing, read, and write music. Music literacy is something that everyone can and has the right to enjoy. Kodály believed that the path from musical illiteracy to musical culture is through writing and reading music.

- **Music education should be based on singing**

The human voice, the most accessible musical instrument, is the foundation of musical development. It is the most natural instrument and one which every person possesses. Kodály made this famous statement, "A deeper musical education can at all times develop only where singing forms its basis. Instruments are for the privileged few. Only the human voice – accessible to all, free of charge, yet the most beautiful of all instruments, can be the fertile soil of a musical culture extending to all." (Kodály, 1982) He called singing "*the essence*" of authentic musical experience.

Upon research, it appeared that music in early worship, including the early periods of Old Testament, was primarily vocal. During the reign of king David, specific instructions were given to guard the use of instrumental music in worship. Later on, instrumental music became associated with temple worship, which explained its eventual absence during the synagogue worship. In sum, the human voice, whether employed in worship or in learning music, played a major role in the overall development of worship, both the spiritual and the musical aspects.

It is important to note that music learning through singing should precede instrumental training. It would be in the child's best interest to first understand the basics of reading music before beginning the difficult task of learning an instrument and the technique.

*"If we ourselves sing often, this provides a deep experience of happiness in music. Through our own musical activities, we learn to know the pulsation, rhythm, and shape of melody. The enjoyment given encourages the study of instruments and the listening to other pieces of music as well."* (Kodály, 1964)

In conclusion, singing best develops the inner, musical ear.

## The Challenge

We have before us quite a challenge. Music education in the church can be effective only if we truly understand the importance of music in our lives. Therefore, if the church is determined to cultivate a love and understanding for music, it is necessary to introduce comprehensive music education for everyone, from infants to adults.

Now it is up to us to take up the challenge and "run with endurance the race that is set before us." (Heb.12:1)

*About the author*

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Upon graduation from the Singapore Bible College School of Church Music, University of Melbourne and from the University of Queensland with Master of Music Studies in Choral Conducting, Lee Hui further studied and obtained Diploma in Choral Conducting from the Zoltan Kodaly Pedagogical Institute of Music, under Ferenc Liszt Academy of Music in Hungary in 2009. Currently, she is the Principal Conductor of the International Christian Festival Singers (ICFS) and the Music Educator of International Christian Choral Conducting Society (ICCCS).