

## “Why Music?”

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Psalm 96:1-6

How many of you enjoy singing? Who enjoys music? Would you say that music has some kind of effect on you when you listen? Yes, it does and music probably impacts us more than we realize.

Last September, people from the Swiss cheesemaker, Beat Wampfler teamed up with a research group from Bern University of Arts to see what might happen if they pumped music through cheese.

They got nine 22-pound wheels of Emmental cheese and placed them each in a wooden crate and played different styles of music to them on a 24-hour loop for six months straight while the cheese aged.

In the classical box, the cheese frolicked with Mozart’s “The Magic Flute.” The cheese in the rock box was wired to Led Zeppelin’s “Stairway to Heaven.” In the ambient box, the cheese mellowed to Yello’s “Monolith.” The hip-hop cheese was groovin’ to A Tribe Called Quest’s “Jazz (We’ve Got).” Finally, the techno box was hopping with the beat of Vril’s “UV.”

Of course they needed a control group so they aged one wheel of cheese in silence, and three others were exposed to simple high, medium and low frequency tones.

After six months, the cheese was removed from the crates and examined by food technologists from the ZHAW Food Perception Research Group. What do you think they found?

The team concluded that the flavor of the cheese was definitely altered by the music. The music cheese was distinctly more mild in flavor than the ones in the simple tone boxes and the one in silence. They also found the hip hop cheese had a stronger aroma and flavor than all of the others.

Then, they did two rounds of blind testing by a jury of culinary experts, who after voting concluded that the hip hop cheese was the best. They said it had a remarkably fruity smell and flavor.

The next step in their research was to do a biomedical study to see if the music changed the structure of the cheese. I haven’t yet seen the results of that study.

Since publishing their results, customers have been calling the cheese company with requests for *blues* cheese, *Balkan* cheese, and

AC/DC cheese. The research certainly opened up some interesting new marketing directions!

If music affects cheese like that, I can only imagine it impacts us physically, emotionally, and perhaps even spiritually at a deep level.

Music is powerful. Listen to the words of a song that was written about 3000 years ago by a king of Israel named David. We don't have the musical notes, but imagine what kind of music might have accompanied the words and would have been resonating through the community of people as they sang this song.

### **READ PSALM 96:1-6**

This song was written to celebrate God's greatness. Although we don't have notes in history to confirm it, this song was probably sung by the Israelites in the Temple in Jerusalem regularly for some kind of festival honoring that God was on the throne and in control.

A bit of background that might be helpful. ... In ancient times in the Near East, where this psalm was written, nations were understood as religious and political communities. Each nation had its

own god, by whom and for whom it would act.

Two basic questions people asked in those days were: "Which god is your god?" and "Which god rules the other gods?"

This psalm was written from within Israel, so their answers to these questions were repeated over and over in the telling of their history.

Which god was their god? Their stories told of their God creating the world and everything in it. Their God sustained the balance of everything in the whole world.

Which god ruled the other gods? They told other stories about how their God had rescued them from slavery, and aided them in battles and protected them against other nations.

In contrast, they pointed to the ineffective and incompetent gods of other nations, that could be chalked up as "false idols."

To frame for the people who their God was. they sang stories from their past.

But Psalm 96 also declared that it was time to sing a new song to the Lord. What does this mean? We'll get to that question in a minute.

Through generations of Jewish history dating back thousands of years, there have been songs written, played, and sung that were deeply meaningful to the people. They told the old stories of how God had been with them through thick and thin.

They sang about a man named Abraham from their ancient past who uprooted his whole family and moved to a new place where God established for his descendants a new home.

They sang about how God rescued their ancestors from slavery in Egypt.

They sang about how God protected their ancestors and provided food for them while they lived in the wilderness for 40 years.

They sang the story of Jonah who was swallowed by a very big fish but was saved from the depths of the sea, then was spit up on dry land so he could share about God's salvation to the people in a town called Nineveh — and the whole city repented.

They sang about Daniel who was thrown into a den of lions to be killed because he broke the law when he refused to worship the king — but God saved him.

They sang all sorts of other stories to remind them of who they were as a people and how God powerfully had worked through their history. This helped to keep them on the path of worshiping the one true God.

The songs they sang helped to form their identity as a people, as a community.

To communicate about the worst of times in their history you have prophets like Isaiah write that in those days not a song was sung. One can only imagine how desperate the people must be if they could not even remember their songs!

Fast forward to the 1500s, when Martin Luther and many others wrote songs for worshiping communities during the days of the Reformation.

In those days, before copies of scripture could easily be in the hands of everyone, like the Jews of ancient times before them, they wanted to communicate as much of the story of scripture and their understanding of God as possible in the music they sang together.

It was not only to have an emotional experience in worship services, although it often could do

that, but the music was a medium of teaching for the congregation.

Music for thousands of years has been a medium to transfer from one generation to the next the stories from the past that hold meaning and purpose along with a compelling emotional framework.

Back to the question about singing a new song.

Psalm 96 that I read earlier was composed because the people of Israel saw God doing something new in their midst. The people who had been in captivity, this time in Babylon, were now returning home to Israel!

This event was worthy of adding a new story to their compilation of great works of God.

They were experiencing another great event worthy enough for a song to be written to pass along to the next generation so that God's new work might be celebrated by future generations.

These stories are not only powerful for the present, but a promise of God's presence for the future.

So, the stories were powerful, but as I mentioned earlier the music itself was also a powerful medium to communicate the stories.

Every once in a while you see a child prodigy who just picks up an instrument and soars. I just watched a few videos of a nine-year-old guitar player from Australia named Taj Farrant.

Apparently, Taj's dad took him to an AC/DC concert just before he was seven years old, and he sat there on his dad's shoulders watching the guitar player rock it out on the stage. That day he said, "I want to do that for the rest of my life!"

He just turned ten years old, and he can now literally hear a song and after a couple of tries he memorizes it and can play it. And he is amazingly skilled. I'd recommend you check out his YouTube videos.

Taj is known for his facial expressions as he creates soaring guitar riffs too. Taj has dread locks and a very cool hat, so you can imagine he really looks quite like the much older rock artists he admires.

When asked about his facial expressions, he said that the music does something to him. Sometimes he is so affected by the music he is playing that he is moved to tears as he plays.

That's not a stage act. That's the power of music!

This is the intangible way that music impacts us as human beings. It has the power to move our body and inspire our soul.

That's why there is a whole field of music therapy. People in this field study different tones, and styles of music and their effect on people. They have found that when they play certain kinds of music for people who have circulation problems, for example, that their symptoms can lessen.

Other tones resonate in other places in our bodies effecting other physical body systems and organs, as well as the mind, and emotions. You can actually buy therapy music for different ailments to help restore your health.

Music is powerful! Music is part of the natural world too — the sound of waterfalls, birds singing in your yard, waves washing up on the beach. All of these have been shown to lower blood pressure, increase the parasympathetic nervous system helping us to relax.

The music we create and the music of nature is God's gift to us, providing access to health and wellbeing. It is no wonder that people probably since the

beginning of time have enjoyed creating, playing, listening to, and appreciating music, and it is no wonder that it has always been an integral part of worship!

So, what do you think? Is music and singing something of value for this congregation?

Perhaps the question for us is what new thing is God doing in our day and does it deserve a new song?