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# MAKING MUSIC

*soli deo gloria*

Life exists for the love of music . . .

—G. K. Chesterton

Music is my life.

I come by it honestly. My grandfather was a boy soprano in a professional church choir, played trumpet and piano, later was in a traveling male quartet, sang in the church choir, led singing for Christian Endeavour meetings, and led singing and wrote songs for Keswick Bible Conferences. My grandmother played piano, was a member of The South Philadelphia Girls Mandolin Band, and had an uncle who played a mean set of bagpipes. My father began with piano and then trumpet, but switched to tuba in high school, where he also played the double bass in a swing band. He graduated from college with a music education degree and led various musical groups in the church over the years. My sister cracked her head open while she and I played during a rehearsal of his group The Joyful Noise, and I remember as a young child sitting in the church pew waving my arms around wildly, trying to imitate my father as he conducted the choir. When I was in elementary school, I sang in the school choir, church youth choir, and took trumpet lessons. In high school, I sang in the school choir, a cappella choir, barbershop quartet, the church choir, took guitar lessons, and one time even fronted my friend Chris Webb's rock band. In college I sang in the choir, helped organize dances, drove miles upon miles to concerts, and perfected the art of making mix tapes. After college, I was the assistant manager of a music

store, served as the art director for the alternative music publication *Notebored Magazine*, and even DJ'ed a dance club once.

After all that investment in music . . . I ended up becoming a visual artist. It was inevitable since when I wasn't making music, I was drawing. But when I was young, I struggled to have a good understanding of what it meant to be an artist and a Christian. I couldn't see how the visual arts could be glorifying to God. But it was obvious to me that as Christians we are called to make music since there are a profusion of references in the Bible to making music. We read about amateur and professional music, music in daily life and worship, as well as instrumental and vocal music. And if there is any doubt about the centrality of music to the Faith, simply open to the middle of Bible. What do you find? A hymnal complete with music dictation throughout for harp, tambourine, trumpet, timbrel, lute, strings, pipes, and clashing cymbals. And in the midst of all of the instructions given in Scripture we have immense freedom of expression, as Tim Keller reminds us:

. . . there is a great deal of freedom in how these absolutes are expressed and take form within a particular culture. For example, the Bible directs Christians to unite in acts of musical praise, but it doesn't prescribe the meter, rhythm, level of emotional expressiveness, or instrumentation—all this is left to be culturally expressed in a variety of ways.<sup>1</sup>

The variety of music found in the Bible is delightful. According to Job 38:7, at the beginning of Time the morning stars sang together. Jubal, the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe, was making music in the fourth chapter of Genesis. Paul encouraged the Ephesians to sing to each other psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, and David called for 288 professional musicians to work in the temple. But worship is not the only place for music specified by the Bible. There is singing after going through the Red Sea. The Israelites had work songs for harvest time and sang while digging wells. There were songs for serving your time as a watchman on the walls, and there was music for war or tearing down city walls. There was music used for calming deranged Kings. And in Zephaniah 3:17, we are comforted to know that God rejoices over us with gladness and exults over us with loud singing. Also, in the gospels we learn that Jesus sang with his disciples. Finally, we understand from Revelation that there will be an unbelievable choir at the end of Time that Christians will be part of, praising God with the heavenly hosts.

Yet throughout the Bible, our songs are mostly intended to be gifts lifted up to God in praise. For example, Psalm 96 begins:

Oh sing to the Lord a new song;  
sing to the Lord, all the earth!  
Sing to the Lord, bless his name;  
tell of his salvation from day to day.  
Declare his glory among the nations,  
his marvelous works among all the peoples!

Ahh, yes, *work*. All this reflection on music in the Bible is heady stuff, but music is not something easily done. Ask any musician and they will tell you, music is work.

## WORK

If there is one thing that was made clear to me after editing *It Was Good: Making Art to the Glory of God*, it is that at the core of creativity is *making*, and making is work. Much is made about “muses” and the “creative spark” and “inspiration.” But my experience is that, at the end of the day, art gets made by the people who show up and do the work.

There is no way around work. As many times as I try to sit down and make art without putting in time and effort, I run right into the truth that it takes hard work to make good work. I often hope that lightning will strike and the first thing that comes out of my pencil will be brilliant. But I have found that to happen so rarely that I have been inspired to pen a proverb: *good ideas are built on top of the detritus of bad ideas*. And this is true not just for me. The band U2 was encouraged by their producer Brian Eno to look for songs in their mistakes and musings. He told them, “Honor thy error as a hidden intention.”<sup>2</sup> It is the slow trudge through one failure after another that gets us up to the top of the mountain where the air is clear and Beauty can be clearly seen.

And that is a good thing. The hard work of making is our work. Work was our calling before the Fall, and it still is today. We were made to work and are called to work to the glory of God at whatever we are given to do. And as reborn followers of Christ we are particularly sent out in our day for “rightly ordered cultural labor, the creational task of making and remaking God’s world. We are (re)made to be *makers*.”<sup>3</sup>

## THIS BOOK

The book in your hands is the work of many. It is a book about the amazing gift of music. Mars Hill Audio’s Ken Myers asserts that music is a great gift of God and that music is

... a unique gift in its capacity to represent and in some way enable us to participate in the order of God’s Creation. It is not merely a mode of per-

sonal expression, but a way of knowing something about objective reality. It addresses the body, the intellect, the imagination, and the emotions in a uniquely powerful way. Music is a great and powerful mystery, and something that unites heaven and earth.<sup>4</sup>

That is a lot of weight to give to music. And it makes the work of creating a book about music seem to be an impossible task. So for this project we have broken down music into more bite-sized portions. As with *It Was Good: Making Art to the Glory of God*, this book can be read in any order. But there is intent behind the ordering of the essays. If you read the book by following the table of contents, you will find that it begins with silence as we pause to prepare for the freedom, creativity, and delight of music (because if music isn't a delight, you're doing it wrong). Then we reflect on the calling and mission of music as we follow the journey of a particular music-making disciple of Christ. Stories like these are important because "the significance—and ultimately the quality—of the work we do is determined by our understanding of the story in which we are taking part."<sup>5</sup> After that, we step back to the music of childhood—a parent's perspective in raising musical children, and providing music made especially for them.

Following that pleasant excursion, it is finally time to get down to the work of *making* music. The next essays deal with rehearsing, refining, song writing, collaboration, counterpoint, harmony, listening, and participation.

In M. Edith Humphrey's *Grand Entrance: Worship on Earth as in Heaven*, we are reminded that since "in our great story of salvation, the next major act after the Creation is that of the Fall, God's people have never been strangers to the minor key."<sup>6</sup> Therefore it is good that we take time to reflect on music made for times of pain, and music in minor keys. This leads us naturally into the essays on the Blues, Jazz, and improvisation.

I think in my old record store we stocked World Music in the bins between Jazz and Hip hop, so I've organized things the same way here. Then this book goes to church with instruments for worship, psalms, and hymns. We struggle with making music utilizing limited resources, then finally, we return to work on Monday morning as we think about vocation, booking, touring, and the fame that may (or may not) come.

One word of warning needs to be offered before you jump into reading this book. The topic of glorifying God through music is so big and we have so many contributors that you should not be surprised to find yourself disagreeing with writers in this book. *They* even disagree with each other. It is easy to imagine that if they were all together in one room (rather than in one book) a fight or two might break out. You as the reader need to apply the advice from Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:21—"Test everything. Hold on to the good."

## IS IT REAL OR IS IT MEMOREX?

As indicated earlier, the idea that most captured my imagination after working on the first volume in this series was that of *making*. In his book *Resounding Truth*, Jeremy Begbie declares that music is fundamentally something done. He writes, "I am proposing that music is best construed first of all not as an object or objects but as something done. So . . . we might speak of 'musicking' rather than 'music.'"<sup>7</sup> Therefore, music isn't primarily something on my CD shelf, in my iPod, or in my stack of hymnals—music is *making*.

I take comfort in the knowledge that nearly everyone who reads this book will skip the Preface. But for those chosen few who are actually reading this, I wish to make clear that *I am not disparaging recorded music*. I have no desire to burn my music collection and go back to the Middle Ages where I would only get to hear music at church and the occasional festival. I come from poor Irish farming stock and would never have been invited into court to hear the Handels of the day. No, I am thankful for the myriad of musical choices that are mine to experience. And I am thankful for record players, CD players, iPods, iTunes, Pandora, and whatever the next music technology will be. But the older I get, and the more concerts I attend, I have begun to feel that there are degrees of loss occurring with each step that I take away from music making.

I have come to believe that on the continuum between live performances at one end (with perhaps playing a record in a room with friends in the middle) and being plugged into an iPod on the other, there is loss. In the same way that back when I'd make mix tapes and then subsequent copies of those mix tapes, the music was degraded. I am not saying that today there is a loss in sound quality, since a track on an iPod could be light years superior to the live performance. But instead, there is a loss in the *musicness*—that is, a loss in what makes music such a powerful art form. A similar experience of loss can be found in the visual arts. I remember when I first saw Vincent van Gogh's painting *Starry Night* at the MOMA. I was shocked. The chasm between the reproductions of van Gogh's painting that I had seen in books and the actual work of art that was hanging in front of me was mind boggling.

## MUSIC VS. MUSIKING

Not being a competent musician myself, and being suspect of my own musings in this vein, I decided to ask writers in this book what they thought of Begbie's declaration contrasting *music* with *musiking*. Following are several of the reactions I received. Sandra McCracken was the first to respond:

Yes, I do agree! I have been playing house concerts over the past year or two and it is remarkable how, in spite of my initial shyness in such a close environment, the reciprocation of energy in a living room, without the barrier of