

The Role of Gospel Music and Songs in Education and Christianity

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Abstract

Music and songs have remained part and parcel of Christianity since ancient times. From time immemorial, the inspirational strength offered by music has been used to communicate the gospel messages. Research has also shown that songs have been used to arouse people's spirits beyond imagination. Music awakens human senses in an interesting way which in turn allows human to praise through a medium that makes worship more enjoyable. The main focus of this paper therefore is to examine what has been the impact of music and songs on Education and Christianity. The paper adopts historical method in its analysis since the work is historical in nature. The outcome of this research shows that music and songs are created for ceremonial purposes, recreational purposes and artistic expression. The findings further show that music and songs are source of strength as well as a means of reducing hardship, refining one's emotional status and assisting in the discovery of meaning in one's suffering. Apart from the fact that music has a way of penetrating the inner most part of human soul that assists Christians in their expression and response to God and to the church, it is put in place to provide opportunities for Christians to attain their highest level of achievements. Music is not only a force within Christians' daily lives but part of their heritage that provides them with a means of uniquely communicating through personal expressions. The influence of music on education cannot also be over-emphasized as it inspires creativity and primes the brain for better performance. The paper however recommends that music and songs should be handled with all seriousness but those that cannot promote the spread of the gospel nor edify Christians should be jettisoned.

Keywords: Music, songs, Christians, gospel, Christianity, ceremony, education.

Introduction

Music can be described as a universal language and an integral part of religion that has the potential to enhance developments at all levels. Music plays a vital role and exerts significant influence on human society. It provides entertainment and emotional release. It appeals to and strengthens human senses in a pleasurable way. Music is not only considered a force within our daily lives but as part of our heritage that can help us communicate uniquely through personal expressions. The pervasive influence of music on Christianity cannot be underestimated.

Music and songs are two pleasant ways of expressing oneself. They are designed to give voice to human emotions, thoughts and experiences. It must, however, be emphasized from the onset that music and songs are not completely the same. While music remains an art that uses sound to create a mode or express an idea, song is a sequence of sounds that have been put together to create a piece of music. For the purpose of this study, we shall therefore examine the origin of music and songs; biblical exposition of music and songs; the role of music and songs in education and Christianity and the conclusion.

Origin of Music and Songs.

Music has no generally accepted definition but has its definitions vary widely throughout the world. Its origin remains highly contentious; while some commentators trace it to the origin of language but remain skeptical as to whether music arose before, after or simultaneously with language. Scholars from different disciplines have different view. It is however very interesting to

know that most cultures also have their own mythical origins concerning the invention of music; generally rooted in their respective mythological, religious or philosophical beliefs¹.

Some notable and renowned scholars in the field of archaeology, cognitive science, ethnomusicology, evolutionary biology, linguistics, neuroscience, pale anthropology, philosophy and psychology have propounded prominent theories in respect of the origin of music which include:

- The submission that music emanated from an elaborate form of sexual selection. This position was at first rejected for lack of merit and concrete proof but later accepted based on the fact that recent findings have revealed that sexual dimorphism are evident in other animals' mating systems.
- Herbert Spencer's Theory that music arose alongside language. Spencer hinged his argument on the fact that music and language descended from the same precursor. This theory has since the beginning of the 21st century become popular amongst various scholars².
- The theory that music was designed to fulfill a practical need. The following propositions are however made in respect of this theory:
 - To help in organizing cohesive labour.
 - To help in fostering unity and cooperation, most especially on issues relating to families and communities.
 - To be a means of removing predators or enemies of some kind.
 - To facilitate and make a long distance communication an easy task.
 - To facilitate communication with the supreme God or supernatural entities.

Apart from the above, it has also been argued that music had two origins which include: logogenic (from speech) and pathogenic (from emotional expression)³. African music, for instance, is fundamentally, a collective art. It is considered as a communal property whose spiritual qualities are shared and experienced by everybody. It can be submitted that African music originated from the people's speech. Africans believe that music is an art form that communicates with people of all races and tribes. The belief of the Africans in respect of music is anchored on the fact that life is lived communally in Africa. The places for the expression of music are therefore communal. All sphere of life such as births, marriages, death, agricultural celebrations and entertainment have unique music designed for them.

Among the Jews, as we shall see later in this study, Jubal, a legendary figure in the midst of a godless civilization founded music. In Persian mythology, Shah Jamshid was said to be the founder of music while, the goddess of Saraswati was the one that started music among the Hindus. Egyptians mythology associates the origin of music with numerous deities such as Amun, Hathor, Isis and Osiri. (https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/history_of_music).

Findings have also revealed that music had existed during the pre-literate period most especially, the paleolithic age and the instrument being used at that time was "Diuje Babe flute" derived from the Diuje Babe cave in Slovenia. It is probable that the instrument was used by the Neanderthals. It has however been speculated that early Europeans also made use of bone flutes from the Swabian Jura⁴.

A critical examination of the relative complexity of flutes may likely show that it is probable that prehistoric cultures viewed music as intrinsically connected with nature and its influence or impact has no doubt be felt by the entire universe.

Biblical Exposition of Music

Right from the earliest beginning, Musical instruments were an inseparable part of the human cultural enterprise. Music developed very quickly after the creation of Adam and Eve. It was recorded that their descendant, Jubal, was the inventor of musical instrument, "the father of all who play the

¹<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/History-of-music>

²<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/History-of-music>

³<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/History-of-music>

⁴<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/History-of-music>

harp and flute” (Gen 4:21). The Hebrew were said to be enthusiastic about the cultivation of music. Their whole history and literature no doubt provide abundant evidence of this. From the earliest beginning, there had been references to musical instruments in the Bible. After the global flood, the first mention of music was in the account of Laban. There was an indication that musical instruments were used to accompany singing. According to this biblical narrative, Laban informed his son-in-law, Jacob, of his intention to host a festive send-off with him “with joy and singing to music of tambourines and harps” (Gen 31: 27). After the triumphant passage of the Hebrews from the Red Sea, prophetess Miriam and the women who accompanied her were praising God, they sang and danced to accompaniment of tambourines (Exodus 15: 20-21).

In the Pentateuch, the first recorded instance of where God clearly instructed his people to use musical instruments in worship also appeared. While in the wilderness, God commanded Moses to make two trumpets of hammered silver which were to be used to gather the assembly or the leaders, to signal the breaking of the Israelites’ camp, to invoke Yahweh’s help during war and to commit the offerings to God as a memorial during the appointed feasts and times of rejoicing⁵.

The period of Samuel, David, and Solomon had been described as the golden age of Hebrew music. For the first time in history, music became systematically cultivated; it became an essential part of training in schools of the prophets. After he was anointed as the first King of Israel, the company of prophets whom Saul met prophesied to the accompaniment of lyres, tambourines, flutes and harps (1Sam 10: 5). Saul also hired David to play the harp as a means of soothing him when he was continually tormented by an evil spirit (1Sam 16:15-23). Considering the number of Psalms David had written, one can therefore deduce that he was not only a musician but also a poet and song-writer. It is also not an overstatement if one concludes that it is probable that the music he made for Saul was instrument-accompanied song.

The temple gradually transformed into a great school of music. Large bands of trained singers and players on instruments were constantly employed. David appointed some of the Levites to the ministry of music and song. "These people were to minister before the ark of the Lord to make petition, to give thanks to the Lord, the God of Israel: Asaph the Chief, and the next to him Zechariah, Jeiel and Shemiramoth, and Jehiel, and Mattithiah and Eliah, and Benaiah, and Obededom: and Jeiel with psalteries and with harps; but Asaph made a sound with cymbals and Benaiah and Jahaziel the priests were to blow the trumpets regularly before the ark of the covenant of God” (1Chronicles 16:4-6).

Without mincing words, one can assert that music-making even before the establishment of music ministry, had been an integral aspect of Israelite life, culture and worship. This quality was demonstrated when the ark of God was to be brought back to Jerusalem, David and the whole house of Israel celebrated with all their might before the Lord, with songs and with harps, lyres, tambourines, sistrums, and cymbals (2Sam 6:5).

The interest and love David had for music was further demonstrated when he was to establish the ministry of music as described above, out of 38,000 Levites, David set aside 4,000 for the ministry of music. Obviously, David allocated a substantial and considerable portion of the human resources at the temple to the ministry of music. Reference was also made to Solomon at the peak of his kingdom’s splendor. He imported unprecedented amounts of almugwood which were of high quality not only to be used at the temple and royal palace, but also to make harps and lyres for the musicians (1Kings 10: 11-12).

Music is so important in the Old Testament to the extent that it served as an indication of the Israelites’ spiritual condition. The silence of musical instruments and disappearance of joyful songs symbolized the disappearance of God’s favour (Amos 5: 23).

There is a relatively small number of musical compositions and also a very scanty number of references to music in the New Testament. Music ministry is presented in the new testament as a vessel from which the church can “teach and admonish one another with wisdom through psalms,

⁵ChristianStudyLibrary,(n.d.).MusicalInstrumentsandMusiciansinWorshipintheBible:TheOld Testament.<https://www.ChristianStudylibrary.org/article/music-instrument-and-musicians-worship-bible-old-testament>.

hymns and songs from the spirit” (Col 3:16). The New Testament makes reference to music and dancing in Luke 15:25 when the prodigal son returned to his father. Jesus and his disciples sang hymn after the Lord Supper (Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26). We are made to see the importance and influence of music in Acts 16:25 when Paul and Silas were unjustly imprisoned⁶.

The experience of Paul in the prison might probably be one of the reasons why he wrote to the Ephesians commanding them to address one another in song (Ephesians 5:16). The book of Revelation also mentions songs of joy, thanks, songs of praise which will take place during the future 70th “Week” described by Daniel⁷. We also see the account of the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders that fell down before the Lamb, in the same book of Revelation. Each of the creatures was “holding a harp... and they sang a new song” (Rev 5:8-9).

From the foregoing, we can see that there is more in the Bible about music than any other art. Music is demonstrated from creation (Gen 4:21) throughout history into eternity (Rev 15:3).

The Role of Gospel Music and Songs in Education and Christianity

Of all the world religions, Christianity appears to be the most musical because the adherents have the most to sing about. Christianity has therefore been described as the singing religion and the Christians, the singing people. No Christian gathering seems complete without the singing of songs. Every facet of life has unique songs attached to it; at birth, weddings and funerals, Christians sing. It is never an overstatement to say that music is closely united to Christianity in such a way that there is a kind of unbreakable bond between them. It is in view of this that this section will focus on the role of music and songs in Christianity.

Gospel music and songs help people feel more connected to God and his message. Since gospel music and songs give inspiration, Christians are undeniably connected to God as they are inspired. Through inspiration being given by gospel music, Christians are spontaneously taken to the realm of faith where God abides. Gospel music has a positive impact on the general well-being of people.

Gospel music can also enhance the proper functioning of the brain. Findings reveal that there are both left and right hemispheres of the brain. Gospel music has the potency of increasing the activity of the left hemisphere of the brain which is responsible for positive emotions. Gospel music decreases the activity of the right hemisphere of the brain which is responsible for negative emotions. Studies have also shown that gospel music can help to improve cognitive function and reduce stress level. Those who listen to gospel music constantly get the feeling of satisfaction.

Music is the fulfillment of God’s commandment. Singing, according to the Bible is not optional, it is a command. Christians are not just invited to sing, they are commanded to sing so that the involvement of Christians in gospel music is seen as the fulfillment of God’s command. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians says: “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart.” (Ephesians 5:18-19).

Gospel music and songs help Christians to dig deep into the words of God. The more Christians know the words of God, the more cordial their relationship with God and the more comfortable they are. According to Paul’s exhortation in Colossians 3:16; singing is one of the two chief ways in which God’s word dwells in Christians richly.

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly... singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs... (Colossians 3:16).”

Gospel music and songs play the role of building up others. When Christians sing, they build up fellow believers. The Bible commands:

“Addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs...” (Ephesians 5:19).

Findings have also revealed that gospel music and songs have direct and beneficial impact on Christians’ mental health. Since gospel music and songs remove anxiety, stress and sadness,

⁶<https://crosswalk.com/slideshows/7-reasons-singing-is-essential-to-the-christian-life-html>

⁷MusicintheBible,(n.d.).*Christiananswers.net/dictionary/music:html*

Christians who listen to gospel music on regular basis feel more confident, satisfied and in control of their feelings.

Music and songs strengthen Christians spiritually for trial, promote corporate feelings of solidarity and express unity.

There is a gross misconception among some believers as many think that singing is only necessary when one is happy and everything is going on well. The event in Acts 16:25, has proved this wrong. Paul and Silas were unjustly imprisoned but later miraculously released when they sang. Music and songs are also a means of reinforcing important values held by the community. It has also been observed that community traditions, cultures and values are strengthened and maintained by the use of music. Music and songs no doubt “help strengthen corporate feeling and solidarity”.⁸

Music and songs calm the nerves and keep evil spirits away. Music and songs have the ability to calm the nerves and reduce tension. The Bible says:

“Now the spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him. Saul’s attendants said to him, ‘See, an evil spirit from God is tormenting you. Let our Lord command his servants here to search for someone who can play the harp. He will play when the evil spirit from God comes upon you, and you will feel better’... Whenever the spirit from God came upon Saul, David would take his harp and play. Then relief could come to Saul; he would feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him.”(1 Samuel 16:14-23).

From the above passage, it is very obvious that evil spirit came upon Saul and the harp that David played drove the spirit away. The most tense person can be calmed and relaxed through the instrumentality of music and songs.

It has been revealed that listening to gospel songs have significant effects on one’s mood. Classical and ambient music for instance has the best mood-boosting effects. Gospel or Christian music and songs generally improve intelligence, and focus as well as mental health, self-confidence and immune system. Music can be used to relax, boost one’s mood or improve one’s concentration depending on the needs. Findings have also revealed that mood-stimulating music can cause the brain to produce chemicals such as dopamine and serotonin, which evoke feelings of happiness⁹.

It is, however, advisable and even common for people to listen to music and songs that reflect their mood. An individual that is experiencing sadness might choose to listen to more upbeat music, whereas an individual that is happy can choose to listen to mellow music. To this extent, it makes sense to think about what we require the most when we are happy or sad.

Music can also be used to induce, promote and facilitate sleep. Sleep states are determined by a constellation of physiological and behavioural traits; Drugs can be used to stimulate states of sleep, but the same drugs can also alter autonomic physiology¹⁰. When music stimulates sleep, it has no side effect. The activity at the left hemisphere of the brain increases this action, promotes positive emotion which in turn induce sleep.

Effect of Music on Education

Music has been reported to have a strong positive impact on individual performance particularly in learning subjects that need intensive memorizing skills. During long sessions, music can remove boredom; make the lesson interesting and aid endurance. In some cases, students have found that music help them with memorization, by creating a positive mood which indirectly boosts memory formation.

Music and songs increase cognitive competence and development in students. Music and songs have the inherent power that reactivates areas of the brain associated with memory, reasoning, speech, emotion and record. Students who persistently listen to gospel music and songs may likely

⁸George,E.J.(1995).*Music Education for the African Church*. Kaduna, Barake Press. Kaduna.

⁹Ben, V.(n.d.).*The positive effects of gospel music on your mood*.<https://www.benvaughn.com/the-positive-effects-of-gospel-music-on-your-mood>.

¹⁰Christopher,J.W; Hellen, A. and Baghdoyan and Ralph, L.(2011).
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experience brain development than students that do not. Research has however shown that majority of students listen to music while working with the belief that it helps them manage the stress and anxiety they experience while studying.

It has also been observed that music helps to make students appear smarter. Students who persistently listen to stimulating music generally appear very smart. This is made possible when the music reactivates the brain. When the brain is charged and active, it will invariably help the students to be emotionally stable and balanced. When a student is emotionally balanced, he will no doubt appear smarter than other students.

Music trains the brain for higher forms of thinking. It has also been revealed that musical training wires the brain for enhanced performance. The process of learning and playing an instrument increases brainpower and functionality; this in turn results in a boosted IQ and improved concentration. With activities in the left hemisphere of the brain that music increases the mind is kept sharp and the chances of developing dementia decreases.

According to Mandy and Robins, music through performance and creative experiences provides as a means for personal expression, communication, social and cultural identity formation¹¹.

Music provides the opportunity for aesthetic experiences. An aesthetic knowledge which can be interpreted as a deep perceptual understanding in which the senses, the emotions and cognition are combined to make meaning through the experiences of creating, making and interpreting aesthetic forms.

Music inspires creativity. Music has been described as one of the most creatively stimulating tasks any person can undertake. Since music has the potential ability to develop the brain, the development of the brain also makes students more creative.

It helps students to persevere. Before any student can learn how to handle any musical instrument, it will take longer period. Once this act of perseverance is inculcated and instilled in any student, it becomes part and parcel and habit of such a student. This habit, if properly developed, will assist the student in every sphere of life.

Another benefit of music can be seen in the area of developing better vocabulary and articulation. Music education is linked to an improvement in both verbal sequencing and the ability to use articulate speech¹².

Conclusion

Music as we can see from the study appears to be a universal gift from God. It is as old as man; infact, one can unequivocally submit that music originates within man. It is everywhere, no tribe, tongue or nation is without music.

The pervasive influence of music and songs has been discussed. There is an unbreakable bond between music and Christianity. Boredom that would have remained a common experience in Christian gatherings had from time immemorial been removed through the instrumentality of music and songs. The impact of gospel music and songs on education has also been stressed. Students become more creative and emotionally stable through the instrumentality of music. It is therefore necessary to make the following recommendations.

- Ungodly music and songs that do not glorify God should be disallowed in the church and every Christian assembly.
- Lack of basic knowledge of music is a serious problem. People should be given sufficient training.

In view of the positive impact of music and songs discussed above, it is imperative for Christian leaders to hold gospel music and songs in high esteem. Arguably, Nigeria dominates the world music industry today. The mass movement of youths to other countries also supports this dominance. Nigerian dominance in music sphere depends on the youths "prospect" in other countries where they have escaped to. Others, most especially those at home, rely on their remittances from the

¹¹Mandy,S.andRobins,S.(n.d.).ResearchintothebenefitsofMusiceducation.<https://musictrust.com.all>research>

¹²Morley,L.(2021).ThebenefitsofMusicEducation.<https://www.openmicuk.co.uk>>

Music industry abroad¹³. With the largest population in Africa, almost 16% of Africa's population and abundant resources, Nigeria qualifies as the 'giant of Africa' and in a sense has taken its music and church activities to the nooks and crannies of the continent¹⁴. Despite Nigeria's high population, the nation even contended the Bakassi Peninsula territory; lapses that the colonial government played its role in the disharmonious important part in the controversies that began what became later known as the Bakassi crisis after 1961¹⁵. The music industry has majorly accommodated the women unlike other facet in the society like politics, and even the church. It is in the music industry that ideal demands that each members of society equally should be assured basic rights of freedom of expression as expressed in their music¹⁶.

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