MUSIC TO CELEBRATE SINGING

Wednesday, June 10, 2020

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Come Christians, Join to Sing....................MADRID; Arr. Becki Slagle Mayo
O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing................LYNGHAM; Arr. Joan Pinkston
Singing I Go.........................................William Kirkpatrick; Arr. Gregg Sewell
I Will Sing of My Redeemer........................HYFRYDOL; Arr. John Wilson
Why Do I Sing About Jesus?.........................Albert Ketchum; Arr. Don Wyrtzen
O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing................AZMON; Arr. Jan Sanborn
O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing................AZMON; Arr. Teresa Wilhelmi
O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing................AZMON; Arr. Jeff Bennett
How Can I Keep from Singing?.....................Robert Lowry; Arr. Lani Smith
Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ...............LINSTEAD; Arr. John Carter
I’m Gonna Sing/Aint-a That Good News?..........SPIRITUALS; Arr. Larry Shackley
Sing Praise to God Who Reigns Above...............MIT FREUDEN ZART; Arr. Faye Lopez

Karen Harvey, piano

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Thank you for tuning in to today’s meditations. Please consider joining us next week for hymns arranged for piano by Gina Sprunger.
Notes on today’s music

Each year at this time, our church celebrates its musicians with a service that thanks them for the wonderful musical ministry they provide. In particular, our Sanctuary Choir literally sings at every service throughout the church year, and in these past three months, the sounds of this beloved group have been sorely missed. So in their honor, and in honor of Music Appreciation Sunday on June 7, I’ve chosen to feature hymns that are about singing. Additionally, I thought it would be interesting to research the many benefits of choral singing; the following is an excerpt adapted from *Imperfect Harmony: Finding Happiness While Singing with Others* by Stacy Horn.

I used to think choir singing was only for nerds and church people. Since I was neither, I never considered singing in a group - even though I loved singing by myself. Then, in my 20s, I found myself facing a big, black hole of depression. I remembered how much fun I had once singing Christmas carols with a boyfriend at his church. Desperation forced my hand. I joined a community choir. Except that at that first performance, we didn’t sing Christmas carols - we sang a piece of music that was 230 pages long: Handel’s *Messiah*. It was magnificent. I was left vibrating with a wondrous sense of musical rapport. Since that performance, I haven’t found the sorrow that couldn’t be at least somewhat alleviated, or the joy that couldn’t be made even greater, by singing.

Singing is such a surefire way of feeling good that even singing about death is life-enhancing; researchers discovered that a choir singing Mozart’s *Requiem* showed an increase in s-IgA, an immunoglobulin that enhances our immune defense. Music is awash with neurochemical rewards for working up the courage to sing. That rush, or “singer’s high,” comes in part through a surge of endorphins, which at the same time alleviate pain. When the voices of the singers surrounding me hit my ear, I’m bathed in dopamine, a neurotransmitter in the brain that is associated with feelings of pleasure and alertness. Music lowers cortisol, a chemical that signals levels of stress. Studies have found that people who listened to music before surgery were more relaxed and needed less anesthesia, and afterward they got by with smaller amounts of pain medication. Music also releases serotonin, a neurotransmitter associated with feelings of euphoria and contentment. “Every week when I go to rehearsal,” a choral friend told me, “I’m dead tired and don’t think I’ll make it until 9:30. But then something magic happens and I revive … it happens almost every time.”

It doesn’t even matter if you can sing well; in a 2005 study, investigators found that group singers experienced the same benefits even when “the vocal instrument is of mediocre quality.” And there are reasons you should find a choir rather than simply singing in the shower. Studies have found that group singing releases oxytocin, a chemical that manages anxiety and stress and, according to McGill University professor Daniel Levitin, enhances feelings of trust and bonding. The world doesn’t open up into a million shimmering dimensions of hope and possibility when I sing alone; it happens when I’m surrounded by my fellow choristers, and all the different sounds we’re making combine to leave us thrumming in harmony - lit up together like fireflies flashing in synchrony by whatever masterpiece is currently racing through our brains, bodies, and hearts.

Researchers are constantly studying how the body and brain respond to music and singing in groups. In the meantime, as science works to explain what every singer already knows, no matter where you fall on the voice aptitude scale - sing. I know of no other activity that gives so much and is this eminently affordable and accessible: just show up for choir practice. Singing might be our most perfect drug; the ultimate mood regulator, lowering rates of anxiety, depression and loneliness, while at the same time amplifying happiness and joy, with no discernible, unpleasant side effects. The nerds and the church people had it right.