

Music as Communication: Word and Music – Word and Spirit

There is a kind of communication that we can call 'descriptive' and there is another kind we can call 'performative.' Of the first order, a good example is the radio commentator who vividly describes the burst of energy that brings about the deciding try. The commentator paints the picture, but he doesn't actually make the try happen. Of the second order, a good example is Donald Trump in his TV show when he says "you're fired!" Not only do Donald's words paint the picture, they actually cause the person to be fired! You can see something has actually happened by the victim's reaction. That's performative!

Performative language is symbolic, signifying what it effects. Good examples of performative language are (1) when we say "I do" and "I will" at the wedding, we actually do and will those actions then and there; (2) and when we say "you bug me", we concretely confirm things until now perhaps only suspected. We know that these things are actually performed as we say them by the reaction of others at the very moment we say them. It's history! We can't undo it.

Performative language is not just verbal. We can't help but smile when we sing that whimsy folk melody, "Happy birthday". Words alone fail. Even song itself cannot express it all. It is the sight of loved ones singing and smiling, our breathing in and blowing out the candles, the cutting of the cake, the eating, and the sharing. It is the whole ritual performance that makes those moments particularly happy celebrations of being alive and present to those who love us.

This presentation will explore the performative nature of liturgical language. It will examine the role of music and song in the overall symbolic complex of the liturgy. It will identify resources to help evaluate liturgical music and song that communicates effectively – Word and Spirit.

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Music as Ministry

- "In service of the Lord"
 - tied to the ritual action
 - prayer
 - the *Word*
 - the unity of the body
- Liturgy – work of Christ
 - Music: ministerial function
 - Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 112
Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (SC112)

**"One bread, one body, one spirit of love.
Gather your people, O Lord."** © 1991. Bob Hurd.



Liturgical language is by and large performative. "The Lord be with you" "This is my body" "Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ" "Dying you destroyed our death, rising you destroyed our life, Lord Jesus, come in glory" "we make our prayer through Christ our Lord" "Amen" "Thanks be to God, Alleluia!"

Similarly liturgical music is intended to be performative, not descriptive. It is intrinsic to the ritual performance, not simply decorative. For example, when we respond to the psalm: "We are his people, the sheep of his flock." Without song can we proudly acclaim our identity as the people of God? Without music, can we joyfully profess our faith and trust in the Lord, our Shepherd?

This is what the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC), is getting at when it refers to music's ministerial function, "munus ministeriale" (SC, 112). Liturgy is the work of Christ, head and members, and music is in service of the Lord.

Music solemnifies the ritual actions, drawing us to engage the symbolic and contemplate the mystery celebrated.

Music serves our prayer, by expressing our feelings and emotions – joy, adoration, contrition, sorrow, delight, thanksgiving and supplication.

Music serves the Word, giving air to the inherent musicality of the psalms.

Music serves our participation in the mystical body of Christ, by fostering our sense of belonging and unity of mind and heart.

For example, singing with one voice the words "one bread, one body" brings about the sense of unity for which the entrance and communion songs call.

In all these, music is doing not describing, performing not decorating.

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Music as Art



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- **Artistic criterion for liturgical music:**
 - “The beauty that invites prayer” John Paul II
- “Close link between
 - music and song [music / words], and
 - contemplation of the divine mysteries and prayer” [*Spirit / Word*]
- John Paul II, *Address to the Professors and Students of the Pontifical Institute of Music* (2001), 3. (JP II 3)



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Vatican II made the point that music is the more sacred the more closely it is connected with the ritual action (SC, 112). John Paul II mentioned this “close link between music and song, on the one hand, and between contemplation of the divine mysteries and prayer, on the other” (*Address to the Professors and Students of the Pontifical Institute of Music*, 3). Prayer becomes song when we breath into it a music that dwells harmoniously with the words, much as the Spirit dwelt with the incarnate Word. This connection between music and the Spirit dates to New Testament times, when St Paul exhorted the churches:

“be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and playing to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks always and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father” (Eph 5:18-20; cf Col 3:16-17).

In his letter to the Corinthians Paul counsels them regarding the unintelligibility of speaking in tongues. Not to deny the gift of the Spirit, he says:


“So what is to be done? I will pray with the Spirit and I will pray with the mind also. I will sing with the Spirit and I will sing with the mind also” (1 Cor 14:15).

In Gregorian chant the close link between Spirit and Word is indicated by the name given to musical phrases - neumes. The original meaning derived from the Latin / Greek “pneuma”, meaning “breath” and signifying the Holy Spirit.

Much has been said in recent times about what constitutes beauty in liturgical music. John Paul II recently gave us a measure that applies specifically to liturgical music, a measure related to its performative inspiration and intention:



“The criterion that must inspire every composition and performance of songs and sacred music is the beauty that invites prayer” (JP II, *Address*, 3).

Music as Symbol



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- Christ is present in his *Word*, when his Church prays & sings, in his minister, and substantially in his Body & Blood (SC7)
- “When song and music are signs of the *Spirit’s* presence and action ...
– “Signs perceptible to the senses” (SC7)
- ... they encourage, in a certain way, communion with the Trinity.” (JPII 3)
– praise to the Father, through his incarnate *Word*, in the breath of the *Spirit*



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The source of this beauty is not the music in itself, but the contemplation of the mystery - the presence of the risen Jesus. For it is Christ himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read. He is present when the Church prays and sings, in his minister offering sacrifice, and substantially in his body and blood.

Our inspiration is the splendour of this mystery and the aesthetic radiance that enlightens our perception of Christ’s presence, like a Damascus conversion. Thus the beauty we express in liturgical music is that which enables us to glimpse the vision of this splendour, this radiance. If it doesn’t do this, it’s out!

Composers, musicians, cantors and choirs thus have a unique role in inviting the assembly to prayer and holiness. It is our awesome responsibility to select performative music and song. Our intention is the assembly’s contemplation of the mystery being celebrated, mediating their perception of the presence of Christ. Such an awesome responsibility requires informed consideration of the context of the overall liturgy and each element within it, while at the same time taking account of the cultural sensibilities of the particular assembly.

The “right” music adds significant force to the performative nature of the words and the liturgical action:

“When song and music are signs of the Holy Spirit’s presence and action, they encourage, in a certain way, communion with the Trinity. The liturgy then becomes an ‘opus Trinitatis’. ‘Singing in the liturgy’ must flow from *sentire cum Ecclesia*. Only in this way do union with God and artistic ability blend in a happy synthesis in which the two elements -- song and praise -- pervade the entire liturgy” (JP II, *Address*, 3).

Thus, a second source of inspiration is our sense of *feeling, living, thinking and loving* with the Church (*sentire cum ecclesia*).

The Key: Paschal Mystery of Christ

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Prayer

When "the aesthetic harmonises with the poetic," (S. Maggiani, 271)
 → Beauty
 → invites Prayer
 → signifies Holiness

Poetics

- intention – contemplation of the divine mystery
- inspiration – splendour of the mystery, '*sensus ecclesiae*'

Aesthetics

- context – rite: time, space, acoustic, visual, kinetic
- culture – faith, tradition, style, tonal affinity

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The entire assembly is caught up in this work of the Trinity, expressing praise to the Father and experiencing our own holiness in "signs perceptible to the senses." This dynamic of expression and perception, of the poetics and aesthetics of liturgical music and song, is fundamental to our participation in the mystical body of Christ. As leaders in music ministry we must do all we can to help bring about the harmonisation of the aesthetic with the poetic – harmonisation of receptive context and culture with performative intention and inspiration. Our starting point is the mystery being celebrated. We must contemplate deeply the paschal mystery of Christ, the key to unlocking performative poetic expression and harmonising with aesthetic perception. A particularly interesting aspect of the paschal mystery is the ascension, pictured here. Another 'A' word may be more to the point – the 'absention', or the absence of Jesus, which has enabled the presence of the Holy Spirit in each of us. This aspect of the mystery of the presence of Christ bears directly on our discussion on performative language, for it is the Holy Spirit that animates our musical expression.

Some will recognise the similarities of this model with the pastoral, liturgical and musical judgments outlined in *Music in Catholic Worship*. Certainly all *MCW*'s liturgical considerations are context considerations in this model, and all *MCW*'s pastoral considerations are culture considerations in this model. The major difference to *MCW*, and the area of focus of this presentation, is the development of performative language considerations for music used in liturgy.

Why? Well, what's going on when we sing a "sacred" Hail Mary or "Let it be" during communion, a Latin polyphonic Sanctus, or Boniwell's "Lord is my shepherd" as psalm? How can we simply say "Alleluia?" What is the inspiration for this? What is the performative intention? The poetic is not harmonised with the aesthetic. The beauty that invites prayer is unrecognisable.

Words and Music:
Word and Spirit



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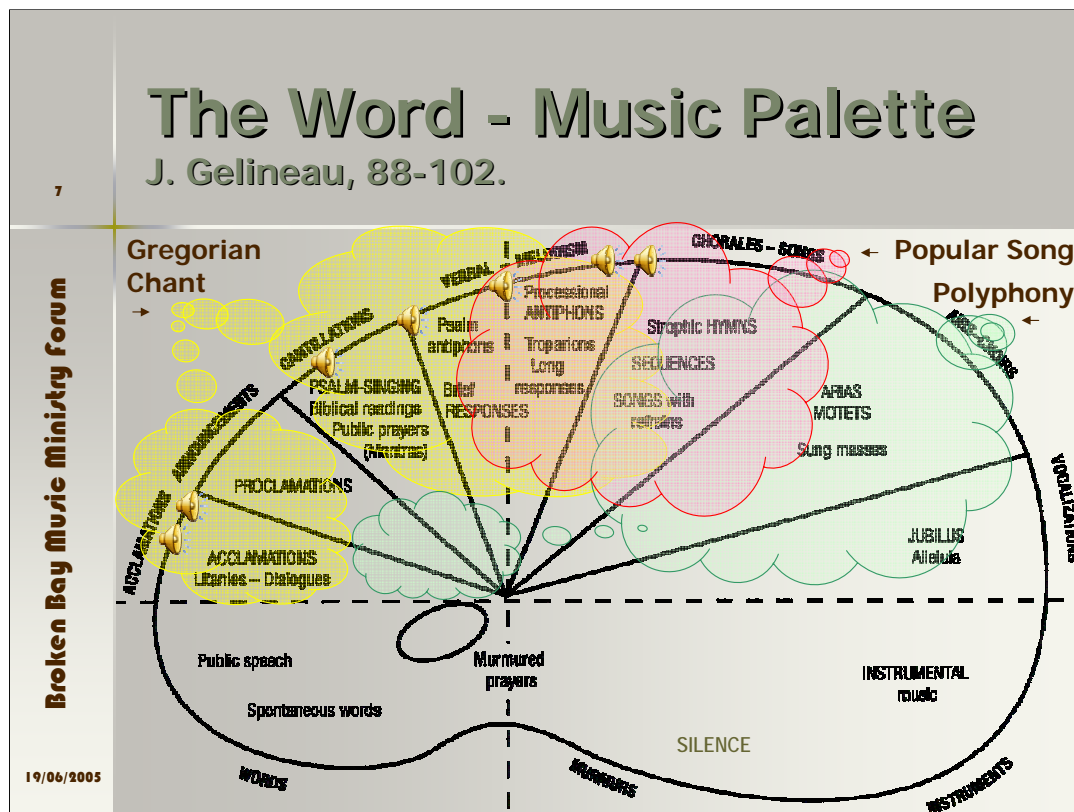
- **Threshold between speech & song**
 - Tone (pitch), intensity, rhythm, pace
- **Relationship between words & music**
 - Spoken words ◇ Instrumental music
 - Words with musical sounds (*Word*)
 - Music with lyrical vocals (*Spirit*)
 - Verbal-Melodism (*Word & Spirit*)
 - Joseph Gelineau, *Liturgical Assembly Liturgical Song* (Portland, OR: Pastoral Press, 2002), 88-102.

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Let's now look at a practical method for exploring the performative language opportunities for song and music in the Mass. Joseph Gelineau has laid out the various elements of the Mass (past and present) on a grid that shows the threshold between speech and music, on the one axis, and the relationship between words and music on the other. Speech and song both exhibit the following characteristics - tone (pitch), intensity, rhythm, pace. At various points speech becomes recitation, cantillation, and song. Relationship between words & music varies from the two extremes - spoken words and instrumental music. The emphasis varies: Words with musical sounds (*Word*); Music with lyrical vocals (*Spirit*); and Verbal-Melodism (*Word & Spirit*).

SIDEBAR: A Reflection on the Paschal Mystery

"By baptism we are plunged into the paschal mystery of Christ: we die with Him, are buried with Him, and rise with Him; we receive the spirit of adoption as children "in which we cry: Abba, Father" (Rom. 8 :15), and thus become true adorers whom the Father seeks. In like manner, as often as we eat the supper of the Lord we proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes. For that reason, on the very day of Pentecost, when the Church appeared before the world, "those who received the word" of Peter "were baptized." And "they continued steadfastly in the teaching of the apostles and in the communion of the breaking of bread and in prayers . . . praising God and being in favour with all the people" (Acts 2:41-47). From that time onwards the Church has never failed to come together to celebrate the paschal mystery: reading those things "which were in all the scriptures concerning him" (Luke 24:27), celebrating the eucharist in which "the victory and triumph of his death are again made present" (19), and at the same time giving thanks "to God for his unspeakable gift" (2 Cor. 9:15) in Christ Jesus, "in praise of his glory" (Eph. 1:12), through the power of the Holy Spirit" (SC, 6).



Popular Song John Paul II, *Chirograph: Moved by a Lively Desire* (2003), 6, 7; and John Paul II, *Address to the participants of the International Congress of Sacred Music* (2001), 4.


- “A bond of unity and a joyful expression of the community at prayer”
- “Fosters the proclamation of the one faith”
- “Imparts to large liturgical assemblies an incomparable and recollected solemnity”
- “Particularly adapted to the participation of the faithful”
- 2nd half of 20th century particularly strong – in line with Vatican II, SC 118

Polyphony John Paul II, *Chirograph: Moved by a Lively Desire* (2003), 6, 7.

- “Polyphony and other kinds of sacred music by no means excluded”
- To be avoided
 - “elitist forms of ‘inculturation’ which introduce into the liturgy ancient or contemporary compositions of possible artistic value, but that indulge in a language that is incomprehensible to the majority”
 - “Anything trendy or superficial”
- Therefore, find “new musical languages” to express the mystery in the liturgy

Gregorian Chant John Paul II, *Chirograph: Moved by a Lively Desire* (2003), 7, 12.

- Use Gregorian Chant directly in liturgy celebrated in Latin
- Use Gregorian Chant as the yardstick for new vernacular liturgical music
 - “Not to copy Gregorian chant,” but
 - “Make sure that new compositions are imbued with that same *Spirit*”
 - Similar “in movement, inspiration & feeling”

 **Chant samples** from left to right on the Word – Music palette: Lamb of God (Agnus Dei), Alleluia, Our Father (Pater Noster), Responsorial Psalm (Gradual), Communion Procession, Entrance Procession (Introit), Glory to God (Gloria)

Discussion

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- **What light does this shed on music ministry in your parish?**
 - Considerations of context, culture, inspiration and intention
 - Considerations of beauty
 - Performative v. decorative function

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Conclusion

This presentation provides a foundation for discussion. It has explored the performative nature of liturgical language. It has examined the role of music and song in the liturgy. It has shown the intrinsic role of music in liturgy in communicating signs of the presence of the Holy Spirit. It has identified a model for evaluating the performative intention and inspiration for liturgical music and song. It has briefly looked at Gelineau's "word – music" palette as a tool for identifying the performative balance between word and music in different liturgical contexts. On the handout there is a set of references for further reading. I now invite you to discuss and consider: what light does this understanding of liturgical music as communication shed on music ministry in your parish?

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CHANT SAMPLES (traditional and contemporary) are included in the presentation to indicate their place in the Word – Music Palette. They are indicated by the symbol 

CREDITS:

'Lamb of God', 'Alleluia', 'Our Father', 'Gloria' from *Mass of Glory and Praise* performed by WYSPERS (Wahroonga Youth Singers and Players)

© 2004 Paul Mason, Published by Willow Publishing Pty Ltd. PO Box 288 Brookvale NSW 2100

Gradual – 'Venite Filii', Communion – 'In Splendoribus', Introit – 'In Dominus Dixit ad Me' from *Gradual Romanum* performed by Monks of St. Benedict's, Brazil

http://www.christusrex.org/www2/cantgreg/index_eng.html

Further Reading

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- John Paul II
- Vatican II
- Joseph Gelineau
- Silvano Maggiani
- Don E. Salier

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