A Theology of Music

Intro

The Bible says that the angels sang with joy when God laid the foundations of the earth.

Before there was speech, there was music. Jubal was called “the father of all who play the lyre & the pipe” (Gen. 4: 21). Israel had men’s choirs and professional choir directors.

The song of Miriam and the song of Debra were for praise.

The song of Solomon extolled love.

The song of Moses to give hope during national judgment.

Jesus led the 12 in song at the Lord’s supper.

Paul said that the church is to “speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs...singing to God with thankful hearts.” More than any religion or philosophy...the Bible sings. “Is any cheerful”, said James, “let him sing”.

And in the Book of Revelation in heaven there are harps accompanying a new song. Music reflects theology, or its lack. Man has always been immersed in music. He is instinctively musical, song reflects man’s heart. I’d like to walk us through a theological historical perspective of music, sacred and secular. “It is the expression of his soul.”

The earliest musical instrument discovered is a flute from the femur of a cave bear. In Egypt we have records of harps, lutes, and lyres, drums and tambourines.

In Mesopotamia in 2000 BC ...the time of Abraham...in Ur, the city of Abraham, is found the first documented song on a clay tablet.

In 800 BC in Babylon is the first reference to the musical scale as the observation of musical order was beginning.

Music then moves to the Mediterranean to Greece in 500 BC. The first western music....meaning music with a sense of order and a seeking of musical absolutes. A musical reality standing outside of man. This was because the Greeks constantly searched for the higher meaning to physical things. For order to their world.

Thus the order of music was a microcosm of an ordered universe. Aristotle felt music could control ones behavior. Thus music was required in Greek education.
And that’s why the major contributor to Greek music was a mathematician – Pythagoras. He discovered that the mathematical order of the length of a string gave rise to the order of notes and octaves; and the 12 tone scale.

Thus there was to be a right way…. a best way to be musical. Beauty was objectively outside of man as well as within the heart, a standard to be practiced and attained to. Beauty was not just in the eye of the beholder; it was believed a gift from Apollo.

Rome conquered Greece but absorbed the Greek concepts of music. The Roman Empire encompassed Britain to France to Turkey to Egypt to Spain and thus the Greek idea of music was exported to Europe. And when the barbarian tribes took over the empire, they also absorbed the Greek musical theory that would become the music of Europe. And when the Christian church became the religion of the tribes, Greek music would be Christian, with God answering the Greek quest for absolutes.

The Church controlled art and music from the 5th century onward until the Renaissance, “the Middle ages”. For a thousand years musical professionals served the church. Music was created in the church, and because of the church’s opposition to the pagan cultures, it opposed their native music and gave rise to sacred music. Music was essentially Christian.

The first music of the church was the chant or “plainsong”, almost a musical monotone. The words were from the reading of the church service, the mass. Words surrounded by a cappella tones. Different regions: Spain, England, Ireland, France – sounded different.

So in 600 AD the man considered the first Pope- Gregory I, established unified chants, Gregorian chants, sung only by monks and nuns. Sound heavenly?? It was meant to draw one heavenward.

But at the turn of the millennium in 1000 AD, a cultural musical innovation arose: “folk music”. Secular, non-religious poetry set to music. Simple string music on a lute, by men named “troubadours” going from castle to castle in France, performing for the wealthiest. Musical professionals playing for pay on music sung faster and not in Latin but the common languages.

And not about God but love songs about courtly love, illicit and forbidden bringing heartbreak. But it was frowned upon by the church as heathen. In the 1200’s the troubadours and their love songs were forced out of France by Pope Innocent III and thus they spread their “folk music” across Europe. By the 15th century folk music was common.

And something else arose. Musical notation that songs could be recorded and remembered and with this came the phenomena of the recognition of the songwriter. Wealth and fame could now come with musical professionals writing and singing love songs. “Imagine”!
The first songwriter of note was Guillaume de Machaut who wrote 100 love songs and masses, but his main contribution was the development of polyphony – “many sounds”. Single melody lines sung simultaneously developed later into harmonies called “ars nova”, the “new art”. Musical order stayed the same but was becoming more creative, complex, expressive.

The Renaissance beginning around 1350 was the dawning of a new musical era. The Renaissance was a return to the cultures of Greece and Rome in their emphasis on human life not just on heaven. A return to human reason and rational philosophy and the love of nature.

The music was now less ornate and less, well, “churchy”. It attempted more to be pleasing to the listener not just true to the Bible. There was a greater emphasis on musicality and new instruments.

The masses were more for the masses and became the symphonies of the day, the art events.

Later the Protestant Reformation popularized “the hymn”...sung by all the congregation. Often putting Protestant theology to well known secular tunes. Not pre-existing words from the mass but in words created by writers to communicate doctrine through simple tunes all could learn.

[*****‘Fairest Lord Jesus’ ‘Praise to the Lord the Almighty’*****] But the classic hymn of the Reformation was by Luther himself: [****“A Mighty Fortress”****]

The Renaissance and Reformation popularized music and brought it to the people where the Middle Ages had spiritualized it. But the period that followed escalated it with invention and creativity. As a matter of fact the name of the period means “ornate, inventive, spiraling”---or Baroque, a word that means implies “curly-ques” or arabesque. It produced music that endured. You may not have known Renaissance composers but you do the Baroque? Bach, Pachelbel’s Canon, Handel’s Messiah, Vivaldi.

Baroque music sounded like baroque architecture looked...great, curving, undulating.... Baroque fashion became elaborate and fancy. Baroque painting by Rembrandt and Rubens was dramatic with light and shadow showing movement.

Actually the Baroque period was begun by the Catholic Church in the counter-reformation period as a reaction against the Protestants. As Protestantism went to the masses, so would Catholicism, and the Council of Trent ordered that art and music become more populist and speak directly to the people. Thus began the more dramatic.

Baroque music reflected just that: an ordered, precise, universe. Almost mathematical, and yet within the structure, that which was lovely...enjoyable....creative....and even improvisational.
New instruments aided this—flute, clarinet, oboe, bassoon, trumpet, French horn, violin, cello, double bass and in the keyboard family, an instrument called the “softloud” because the keys were touch sensitive for musical dynamics. The “pianoforte” -- “softloud”—shortened to “piano”, an instrument that shortly everyone wanted in their homes as anyone could learn to play.


What about church music? Baroque was church music. The Protestants followed in their hymns. Theologically precise yet artistically delightful, but it took innovation. Some felt that musicality in hymns was profane. Bad music was good. But Isaac Watts complained that the church’s music was terrible. His father said, “Can you write better?” Isaac said, “yes,” and he did!

Precise, popular, and enjoyable... Isaac Watts! The first Protestant hymn writer of note.

Following the Baroque was the Classical period from the death of Bach in 1750 to 1820. Most of us call all serious music “classical” but it technically is what evolved from the Baroque. You know its composers also: Hayden, Mozart, Beethoven. It brought the rise of the symphony.

Classical was a revolt of the younger musicians against the convention of their elders. Hard to believe! They sensed technical restrictions and emotional restraint. We might say it was too churchy. They wanted freedom.

And the classical period mirrored the times...a time of Revolution! The Philosophic Rebellion of the Enlightenment. The political revolt of Voltaire and Thomas Paine and the removal of kings. It brought the diminishing of the church and the challenging of the Bible in Deism.

The term “classical” came from the perceived simplicity of Greece and Rome. The style was cleaner and clearer and less ornate than Baroque’s divine complexity. Like classic architecture – stately and simple. Rules were less. The creative more. Like the age, God was moving out. Man was moving in. Truth was less emphasized. Feeling more.

The church for the first time found itself moving toward the outside of the arts. But sacred music, hymns maintained their voice.

Hymnology saw the rise of the most prolific hymn writer of history. In the 1700’s, Charles Wesley of England, brother of John, took music to the common man as much as his brother and Methodism took the faith to the common Englishman.
His hymns, like the age, were simple and deeply emotional – still loved...still sung
...communicating Methodism’s great idea of the new birth and inner emotional, spiritual
experience.

1820 to 1900 was called the Romantic Period. Its difference to the Classical was simply its
intensity. It was the Classical gathering speed. The forms of music began to waiver....to
dissolve...accepted rules didn’t hold. The soul of music became increasingly human.....
increasingly passionate....increasingly – ‘romantic’. In no way was music any more the domain
of the church.

But it was called Romantic for another reason. The Romantic was a term for the heroic...for the
national hero....the praise of a certain type of man. Because this period saw the deposing of
almost all kings and monarchies and the exaltation of the_nation...the race...the people. The
French, Germans, Russians, Irish, the British, and finally, the American...toward the end of the
period, a new nation.

It was at the same time the age of the formal denial of God. In government, with Karl Marx, in
science with the revolution of Darwin’s thesis, in archeology as fundamental assertions of the
earth’s age were denied – dinosaurs received their name at this time. German liberalism
denied the reliability of scripture. Philosophy birthed Nietzsche. “God is dead”. Hitler was a
boy... Lenin a young man... communism an ideology on its way.

Romantic music is called emotional, mannish, heroic, nationalistic, music of the
imagination....sensitive....memorable in its melodies that at times bordered on political
propaganda....popular music indeed!

There was now a German sound, Italian and Russian sounds. And native composers – Wagner,
Verdi, Tchaikovsky. No longer were composers ministers of the church, but were the
somewhat neurotic....genius was now akin to madness.

Certain phrases today recall the Romantic. “Figaro Figaro...” from Italy’s The Barber of Saville,
along with “The William Tell Overture”....and Beethoven’s 5th, Wagner’s Nordic gods in the “The
Ride of the Valkyries”...The Rite of Spring, The Nutcracker from Russia along with Peter and the
Wolf or Norway’s “In the Hall of the Mountain King”.

And at the end of the Romantic period, America made its contribution to the Romantic through
a Brooklyn Jew...George Gershwin ...here is America...the city...the hustle...the blues...    A
Rhapsody in Blue.
Where was Christian music at this time? As always the hymns reflect the times. The Civil War had brought pain and melancholy. A desire to see loved ones in heaven. The Frontier Revival or 2nd Great Awakening along with the Eastern Urban Prayer Revival of 1858 and the emergence of D. L. Moody and his crusades made the idea of “getting saved” and “decisions for Christ” part of the American vocabulary. The hymns were emotional...not so theological...as tugging at the heart for a response.

D. L. Moody’s song leader, Ira Sankey, wrote “The 90 and 9” as an invitation hymn.

D. L. Moody’s meetings ended with “God Be with You”.

The military and warfare memories produced “Onward Christian Soldiers” as America sought its destiny of world reform through democracy. Its war against slavery...alcohol...women’s rights...universal education...worker’s rights...

What followed the Romantic? What would its evolution produce? The Modern Period. Individual expression increased. Universally held rules collapsed in the search for new means of expression. “Classical music” for the multitudes disappeared because of a lack of communication between the composer and the listener. The term “weird” arose. As well as the “artistic snob”. Classical music no longer served artistically the bulk of humanity but became the exclusive property of “the enlightened”. It became the Emperors Clothes, that only the gifted could see. Or as Charles Stolfus, One O’clock Jazz Band trombonist, said, “It became a scam.”

Just as art of the modern 20th century world...

- Medieval art I enjoy.
- Renaissance art I enjoy.
- I enjoy Enlightenment art, even Impressionistic, tho the work is seen more from the subjective viewer.

But Picasso? Most of us can’t follow...this is *Nude Descending a Staircase*...no one can see it. A nude or a staircase.

In Cubism...form was lost, and communication to the common man.

The 20th century saw the loss of the Biblical worldview; the loss of belief in God, truth, objectivity, realism, absolutes, although creativity increased. Incredible heights were scaled in industry, technology, wealth’s distribution, space travel, communication—radio, TV, telephone, computers, men on the moon! But also man’s worst failures and monsters: the Holocaust, the killing fields, terrorism, Communism, Nazism, the despair of a world with no foundation, the
church discredited, the Bible discarded, truth denied. ”Right”? Just a semantic term. There were no absolutes to curb man’s desires. This was an artist’s conception of the day entitled “The Scream.”

Here is a Jackson Pollock. This is his vision of the world. Random.

Art and literature reflected the mixed-up world. Late 19th century impressionists did not depict forms as representing their realities but as only, well, “impressions” on the one viewing. Fauvism depicted simplified shapes…a step beyond the impressionists. By mid-century Cubists broke subjects down into geometric shapes. Surrealists were painting dreamlike images of the subconscious. “It was as if the world itself was too dangerous to paint as is.”

The loss of any absolute standard was reflected in music, which no longer sounded classical. Unlike previous periods, no one style depicted it…only a lack of style.

Listen to Debussey’s Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun. It goes beyond traditional harmony but still creates an atmosphere.

Chromaticism is the use of notes not within the scale of the piece. Their use was common in earlier compositions but only in passing. Now the scale was obliterated – the sound . . . a-tonal.

(Schönberg’s “Pierrot lunaire”)

John Cage used simply random chance for notes.

Polytonality used more than one tone at the same time. Dissonance.

(Stravinsky’s Petrushka)

Micro-tonality divided the octave into smaller harmonic intervals.

(Blackwood’s 12 Microtonal Etudes)

Minimalism, a simple melodic motif, repeated numerous times with minor variations.

(Glass’, Music in 12 Parts)

Musique Concrete simply records everyday sounds as music.

(Earth Noise by Buttigieg)

None of us own these pieces . . . have not heard nor understand them . . . the common man feels condescended upon.
So, where would music go? An old form of music became the new music that replaced classical. “Folk Music”…regional music of the common man had always existed though looked down on by the elite… who always claimed the title of classical. Until the 20th century. The only “classical” music understood by common men was from the 17 and 1800’s. The 20th century had lost its ability to communicate understandably to common men.

The evolution of classical had ended. Most of us can name but few composers after Beethoven and maybe Tchaikovsky because we simply don’t understand them.

At this point in the early to mid 20th century...popular music enjoyed a massive innovation. It became democratized music where all could enjoy and more so ....as bands replaced orchestras.... and guitars, violins, all could play! Folk music replaced the classical because of classical’s loss of the common man. As you would expect, Democratic America pioneered popular music.

And as popular music replaced classical it diverged from the river into many streams.

Pop music’s roots were in African-American work songs and spirituals of the mid 1800’s...songs musical in order, but songs of passion, pain and longing.

At the same time the German Brass Band arose in America—its chief writer John Philip Sousa. Again, strict musical order but the passion of patriotism.

In the late 1800’s these black and white streams came together in “Ragtime”. Popularized by a man from Texarkana – a black man, Scott Joplin. Popularized for all the country, Ragtime had the snap of the brass band and the soul and rhythm of the spirituals. Joplin’s popularity had a rebirth from the 1973 movie The Sting.

Ragtime evolved into America’s first native contribution to music. The Blues. Its sound was technically from flattening certain notes. But its soul.....in the early 20th century, was, well – The Blues. Passion, angst, life. More earthy than Ragtime.

And there were 2 types of Blues ... Rural or Delta Blues ... and then Urban Blues popularized by the “Father of the Blues” ... the man who brought it to the masses ... an African-American, trained musician from Alabama, a cornet player who moved to Memphis, to Beale Street in 1909. He wrote the Memphis Blues ... smoothed out Delta blues irregularities and merged it into a dance band – Urban Blues. When W.C. Handy died in 1958, 150,000 people gathered in the streets of Harlem to pay respects. He was an American musical original.
But the Blues were a precursor for another movement that took the entire musical world by storm.

The Urban Blues evolved into a classic American expression. Fast moving like America, driving, a tad frenetic, loud and free like America—making a device of improvisation. Democratic music, where all work together while alternately letting anyone be the lead just like America—JAZZ

Classic American------

Jazz had its beginning in New Orleans in 1885 . . . called “Dixieland”, growing out of blues, brass band and ragtime. Emphasizing a rhythmic accompaniment called “4 on the floor” leaving room for syncopated melody and improvisation.

This “improv” was named “Hott Jazz” . . . each instrument playing off the others. A cornet player named Joseph ‘King” Oliver took this phenomenon to the north to Chicago...and there he promoted the career of a New Orleans orphan who played behind him who would make Chicago synonymous with Jazz. His name was Louis Armstrong - ”Satchmo”

Extreme creativity...but working within musical order. Never again would popular music make Classical’s fatal mistake. No matter how creative the musicians might be they would maintain ordered objective standards. Not because they believed in absolutes, but because the public would not pay for what they could not understand. There was no money in random noise.

And in the 30’s, Jazz evolved into “swing”, as Jazz bands grew into the Big Bands; the dance band that reached black and white. Now you didn’t just listen but you became part of the music. With dances with certain steps, the Lindy Hop...the Jitterbug...the Fox Trot, bands with what were called “vocalists” – Bing Crosby, Sinatra. Bands like Glen Miller, Benny Goodman, Harry James (who featured his wife and former Denton Bible member Louis Tobin of Aubrey Texas) and Tommy Dorsey and the great black orchestras: Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Chuck Webb, Cab Calloway . . .

Records emerged at this time, then radio with a musical special - every half hour. America had been through a World War, a depression, and a Dust Bowl. America wanted to dance.

But the church maintained tradition. Distinct from the culture, continuing “sacred” music. Music that did not sound like anything popular or common. Distinctly Christian. Recognizably Christian. Whose emphasis was the words . . . and repetitive melodies . . . easily sung by all ... with choir and keyboard. The chief Christian songwriter of the late 1800’s and earlier 20th century was a blind woman from Brewster, New York named Fannie Crosby, a direct descendant of William Brewster of Plymouth Plantation, who wrote 8000 hymns using 200
pseudonyms because publishers were embarrassed to have so many hymns from one woman! She prayed that in her life of 95 years she could win 1 million people to Christ.

“Blessed Assurance”, “Pass Me Not O Gentle Savior”, “Rescue the Perishing”, “To God Be the Glory”

No one mistook Christian music for anything else. Its strength was uniqueness. You knew you were in church.

But in the 50’s, Big Band began to wane into small groups partly because The American Federation of Music union went on strike from ’42 thru ’43 and no orchestral recording was made. Thus the nuance arose of the solo recording . . . Sinatra, Crosby, Ella Fitzgerald, Billy Holiday, all took off.

Traditional jazz changed into complex structures called bebop – the dominant form of Jazz for decades. Played repetitively and fast with minor variations. Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonius Monk. But bebop was intellectual, for a narrow audience that did not dance but listened in smoky clubs. Its structure lost touch with the common man. Popular no more.

Popular music diverged then from Jazz in two paths: one growing larger than the other.

First, Woody Guthrie made American folk music popular in the 30’s in the Depression. Songs of struggle that everyone felt. Folk music then took off in the mid 50’s as the musical audience now contained the beginnings of the New Generation, The Boomers - those with a sense not just of patriotism but also of protest and frustration. Folk music was music with a message of the frustrated and hurting about war and nukes and racism and being lost in an industrialized world; frustrations with capitalism. It was “white blues” set to guitar.

The Kingston Trio, The Chad Mitchell Trio, Sonny and Cher, The New Christy Minstrels, Simon and Garfunkel, Peter Paul and Mary, all emerged. And then Country Western, and Western Swing (‘where Bob Wills is still the king’), then Bluegrass. And another river sprung forth from Jazz: “Jump Blues” . . . Blues sped up . . . blending Jazz and Blues. “The Tympany Five” played to black audiences but began after the war to show up in white charts, under the heading “R & B”. Music was integrating after the war. Just as the culture would.

Three white promoters founded Atlantic Records strictly for black R & B featuring Ruth Brown, The Drifters, a woman named Aretha Franklin and a blind piano player named Ray Charles. R & B then split into the Detroit sound through a boxing promoter named Berry Gordy and his right hand man – Smoky Robinson. It was called Motown. And then another sound – the southern compliment to Detroit, arose called Soul. Otis Redding, Isaac Hayes (Shaft) and James Brown.
And as the 50’s continued, R & B morphed again. From a rather large man at the keyboard named Fats Domino who sang what was called “Boogie Woogie” simply because that is what it sounded like. Following close behind was Little Richard, and Chuck Berry. And their music soared in black recordings. But promoters noted that white teens loved the sound...the backbeat, the drive, the grittiness, the sex, the independence, the youth, and yes, the rebellion of R & B. Its structure was musically ordered but its themes and emotion were thoroughly liberated. Rapidly moving from boy meets girl, to sex. Musical rules were fixed, not morality. And white teens stayed up late listening to Beale Street on transistor radios, listening quietly under the covers to the “Negro music”. The huge marketing audience of white Baby Boomers waited to be harvested.

Who would make the jump to the white audience? Billy Haley & the Comets recorded Rock Around the Clock that went straight to the top. Buddy Holley made “Oh Boy” that was played by a D.J. for an entire afternoon in Cleveland.

But all were looking for a white man that sounded like a black man. Until Sam Philips of Sun Records on Beale St. in Memphis, Tennessee had walk into his studio one day in 1955 a young man of 18 from Tupelo Mississippi who wanted to make a record for his mamma—Elvis Aaron Presley. White America had found its man – Rock and Roll was born . . . or white R & B. From ’54 to ’59 Rock and Roll became the focus of a million sermons! It may not have sung overtly about sex, but it sure got close. And it just ‘sounded’ nasty! And a new generation world wide – loved it . . . like no other music in history.

A phenomenon had occurred in music, whether popular or classic: the exclusion of the older generation. Music previously was created by the older for the older. Now it had been commandeered by a growing youth movement. Moreover, a generation gap was appearing everywhere. One generation progressive; the other reactionary, resistant. One dancing; another revolted.

But 1959 was called “The Day the Music Died”. It appeared that what the adults said would happen – happened. Elvis was inducted into the military . . . and shorn. Buddy Holly, Richie Valens & the Big Bopper were killed in a plane crash. Chuck Berry was put in prison for transporting an under aged woman across state lines and Jerry Lee Lewis married his 13-year old cousin. Little Richard’s homosexuality became known. Heroine began to show up in its artists as depicted by Frank Sinatra in the movie The Golden Arm. Rock’s early giants were missing in action.

The industry reacted to the protest of parents. It drew back. It was called “White Bread”. Pat Boone, Paul Anka, Franky Avalon, Bobby Rydell, Bobby Vee, Bobby Vinton, Bobby Darren, (and

And then the California sound… “The Beach Boys”, blonde and innocent, Jan & Dean sang of surfing, girl friends, school, teen angst, sidewalk surfing and mostly – cars! It looked to be cleaned up! And Rock and Roll went into hibernation. Who could revive it? Give it a restored innocence? It would be given back to the U.S. through another country.

Liverpool England is a seaport town. Incoming sailors brought back from the States the latest American records and Liverpool on the west coast got them first of all.

Thus Liverpool became a haven for American Rock-n-Roll imitation. This westernmost port was ahead of all of Europe in the latest sounds. Fats Domino, Ray Charles, Buddy Holley, Jerry Lee Lewis, Little Richard and Elvis made their way to Liverpool in what came to be called the Mersey beat because of Liverpool’s Mersey River.

One of its hosts of bands had an art student named John who met a younger boy in a church choir named Paul. They both had a youthful interest in “Skiffle” – English for Rock & Roll. They met a younger boy who could actually play a guitar riff from “Raunchy”. His name was George. They picked up a drummer named Pete . . . and in time replaced him with what would be the most experienced musician in the band. His name was Richard . . . they called him his nickname – Ringo. John, Paul, George & Ringo—The Silver Beatles. They were pretty bad, but very determined. They went to Hamburg Germany from Aug ’60 – Dec. ’62 and played continually . . . and got good.

Two of them, John and Paul, had an amazing creativity in song writing. They began to create their own style. They got good. They came back to Liverpool and began playing in a club called The Cavern. They had a sound. It was black R & B. Gritty. They were unique. They had no single lead. No Ray, Chuck, Little Richard. But harmonized…all sang….well. They out practiced all others. And people flocked. They dropped the “Silver” and just became The Beatles. A take-off on the vanguard of the 60’s—Beatniks. And existentialism that was Beat. And Rock & Roll’s distinctive back-beat….and a memory of Buddy Holly and the Crickets. They were picked up by a Jewish promoter named Brian Epsteen who knew he’d caught lightning in a bottle… He cleaned them up, removed their Elvis look, dressed them like choir boys and changed their hair…leaving it long, combing it down . . . making them British . . . cute . . . Prince Valiant . . . non-menacing to frightened American parents.
Rock and Roll had its rebirth . . . recording only for 6 years . . . The greatest . . . most culturally impacting group of all time. They went viral before viral was viral.

The Beatles . . . they were the perfect storm.

They came to America weeks after John Kennedy was assassinated. The country wanted to dance and laugh. And, they caught the wave of the cultural rising of the youth. When they performed on Ed Sullivan the first time, there was no crime in New York for one hour. Even the criminals wanted see them.

They brought the British invasion – Herman’s Hermits, Jerry & the Pacemakers, The Hollies, The Rolling Stones, The Dave Clark 5, Eric Burton & The Animals – and the American imitation, as it seemed every boy in America wanted a guitar...and hair became a 20 year obsession! But for 6 years their musicality evolved and devolved like time-lapse film reflecting the culture. From songs of love, to songs of sex, to songs of protest, to songs of drugs, to songs of Eastern religion, to finally a break up. Paul McCartney wrote in retrospect, “We forgot that we were just a good little band.”

Their imitators were virtually a commentary on the worldview shift in the West, and its moral and social disintegration as all authority was questioned, and all norms; and then the descent into sex, and drugs, violence. Youth were now armed with music. They didn’t just sing, they hit. Music, their weapon of freedom.

The musical horizon after Rock and Roll lost any cohesion. Woodstock and The Monterey POP Festival sought to be the ushering in of an age of peace and love and brotherhood. But it collapsed at the Altamont Speedway Free Festival where the Hell’s Angels were hired to keep order and beat a young black man to death as the festival erupted in violence and burnings and the Rolling Stones had to be airlifted to safety.

Its future was psychedelic, suggestive, drug elevating, loud, bombastic, immoral, eastern, at first hopeful then despairing to rebellious, defiant, and finally violent. Its stars burned out and died of overdoses, suicides like meteorites. Then it splintered into a cacophony of genres. Country Rock, Glam Rock, Progressive Rock, Disco, Punk, New Wave, Heavy Metal, Dance-Pop, Hair Metal, Alternative Rock, Grunge, teen Pop, Hip Hop, Rap, Gangster.

Today---no certain music typifies America or youth . . . in fashion . . . hair style . . . music or dance.

What was the response of the church to what had become of music? In the first half of the 20th century, it doggedly . . . intentionally . . . defiantly held to its uniqueness, unmistakably
Christian. Choir, organ, and piano were considered sufficient. Orchestras considered worldly...percussion godless....guitars the mark of the beast. The hymns were strictly recognizable resembling nothing of the popular . . . like church architecture, suited only for the church, intending to be a world apart. “The Old Rugged Cross”, “In the Garden”, “I Stand Amazed”, “Since Jesus Came Into My Heart”, “Great Is Thy Faithfulness”, “There’s Victory In Jesus”, “Wherever He Leads”, “the Way of the Cross Leads Home”. So frequently sure that few needed hymnals . . . their memories serving them best. . . . Until the mid-60’s when the youth began to distance themselves farther and farther from their cultural past...as the Flower Child arose in San Francisco and around the nation...as the Boomers began, the seizing of the country...as advertising and marketing became youth driven. And Pop culture grew with their own ideas, outlook, music, and sedatives. And Christianity began to fill the longing of many and the “Jesus people” . . . Counter Culture Christianity with its own style, theology, and music . . . arose to be the greatest Christian “cultural” impact of the 20th century.

Beginning in California among the hippies, the cultural children of the 50’s Beatniks, they began to show up in Southern California churches looking for something they had forgotten. Numbers of them were converted and began bringing others. Established churches now had to deal with dress codes, hair length, hygiene, smoking and sitting on the sanctuary floor as these converted hippies began to be termed “Jesus People” or “Jesus Freaks”. Their Christianity had no place for the perceived superficiality and show they rejected. Theirs was a radical and refreshingly primitive Christianity with no formality, no occupation with wealth or racial or social distinction; communally centered and with the creation of a new Christian music and a new worship style. Initially the folk songs and musical style of the 60’s was reflected in the music of Ralph Carmichael, Kurt Kaiser, Larry Norman, Danny Lee and the Children of Truth, Andre Crouch and the Disciples and the birth of Word Records of Waco and Maranatha of California. It was called Praise music. “We Are One in the Spirit”, “There’s a Sweet, Sweet Spirit”, “It Only Takes a Spark”, “I Wish We’d All Been Ready”.

And in this youth movement back to fundamentalism was a strong back to the Bible evangelistic emphasis. Out of it, the parachurch movement exploded as it proved too passionate for most churches and denominations. Campus Crusade, Navigators, The Fellowship Of Christian Athletes, Young Life, Intervarsity. And as these young people grew came the spreading of its new music. Simple, melodic, spiritual, repetitive. Almost reminiscent of the chants.

At almost the exact same time, the Charismatic or Modern Pentecostal movement began on the west coast. This movement which was more spontaneous, more emotional was immediately embraced by the Jesus People. It was also novel, also progressive and also distanced from mainstream Christianity. The new had founds its vehicle. The Charismatics had found their own music.
And as these young believers soon went to seminary and started churches, coffee houses, communes and youth groups, got married and became parents – soon the music was not exiled to youth meetings and college retreats but became mainstream and as the old passed away and the hymns forgotten or never learned . . . new songbooks published . . . the chasm widened as the choirs were replaced by bands, organs with guitars, hymns with tunes and songs, suits with blue jeans, doctrine with relevance and current needs, then preachers became just mass communicators. Church architecture became as big business.

In today’s music whether classical, sacred or popular, the old music tends to be forgotten. All culture is novel and searching for its tomorrow rather than preserving the past. Christianity has tended for the first time to divide young and old... the traditional and the emergent. Five hundred years of tradition is in danger of being lost to a younger generation, in a culture in which youth, beauty, health, tomorrow is everything. Where today quickly becomes yesterday. America is capitalistic. Capitalism is commercial. The commercial must market, and advertise. And, advertisement must anticipate tomorrow’s longing. That spells youth. And that is America of the 20th century. American Christianity has no help from the government. It must survive by converting the lost or attracting the young. The tension facing the church is obvious.

But more than any culture the Christian culture is inextricably linked to its past. The church is **local** . . . it is also **universally** bound to Christians over all the earth. But the church is also **historic**. We are connected to the Apostles who gave us the New Testament and to Christians since who fought off heresies, dogmatized truth in creeds at church councils, endured the trials of mission work and suffered martyrdom. Brought reform, wrote the great works and **composed music** that reflected their times. To forget that music is to forget that legacy.

But to **live** in the past is just as deadly. God is the “I AM” . . . always the same inspiring every generation. Their deeds and songs of their day reflect the longings of their day. “Sing a New Song”

And music teaches us most of all the lesson of life. All life like music has individuality, expression, vitality and creativity. But like music, to communicate to the listener...to the viewer...to make sense, it must exist within the framework of divine order...absolutes...the reflection of reality. So with morality, the home, history, education, art...and music. Where there is no God, there is no final truth, no order, no structure, no right, no wrong, no good or evil, no best or better...and all becomes chaotic...and dis-integrated, and useless.

Such is modern man and the arts . . . music is a microcosm of modernity. But where there is the Triune God . . . the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit . . . there is a Creator and order and truth. And within the Trinity there is diversity, love, creativity, right, holiness, purity, beauty . . . and art.
Life, as music, will reflect truth in its beauty or reflect its lack of truth in its chaos.

Billy Preston in the late ‘60’s wrote a song that reflect music and the modern day.

“I’ve got a song it ain’t got no melody
I’m gonna sing it to my friends
Will it go ‘round in circles?
Will it fly high like a bird up in the sky?

“I’ve got a story it ain’t got no normal
let the bad guy win every once and awhile.
Will it go ‘round in circles?
Or will it fly high like a bird up in the sky?

“I’ve got a dance it ain’t got no steps
Just let the music move me around
Will it go ‘round in circles?
Will it fly high like a bird up in the sky?

His question? Creativity without structure. Will it fly or come crashing down?

life without God
sex without morals
marriage without roles
life without God.

The 60’s said we should fly high. “Will we?” said Billy Preston. History has spoken. We crashed.