

THE UGLY DUCKLING: CELEBRATING YOUR UNIQUE WAY OF

BY SHERI CARR

In a world of predominantly male musicians and male worship leaders, I have often felt like the odd duck out. Remember the story of *The Ugly Duckling*? Maybe you remember that old *Sesame Street* lesson where they sing the song, "One of these things is not like the others...." Have you ever been in that position, feeling like you are the one "thing" that is "not like the others?"

FITTING THE MOLD

Maybe for you, you don't feel odd because you are a woman. Maybe you feel so different because you are younger than everyone else in your worship community. Maybe you are older. Maybe you don't think you are as skilled of a musician as the others on the team. Maybe you're from a different cultural background. Maybe you feel like the songs you choose (or write) from week to week don't "fit the mold." The specific situation can vary, but I find that many worship folks often suffer from what I like to call "Ugly Duckling Syndrome." I know it's something that has plagued me.

I was thrown into the deep end of the worship leading pool as a senior in high school, without having had much instruction or experience. There I was – a young, new female worship leader who was trained classically on flute for ten years but ended up as a rather loud worship leader who liked to "rock and roll." I was often told that I was too loud. Admittedly, I probably was too loud at times. Yet there has been something that I have begun to realize over years of leading and always feeling "different" than everyone else. I realize that being "different" is exactly what makes the Body of Christ so beautiful – I needed to embrace my own uniqueness if I was ever to embrace the uniqueness of others.

THE GIFT OF DIFFERENCE

Being different is a wonderful gift from God. Have you ever watched a sunset and seen one that looked exactly the same as another? Have you ever taken a walk through the woods and seen any trees that grow absolutely identically? Have you walked along the beach and ever seen any wave crash upon the shore just like the one that crashed before? All expressions of creation are unique – and uniquely beautiful. In the same way, I think it can be dangerous if we ever judge one human being to be more beautiful, instrumental, or valuable than another. I believe that being who I am and offering my unique style of leading worship, while each of you do the same, is exactly what makes us beautifully diverse. When we are each uniquely ourselves, our differences shine through and we end up blessing one another in the process.

There is something about each of the worship leaders at our church that I love. Though they all lead very differently, I am blessed by each varying expression. I also love to see my worship teams blended with old and young alike. Richness happens when I pair together a white-haired piano/B3 player with a teenage electric guitar player. I also love a blend of genders and backgrounds. For example, I love having a team with a female percussionist who grew up in the church, and has lived most of her life on the mission field, alongside a middle-aged male drummer who's been playing in bars for years and recently got saved.

I love a mixture of cultures, giftings, and careers in the team. We have a Hungarian cardiac-surgeon who plays bass, a Nigerian student who sings background vocals, a Brazilian baker who is proficient on guitar, bass, drums, and keyboard, and finally a South African worship leader who leads on keyboard but can also play guitar – and is a new mother of twin boys. This is what I think makes the Church incredibly beautiful and diverse. I believe we should embrace the people God has given us to care for, providing them with opportunities to grow so that they in turn may bless the Church with those gifts. The more diverse our worship communities, the more diverse our churches can become.

DO STYLES MATTER?

Do I think styles of music matter? Let's just say I have tried *a lot* of different things, but still have my own "style" to which I default. I sing traditional hymns and even the youth seem to like it. I play a rockin' youthful song, and see elderly men and women clapping their hands, tapping their toes, and singing their hearts out. We attempt gospel arrangements with large choirs, singing songs in Gokana (a language spoken in Nigeria), Portuguese, and Afrikaans. In the midst of these diverse languages and styles, this I know – our church worships. They may fumble through the words and say "Watermelon, watermelon" a few times – but they worship! Would I do new styles every week? I don't know. I haven't attempted it as of yet. Some weeks, if we do a song in Gokana, our Nigerian community loves it while our Brazilian community may feel left out or may not connect at all. The question I continually ask our church staff is this – who is God calling us as a church to reach, and how can we reach them?

The tension for me as a worship leader is to recognize that it is impossible to have our normal Sunday worship set include

LEADING WORSHIP

BEING DIFFERENT IS A GIFT

enough songs in enough languages or styles to hit all the languages, cultures, and musical preferences in the world. Yet we're called as the Church to "make disciples of all nations." So, the question I ask is, "Who are You calling us to reach, Lord? Today? This week? This month? This year? Have You called us to reach the Brazilian community? The Korean community? Caucasian teenagers? Young African-American families? Retired businessmen? Emo-loving college students? Newlyweds? Singles?" I do believe the Lord wants us to reach anyone and everyone we can – but we must ask what is realistic for one Sunday service a week when it comes to whom our worship music style should appeal.

TRAINING THE UNIQUE ONES

Let's be honest – I personally don't think I have enough "soul" to pull off singing a gospel tune and really doing it right. I stink at punk or ska, and I sound foolish trying to rap. I speak Portuguese terribly and sing it even more terribly. I'm horrible with Reggae, and even the Blues don't come naturally to me. Chinese feels like an absolutely daunting language to learn (although I did take a semester of it in school). However, in some of those areas, I have folks in my worship community that could do each of the styles mentioned above, and do them well. I want to be about training and equipping those unique worship leaders, and releasing and blessing them to do what they do best. In turn, that releasing will bless our church and make a place for someone else to follow in the unique footsteps of each leader.

WHO IS GOD CALLING YOU TO REACH?

The question I ask all Ugly Ducklings is this: "Though we are all different, lead differently, have different styles, and speak different languages (or have people in our communities who speak different languages) – Who is God calling you and your church to reach?" What are you doing about reaching those people? I am not saying that I have an answer to this question personally, but that it is actually an important question that weighs on my heart regularly and with which I wrestle. It is no small thing to be asked to lead "culturally diverse" worship. I applaud those of you out there who attempt it, and those who not only attempt it but also see a measure of success. I hope that we can share our experiences and learn from each other – without judging one another for where we're at in our own journey toward diversity.

I love to remember that every Ugly Duckling – thank the Lord – does one day mature into a Beautiful Swan. I can't wait to see how beautiful the Church is then – when we're all fulfilling the call He has on our lives, being "uniquely us," and blessing others to do the same. I can't wait to hear all of the nations and generations together, worshiping around God's throne one day. What a glorious sound that will be.

Sheri (Keller) Carr is a pastor's daughter who grew up in the church, and has been leading worship at Vineyard churches for over twelve years. She presently serves as Worship Pastor for the Atlanta Vineyard, while her husband Joshua is finishing seminary and pastors a United Methodist Church north of the city. With numerous songs published by Vineyard Music, Sheri has been featured on CDs such as **Dwell, More Than Ever,** and **Fall On Me.** You will also find her on a new Vineyard CD entitled **Stand In Awe**, which will be released on July 10th.

