

Our Philosophy-Theology of Music

Approved by Session March 22, 2005

The philosophy-theology of music at Tenth Presbyterian Church is based on four basic considerations. The first consideration is that every aspect of music in the church must be submitted to the Lordship of Christ. The second consideration is that music in the church serves various functions, and while they should all be biblical, these functions infer and result in different parameters and guidelines. Most notably, musical activity outside corporate worship will have some different parameters than music within worship services. Thirdly, we recognize that our lives are to be characterized by the continuous worship of God, and in this respect all musical activities for the individual Christian should be, in some sense, acts of worship. Further, the Tenth Purpose and Objective Statement, in accordance with Scripture, declares that our music is to be thoughtful and excellent—so these qualities should pervade all areas of musical activity in the church. What follows is a theological and philosophical statement on music in the church, with application to our congregation including aspects of specific function and responsibility.

*“Praise the LORD!
I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart,
in the company of the upright, in the congregation”—Psalm 111:1.¹*

Worship Music

We believe that music employed in gathered worship (including wedding ceremonies, memorial services, and other types of worship services) should be:

1. *Biblical*—As our rule of faith and practice, the Word of God is our authority. It contains sufficient principles, examples, and directives to inform our concept of worship music. Music serves in worship as praise, prayer, and proclamation (Ps. 96; Ps. 51; 1 Chr. 25:1). Although there are distinctions, in these ways the music ministry shares similar roles and goals with the pulpit ministry. Music may carry our thanksgiving as well as our lament and cries for mercy (Ps. 95; Ps. 102). It should include psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, voices, and instruments (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16–17, Ps. 150). Sung texts must not conflict with the teachings of Scripture, and the Scriptures themselves are the best texts for worship (Ps. 119:54, 2 Tim. 3:16).
2. *God-centered*—Texts and hearts should be focused on God, who is both the subject and object of worship (Ps. 22:22; Ps. 100). The music is offered principally to him, rather than to each other, and it is for his glory, not for our own. Yet it should also edify, admonish, and teach the body of Christ (1 Cor. 14:26, Col. 3:16). It is a communal activity. Applause for musicians in the context of worship is therefore unnecessary and unbiblical. We present most non-congregational service music from the rear choir loft so as not to draw undue attention to the vessel through which the music is offered (Rom. 12:1; Php. 2:5–7, Mt. 6:1). Although clapping one’s hands to God is mentioned in the Psalms, in our cultural context applause is overwhelmingly associated with the entertainment industry, and so it is best avoided as a worship response.
3. *Excellent*—Excellence is, first of all, an attribute of God (Gen. 1:31; Ps. 8:1). We should offer him the best we can and nothing less. This has to do with the intrinsic and extrinsic qualities of our music—its melody, harmony, rhythm, form, and texts—which will be judged according to musical standards of excellence, as well as its appropriateness for a worship context and its delivery by the musicians offering it. Decisions about the quality and type of music offered in

¹ All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version.

worship are entrusted to the Music Director who will consider musical, theological, cultural, and other informing aspects when making such decisions for the congregation. Excellence should never become a goal in and of itself, however, and it does not substitute for offering music with the proper spirit.

4. *Of the Spirit*—Without the work of the Holy Spirit, our efforts are meaningless (John 4:24, 6:63; 1 Cor. 2:13). Music is not intrinsically worship. Without due caution, one can actually be guilty of worshipping the music that one enjoys. It is important to be mindful of the distinction between spiritual truth and musical pleasure. Worship directed anywhere but to God is idolatry.
5. *In truth*—Truthfulness in worship refers to the actions we take, the attitudes of our hearts and the intentions of our minds. These should align with biblical teaching on worship (John 4:24). Our musical offerings should be genuine and offered to the best of one's ability. The congregation and its leaders should sing psalms and hymns with understanding and with conviction—with the mind and the spirit (1 Cor. 14:15).
6. *Skillfully-led*—According to Psalm 33:1–3, we are to compose, sing, and play skillfully to the Lord. This demands that those leading in public worship music should be skillful, trained musicians. For musical leadership we draw on proficient amateur, semi-professional, and professional musicians from within the congregation and Christian brothers and sisters from other fellowships. In keeping with biblical practice (Neh.12:46–47a; 1 Chr. 23) and in order to support musicians who are dedicated to music as a calling, we customarily provide salaries for church musicians who are full- or part-time members of the staff (including interns) and offer honoraria for solo vocalists, instrumentalists, and choristers (section leaders of the choir) who participate in public worship.
7. *Prepared*—Because our music should be excellent and skillful, it follows that it must be carefully chosen, adequately rehearsed, and presented by musicians who have prepared themselves before God (1 Chr. 25:6–7). Choirs (adult and children's) and soloists should be well-prepared for the significant roles they will play in corporate worship. Worship is not an opportunity to “try out” one's ability or to showcase anyone or anything.
8. *Meaningful*—Our musical offerings must be intentional and have purpose. They should never be trite or perfunctory (Mt. 6:7, 15:8–9). The ministers carefully select the psalms and hymns sung in worship with the input of the Music Director. All other music is selected or approved by the Music Director, who by biblical example is to be the guardian of the people's praise (1 Chr. 15:22). An attempt is made, whenever possible, to make service music meaningful by suiting it to a particular element of the service and/or to the theme of the sermon.
9. *Of the people*—Largely this means that our music will find its basis in congregational song, the most important kind of worship music. It also means that the congregation should be fully involved in singing, listening, and learning (Ps. 111:1, 149:1). This characteristic informs our musical choices—that generally our music should be accessible to the people (or made accessible/taught by communicating information about it) although it is directed principally to God. This does not mean, however, that music selected will not require thought or that it will be “popular” in nature or immediately accessible to all who hear it.
10. *Joyful/emotional*—One of the most significant aspects of music in worship is that it should reflect the joy of being a Christian (Psalm 47:1) and a thankful, grateful spirit (Eph. 5:19). There are many other emotions inherent in music-making, and the book of Psalms provides examples of the musical expression of many of these within the context of worship.

11. *Intelligible*—This parameter has ramifications for sung language, which on most occasions should be English. Language used in worship should be comprehensible, and texts for non-congregational, sung music will appear in the order of service. When other languages are used, a translation will be given so that worshipers can fully interact with the textual and musical meaning (1 Cor. 14:7–10, 19). Musical style should also be intelligible—clear, understandable, explained when unusual or difficult, etc.
12. *Authentic*—Authenticity in worship is related to truthfulness, but here refers to the realm of aesthetics. We utilize live musicians for worship service music and believe that it is important to do so. The Bible models this in many places. We do not use pre-recorded music or accompaniment tracks both because this precludes other participants from the Body and because such recordings are historical rather than organic. The use of live musicians affords flexibility in tempo, nuance, time, pitch, and all of the other living aspects of music. We do not amplify soloists. Instrumentalists will play on acoustic instruments. The argument can be made that something real is better than something that is not real. We avoid electronic instruments that require amplification and function as recording devices because they are aesthetically inauthentic.² Truthfulness should characterize all that we offer God (John 4:24) and this extends to music, musicians, and musical instruments.

Concert Music

Concert music, by definition, is music performed in programs called “concerts” or “recitals” that are outside the context of regular worship services. Concerts are not worship services, although one is certainly capable of worshipping in a concert context, and the performers’ work can be a musical offering to God. Some of the parameters such as theme, language, applause, and other protocol for a concert, however, will be different than those in force in the context of worship. Challenging art music and other music that primarily exists to display the virtuosity of the performer are welcome in this context.

We believe that music performed in concert programs at Tenth should be:

1. *To the glory of God*—All music is offered *Soli Deo Gloria* irrespective of its origin, compositional language or the composer’s intention. Applause on the part of the concert audience is culturally-appropriate recognition for the effort and skill of the performers. At the same time, both audience and performers should internally acknowledge that it is all “from him and through him and to him”—Romans 11:36.
2. *Excellent*—This has to do with the level of performer/performance as well as with the music selected and how it is presented. (See “Worship Music” for more on this.)
3. *Artistic*—Most music performed in concert contexts will be art music or sacred music. Art music is music that exists for purposes beyond function, though it may be functional. This is different from popular music, commercial music, patriotic music or other idioms. Art music primarily includes the genres of “classical” music, although some jazz and sacred music fits here as well. The amount of repertoire and variety of styles and forms that fit these classifications are incredibly large, spanning more than one thousand years.
4. *Edifying to the saints*—We hold that concerts presented at Tenth, or other places where ensembles from Tenth perform, should be a means of bolstering both the spirit and the mind. Concerts should encourage believers in their faith, musical understanding, and artistic experience. As such,

² A current exception to this standard is our digital organ. Session has approved the concept of a new pipe organ and intends to ask the congregation to replace our current instrument when the Lord provides the means.

in addition to the qualities listed above, verbal or written notes will be regular facets of such programs to aid the audience.

5. *An outreach to the community*—Concert programs draw some into the church buildings who do not attend our regular worship services. All programs are open to everyone without charge. We also aim to give some verbal witness to Christ and the Christian faith in our concert programs.
6. *A venue for professional Christian musicians*—Tenth concerts also exist to provide an opportunity for Christian musicians of the highest order to offer back to God what he has called them to do and to be as artists. The Music Director invites the soloists, who may be from Tenth but will often be Christian brothers and sisters from other fellowships. Other musicians may play a supporting role as accompanists or orchestral/choral musicians.

Music in Non-Worship Service Settings

Music is included in activities, such as Bible studies, small groups, banquets, meetings, coffee houses, retreats, conferences, and other church functions. All music for these activities should be God-honoring and biblical with regard to text and music, in keeping with the principles outlined in this document. The church's Music Director, in partnership with pastoral staff and ministry leaders, will oversee music and musical events occurring within the church buildings outside the context of regular worship services or Sunday School. Primarily this is to safeguard the church and to ensure a level of quality by having an educated musician guide in such decisions. Any Tenth group desirous of engaging guest musicians, soloists, or instrumentalists for Tenth events should consult with the Music Director as a first step. Though musical style will be more broadly defined outside the context of worship services, standards of excellence will be upheld for all events.

Music Education

The church has a responsibility to educate its people in the music of the church and, indeed, to teach Christian doctrine through music. Church music education takes place in many forms. Some of the ways we seek to provide such education at Tenth Church are through:

1. *Hymn singing*—Congregational hymnody and psalmody teach and propagate our faith even as we sing to God. They bear witness to the lost and help the Christian recall biblical teaching. They also are means for every Christian present to be a musical participant in worship and to join the heavenly choirs that praise God without ceasing (Eph. 5:19–20; Col. 3:16–17; Rev. 4 and 5).
2. *Schola Cantorum*— (*Schola Cantorum* means “Singing School” and is the name of our children's music education program, taken from historical models in the Church). Of particular importance is the training of children to sing and to be musically literate (Ps. 8:2; 78:1–8, Mt. 21:15–16). The example of Scripture is for parents to teach children, who will in turn, teach their children (1 Chr. 25:6–8). Since many adults today do not have sufficient musical literacy or education to do this, we provide general musical education for our covenant children. This education is grounded in tonal and rhythmic foundations and is expanded on in choral experiences as well as hymn study and memorization. *Schola* is taught by a faculty of professional music educators and musicians from within the congregation.
3. *Choral ensembles*—The choral groups at Tenth (Tenth Church Choir, Men's Choir, ACTS Choral Ensemble, and *Schola Cantorum* choirs), in addition to their primary function in worship services, provide opportunity for many to learn more about vocal technique and music in general, to have fellowship with other believers, and to exercise and develop their musical abilities.

4. *Bible School weekly opening exercises*—The Music Director or members of the music staff teach aspects of church music to the Bible School children (Grades 1–6) briefly each Sunday morning. The focus is hymnody, often the opening hymn for morning worship that day.
5. *Hymn services*—Approximately once a month the congregation is led in a brief hymn service preceding evening worship. Generally, the hymns are linked by theme. This forum provides contextual information and teaching about psalmody/hymnody so that the congregation is intellectually engaged with what it sings.
6. *Hymns-of-the-Month*—Each month a new or less familiar hymn is sung during evening worship throughout the month with the goal of expanding the congregation’s hymn repertoire.
7. *Tenth Concert Series*—The Concert Series provides opportunity for Tenth members and guests to experience many different types of art music performed by a wide array of musicians. The musical mediums include solo and ensemble, vocal and instrumental, old and new, classical and sacred, chamber and symphonic. Performers offer verbal commentary about the music being played or sung, thereby providing a link for the audience to both music and performer.
8. *Tenth Press articles*—Several times annually the Music Director writes articles for the congregation that describe the repertoire for an upcoming musical event, issue a call for involvement, explain a facet of musical worship, or relay a need or opportunity having to do with the music ministry.
9. *Community school instruction*—We believe that music lessons on various instruments as well as voice should be available to church members and members of the community through the auspices of the church. This extends to basic music skills, such as reading and theory, as well as to hymnody and the history of Christian worship. Although still in the planning stage, in time we hope to offer music lessons and classes for all ages taught by Christian musicians. This will be another means of musical outreach.

Music Internships

As a church we have a responsibility before God to help young church musicians prepare for music leadership positions in other churches (in the same way that seminarians preparing for pulpit ministry apprentice with pastoral staff). As such, the Music Director has two or three college-age interns/assistants working with him each year. These younger musicians are selected by the Music Director and interviewed by the Music Committee. They give reports to the Music Committee at scheduled meetings. They serve nine-month terms (September through May) in part-time, salaried positions. The interns/assistants selected are assigned varying responsibilities according to their abilities and need, whereby they gain experience and first-hand knowledge in virtually all aspects of church music ministry. Also emphasized is the development of their overall musicianship. These younger musicians contribute to the ministry of music in the church in valuable ways during their time on staff.

Music and the Individual

The church has no specific authority over the music that individuals choose to purchase or over that to which they listen or in which they participate. The church does not seek to make such decisions nor to determine what is good or bad music for its members with respect to their private lives. However, the following concepts and Scripture passages are offered for consideration when choosing music for oneself or for one’s household:

1. Music is an integral part of the Christian life and should be encouraged in the home, particularly in family worship. Luther (with hymnody) and Calvin (with psalmody) both encouraged singing

in the home. Singing and learning to play instruments is consistent with biblical teaching (Ps. 92:1–3, Ps. 98, Col. 3:16, Eph. 5:15–21). Singing is, in fact, one of those few activities that we know is eternal (Rev. 4 and 5). It also gives opportunities to glorify God inside and outside the church.

2. Music is a powerful medium that teaches and communicates things in deep ways. It can overpower other verbal or written teaching with ease. There is good and bad music. Music is not neutral—it will affect those who listen either positively or negatively. As such, musical choice is essentially an ethical choice. Texts that are anti-God, anti-authority, or humanistic (which can appear in any musical style) will have a negative effect. Styles that are associated with baser things will not usually be edifying and would best be avoided. It is left up to the individual under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to determine what is God-honoring or destructive in this regard.
3. Most people identify with a certain style of music or several styles as a means of defining themselves (sociologically, intellectually, and in other ways). The music to which we listen shapes our character, personality, and mind. Music is not without moral substance or consequence. Parents especially should be mindful of this on behalf of their children and be cognizant of aesthetic concerns as well.

*“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things”—*Philippians 4:8.