

The Magic and Mystery... Is Music the Message?

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Me and my wife, in younger days

Music?

It is widely attributed to our friend 5th-century Greek philosopher Pythagoras, author of the dreaded Pythagorean Theorem of sixth-grade geometry, that he was "the creator" of the theory of music. There is much speculation but he was considered a magician of sorts and legend has it that he was capable of gathering thousands and "healing" many of the sick who would gather, by playing certain tones from his unique guitar-like instrument called a lyre. The first bona fide rockstar? Maybe.

Pythagoras, I'm not, and when I was growing up as a carefree child in the 1950s, music was just background noise. My parents had some scratchy old records that they would sometimes play. When they did, it seemed they were, somehow, a bit happier.



"Performing" for one of my granddaughters

There was also "church music," which was usually very loud and somber, accompanied by some lady "singing" very loudly in order to, I suppose, be heard above all the other voices. It didn't seem to have much meaning for me.

In grade school I was introduced to the 45 rpm record and "rock and roll" (such as it was) and, interestingly, our teacher let us sometimes have dances during recess. For some strange reason, although I wasn't very good, I enjoyed these "dances." But still it was something in the background and music really didn't capture my heart.



Jamming with a total stranger in Woodstock, NY

Even when I took up the trombone awkwardly in middle school and struggled my way to second chair through junior high and high school, I didn't emotionally "connect" with music. I guess I was pretty good and I even went to some competitions, but the emotional connection just wasn't there for me.

My older sister brought home some classic rock albums like "Creedence Clearwater Revival," early "Beatles," and others. It was in listening to these records that I started hearing something in the music that stirred something in me. It made me curious about what made some of these interesting sounds. Something about it felt very expressive and freeing to me.



The author in a recent recording configuration

In my senior year of high school, a friend introduced me to vocal harmony by way of Peter, Paul and Mary and the Kingston Trio, as well as other groups popular at the time. I was intrigued by the mix of vocals with the simple guitar rhythms and I listened over and over and practiced singing along with the records. I liked how it made me feel - as if I could express something deep in my being. I felt...FREE!

One day my younger sister brought home a cheap guitar and a three-chord practice book. She tried learning to play it but she couldn't make her fingers do what she wanted and got frustrated. It sat in the closet for a while, and when I was a freshman headed for college, impulsively, on a whim, as I was packing, I asked my sister if I could borrow her guitar and take it with me to school. She said ok, so I took the guitar with me to my first year of college. It was a life-changing decision.



A performance in Latvia with Russian teachers

The Guitar

Once I got to my college and moved into my dorm, I realized that there were several fairly accomplished guitar players on my floor and I grabbed my guitar (i.e. my sister's) and introduced myself. These guys were very friendly and happy to show me their skills. I was mesmerized and asked if they could teach me a few chords. Thus began my obsession with the guitar.

One guy in particular was willing to show me some basics and give me pointers. He instructed me to practice 3 or 4 chords, explaining that a person could learn to play hundreds of songs with just those chords. I stayed up late at night practicing those chords till my fingers were sore. Then I would go to my friend's room and he would show me more things. He said to keep playing no matter what, and I did.

Eventually, my awkward fingers were able to shape the chords on the fretboard and the tones actually sounded like...music. I was hooked. I started playing every spare moment I had and my grades suffered because of it, much to the disapproval of my parents. Eventually I expanded my chord repertoire to most of the major chords and minor chords. My guitar-playing friend loaned me some of his simple song books and I started learning familiar songs. I was able to "disappear" for hours playing these simple rhythms, singing along as I strummed. I was amazed at how much fun I was having singing and playing. Somehow, it seemed like "this was something I was supposed to do". For perhaps, the first time in my life I felt connected to something that really engaged my heart.

What was it about the sensation of strumming the strings of the guitar and making beautiful tones that would stir my soul, as if I was strumming the strings of my heart? It wasn't just the sounds, the mellow harmonic tones. It was more. It was such an amazing feeling that words just couldn't describe it, and somehow I felt this was something that would become an integral part of who I was and who I would become and the direction my life would go.

Hippie

As a baby boomer caught squarely in the sights of the burgeoning "counterculture" movement, I was immersed in it. Especially anything that had to do with music. I knew all the names of the hot bands of the 70s and their hits. I had a sizable record collection that was constantly playing in my dorm room and, in later years, in my apartment. Most of my friends were musicians and I started experimenting with writing simple poetic lines and setting them to simple guitar rhythms.

Eventually, I met more musicians and we enjoyed playing together impromptu performances anywhere we were. This was me. I was a musician. I listened deeply to the words of some of the most popular songs, and they opened up whole new visions of life. I heard the different musical parts of the songs; I knew how they were produced and the different arrangements and the felt the effects they had overall. When I heard certain songs and guitar parts (solos), they often took me away to a very high place. I couldn't explain it. It was as if God was trying to get a "message" to me.

There was a band in the early 70s called the Moody Blues. They had a huge album titled "A Question of Balance," containing several songs that would definitely impact my life greatly.

My songwriting took a deeper mystical tone as I often heard "voices" (in my mind) saying words that made no sense but seemed important to capture. When I looked back on them after they became songs, I struggled to make sense of the meaning they conveyed. Was it a message?



An example of the Chevy Step Van I drove to Rochester, NY

I graduated from college in 1973 and, after a year of marking time, no place to go, and nothing to do, I found myself and all my worldly possessions stuffed into a Chevy Step Van headed for Rochester, NY. I had a friend who lived there and he had gotten me a job. I thought the change of scenery would do me good.

After being established there for 40 days, I met a group of religious folks who were holding seminars about a teaching called the Divine Principle. I wasn't really interested in religion (I was not a "seeker," or so I thought) but I was intrigued by the quirky international group, and they offered me a free dinner.

Not really interested in their brand of Christianity, I ate their dinner and went home. I must've given them my address at some point because the next week one English gentlemen from their group visited me every day and tried to engage me in some religious conversation. I was polite but indicated it that religion wasn't my "thing" and simply thanked him on his way.

One day that week I found myself strumming my guitar, when a very eerie melody came into my head and esoteric words soon followed: "As I hold this rod of fire, it is my desire...to be a welder." A welder is someone who joins things together and I was on an intense course to become a certified welder, in reality. But was the song symbolic? Was there a bigger meaning somewhere? Was God trying to give me a message?

Well, to bring this meandering tale to its conclusion, after much soul-searching (prayerful?) questioning, spiritual battling, etc., I eventually, surrendered to God. I did go to a workshop and, finally, I joined the HSA-UWC officially on July 21, 1974. Like a band of gypsies, on IOWC, we went...down the highway.

When I look back on my musical journey, I came to the awareness that through the music, through my crude poetic lines, and later songs, God, in fact, did have my number and WAS trying to get a message to me. Finally. However, I had to write it to myself. The song "The Welder" became a prophecy of what I would do with my life in the decades to come. It is uncanny when I look back on those early songs and musical renderings, because I realize they were "advising me." They were telling me to seek higher ground, to listen to my heart, to follow the sun and that there was a "Melancholy Man" and he was looking for those who were looking for him.



A workshop site in upstate New York where I first got involved with the ILS Project, and where I wrote, "Peace in Our Time"

Music ministry: The Welder

Decades later: although I never envisioned myself as a "professional" musician, and I was never an "official" performing arts member in the church, I continued to let God speak to me through music and I used "that voice" to reach out to folks all over the world and share with them the good news. I wrote many songs that supported church functions and events and had the opportunity to play and sing for True Parents on a couple of occasions. In addition, I once had the incredible blessing of performing, with a small rock band, for a church holiday on the iconic Manhattan Center stage.

I was deeply grateful that in 1991 I had the opportunity to share my music as we traveled to the former Soviet Union and participated in the historic International Leadership Seminar project. I wrote a song, "Peace In Our Time," about the emotional impact of such an event and performed it all over the former Soviet Union. Later, when in Israel as part of the "40 days special task force," one of my songs was surprisingly recorded and used as the sound track for one of the "official videos" that was being shown throughout the tour. In later years, I had the opportunity to work with young people, helping them to hopefully find, "God's personal message" for them.

As I reflect on these past decades, it is clear to me that the songs and music that were "given" to me were clearly leading me to this path, a richly spiritual path and one that I could not have imagined. I am deeply grateful to God and ALL of the amazing saints and sages who DID NOT GIVE UP on me despite the fact that I was, almost, dragged kicking and screaming into this beautiful international holy community. And for...the music.

www.reverbnation.com/open_graph/song/3568361



A Peace Concert in NYC

Lyrics for "The Welder"

"The Welder" (c) 1974 Greg Davis

As I hold this rod of fire,
It is my desire, to be a Welder.

Such a tiny spark,
So tightly fuses,
Two great pieces of steel.

So that one is the other,
The teacher and the brother

One is another
The teacher and the lover.

If there was a way,
To make a bond,
Between all persons dark and Blond, Dark and blond.

A common cause between,
To chip away the fear, that separates us into two.

And fuses us together
Inseparable forever,
Humanity together,
Inseparable forever.

If I could only find,
A way to steal your fire, and your eyes. And your eyes.

To make such a Union,
With intensity and feeling,
That bears the weight of pain.

And fuses us together,
Inseparable forever,
And fuses us together,
Inseparable...forever.
Pictures