

# Music at A&P

## Keeping perspective



Two recent experiences have prompted me to think again about what it is we do at the Church of St. Andrew and St. Paul, and why we do

it. The first was reading an article provocatively entitled “Do churches idolize music?” The second was participating in the Montreal Bach Festival’s wildly successful Nuit des Choeurs choral marathon, held at our church on Saturday, November 15 from 3:30 to 10:30 p.m. Where do those two intersect?

They cast into relief the many facets of our church. Our congregation is first and foremost the worshipping body of Christ, tasked with praising God, building each other up and serving as living witnesses to our neighbours. Our ministry of music is a prominent and public part of this witness. We are, however, far from being the New Testament church in its earliest and simplest form, i.e. with no dedicated building, staff, ongoing financial commitments, and so forth. By virtue of our magnificent church

building with its beautiful furnishings, our staff and extensive programmes we are also a significant cultural institution in the city. We are de facto a performing arts organization, and a living repository of musical and religious heritage. Our challenge as a community is to acknowledge the existence of our various identities and to balance them with prayerful care. In that way, our diversity is a strength rather than a liability.

Do we idolize music? I sincerely hope not, although music does play an important role in our worship services and outreach to the community. Amongst the music staff, we are always conscious that our work is in the service of a higher purpose, the praise of God and the edification of His people. Music draws many people to our church (around 8,000 annually, including 2,000 or so for last weekend’s Nuit des Choeurs alone, another 1,500 for the Sing-In, one million or so across the country who listen to the Sing-In broadcast each year, etc.), and their perception of our music’s purpose may not coincide with our intention in presenting it. This doesn’t invalidate their enjoyment or our sincerity--in fact, it simply opens a door for us to engage

members of the broader community who may well later become members of our church!

There is plenty of precedent in Christian history for seeing music as a means of discipleship and outreach. Medieval monks chanted the psalms as a means of memorizing them more efficiently. John Knox, John Calvin and Louis Bourgeois created metrical congregational settings of the Psalms for the same reasons. Luther created metrical settings of the key doctrinal documents (the creeds, the Te Deum, the Lord’s Prayer and so on) so that believers in the new church of the Reformation could memorize and own for themselves God’s revelation through scripture. In the 19th century, the Wesleys and Ira Sankey and Dwight L. Moody penned revival gospel songs with catchy tunes and rhythms to attract the unchurched (or the lapsed faithful!) to the faith. Today’s contemporary Christian music draws from the same well.

The 16th-century Reformers Martin Luther and John Calvin had starkly different views on such matters: while Calvin was concerned that too much beauty and elaboration in the liturgy and church decor could distract from truth in worship, Luther saw the beauty as a revelation of God’s love, and an inspiration to praise.

Through its history and in its current context, our congregation has chosen a more Lutheran than Calvinist path in this matter. We rejoice in the abundance of God’s blessings of art, music and intellect, and are able to share this as a gift with our neighbours, whether or not they yet share in the fullness of our life in Christ. And all of it to the glory of God: *Soli Deo gloria!*

Jonathan Oldengarm,  
Director of Music



Andrew Gray practicing with the children for Pageant music.