

I once heard a musician say that music, “sings to the soul.” It is a powerful image and one that at least in my opinion and experience is true. Maybe the best example I can think of comes from leading a worship service at a long-term care facility. I can recall having members of that community join us and yet not say a word or seem to follow along at all. Many seemed as though they were physically present, but mentally and spiritually were quite distant. Yet the moment we would start to sing a familiar hymn, all those folks would suddenly come alive and sing every word of their favourite hymn with great joy and clarity.

Music does that; it reaches deep within and sings to the soul; it also holds us and can be quite therapeutic. This past week I noticed something about my own life that has surprised me a little bit. It turns out that as I progressed through this pandemic, so did the types of music that would sing to my soul. In the early days of the pandemic, I found myself seeking words of comfort, assurance and even just acknowledgement of the real pain and stress I was feeling. Though I have never been a true country music fan, I found myself listening to Chris Stapleton, Tyler Childers, John Moreland, and Colter Wall. I even found a love for Blue Grass and discovered a young artist by the name of Billy Stings, who I now listen to quite regularly, follow on social media and even bought a ticket for an online show. There was something about their words and the tone of the music that held me and lifted me in those early days. In the summer and early fall, the country music did not speak to me any longer. Rather it was hymns that began to lift me up. I began searching for choirs, barbershop quartets, and soloists who sung my favourite hymns and I would go sleep at night with my heads phones on listening to the words of Be thou My Vision and It is well with my Soul. Then as the late fall started the hymns, like the country music months before, no longer spoke to my soul like they had, and I then found myself looking for classical instrumental music. The one musician who really sang to my soul was Sheku Kanneh-Mason. He and his whole family really, are so incredibly gifted and his music held me and carried me and there were times when I lost myself in the beauty of the sounds. When the Advent and Christmas seasons arrived, it was the songs of Christmas that were all around and often I get tired of them after six weeks of endless play, but not this year. This year I wanted to hear the songs every minute of every day and I wanted to sing along. I listened as I wrote my sermons, I listened as I made supper for my family, I listened as I got ready for work and I listened as I drove to pick up my groceries; I listened all the time.

Then as January began another shift happened. I no longer was humming White Christmas, I no longer found solace in the classical instrumental music and though I always love hymns, they were not speaking to me in the same way. I went back to the country music and even that did not connect. Then one evening as I was looking for something to listen to, my son clicked on a Metallica playlist and I literally felt my soul lift. For the last two weeks I have been listening to Rage against Machine, System of a Down, ACDC, Metallica, Frank Reynolds, Foo Fighters, and Nirvana. I have even rekindled my appreciation for Punk and yes, its loud and abrasive, but in this moment, it is singing to my soul.

I am certain that someone more qualified than I could explain how these different types of music connect to our brains and bodies and maybe could even offer a psychological analysis of my mental health based on the types of music that I connect with, but for me I go back to that simple and yet profound statement, that music sings to the soul. Like all of you, I have found the last ten months to hold great challenge and great joy. There have been times when I have been feeling incredibly positive and optimistic and there have been times when I felt lost, uncertain, and alone. Sometimes I needed to just hear someone else acknowledge the uncertainty. Sometimes I needed to hear sombre, quiet, and

reflective sounds. Other times I needed joy filled lyrics to make me sing and recently I have needed the high paced energy of rock music to push me on. All in all, the music has sung to my soul and my soul has responded.

A month from now I may find the Punk/Rock too loud and I will move onto something else, but at the end of the day to me it really does not matter what type of music has comforted me, or stilled me, or pushed me. What matters is that in the moment my soul sings along. I hope my friends, that yours sings too.

Sincerely

Rev. Adam Hall