

MUSIC, HEART AND SOUL OF PERSONALITY A Pastoral Psychological Reflection

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Abstract

This article explores music as a tool in the formation of Seminarians. As a universal passion, human beings feel the joy and the power of music in their hearts and souls. Needless then to be surprised that the Church has used music in worship for centuries. However liturgical music has not maintained always the same standards of erudition or excellence, as Pope Francis observed in 2017. Hence using music as a formation tool requires watchfulness and updating. The reports in this article are on the author's heuristic reflections on the experiences of using music in formation. It discusses four areas of a formee's personality where strong influence of music could be beneficial; namely the candidate's growth as a person, community membership, intercultural competence, and creativity, each with their own subsets of competencies. The Church therefore, would stand to lose if she ignores music's impact on candidates and seminarians, who would in course of time, assume the roles of Pastoral leadership in the Church. For theology, it will mean another opportunity to explore deeply the interactive space between God's action and the creative and aesthetic dimensions of the human person where music dwells.

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Keywords: Church Music; Formation; Liturgical Music; *Music*; *Music in Formation*

1. Introduction

Having spent more than 25 years in music ministry and musical training of seminarians and candidates both in India and abroad, I have felt that one question still begs attention, namely, “Does the training in music given to candidates and seminarians affect their formation and growth significantly?” And, “if it does, how to make that process more effective?”

Experiences of joy, pleasure, or pain at listening to a piece of music, show that music has the power to effect deep changes in the emotions and action tendencies of people. However, despite its universal presence, music’s influence on the education and formation of seminarians still remains largely un-researched. Any effort to wade into this uncharted territory, like this article tries to do, can only be considered a heuristic effort to initiate a conversation, rather than to propose finalized conclusions.

Importance of Music in Catholic Worship

No doubt, music has been part of Church culture from its beginnings. Robert E. Webber, theologian and well known author of more than forty books on worship, has said that “Music has played a prominent role in nearly every service of Christian worship ever conducted, in any culture, period of history, or worship tradition.”¹ The Catholic Church in her official teachings is explicit about the importance of music in worship. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*² sets out clear instructions about music in liturgy, dedicating an entire section for it. After stating that the musical tradition is “precious” and of “immeasurable value” to the Church, the document asserts music’s “preeminence over all other arts,” and argues how it becomes integral and essential to the liturgy when it is combined with appropriate words.

Music must connect closely with the liturgical action according to the *Catechism*. The connection brings unanimity among the community, and expresses the unique beauty of prayer lending it solemnity. Through music the community participates not only as a gathering of people, but also by actualizing the purpose for which the liturgical words and actions are carried out, namely celebrating the glory of God and the sanctification of the Faithful. Music thus,

¹R.E. Webber, *The Complete Library of Christian Worship*, 1996.

²*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Doubleday: New York, 1994.

adds a new dimension and layer to the purpose of prayer, which no other art form seems to achieve, according to the document. Augustine's famous words, "he who sings prays twice," and the effusion of emotional praise he bestows on great singing of hymns as quoted in article 1157 of the *Catechism*, thus seems totally justified and true.

Of significance is the observation the *Catechism* makes about the validity and fruitfulness of music to represent the *cultural richness* of the people of God. When such cultural adaptation takes place, the document wants that the texts used should be "in conformity with the Church's doctrines" and chiefly drawn from the scriptures and other liturgical sources (1191).

Fluctuating Standards of Church Music

However the glowing support the Church provides to music in liturgy, does not in practice, always pan out into corresponding standards of musical accomplishments or excellence. Recently, the Holy Father Pope Francis made an observation, that in Catholic Liturgical music at times, "a certain mediocrity, superficiality and banality have prevailed, to the detriment of the beauty and intensity of liturgical celebrations."³

One would hope such fall in standards, as the Holy Father points out, does not happen today, but our present culture has enough debilitating factors that could cause a similar decline. Some of these factors are, (i) Today there are fewer musically talented people joining the ranks of clergy/religious in a seminary system, where largely only the talented have been offered musical training, probably for pragmatic reasons. (ii) Worship in the vernacular, in countries like India where there are many vernacular languages, often requires that the limited talent pool of musicians to draw from, has to spread itself too thin. (iii) The increasing presence and quality of sound technology, tends to force liturgical music to follow behind the technology rather than ahead of it. This is so because technology is driven by the needs of a wider world with more plentiful resources. (iv) There is often an unfortunate assumption at work in many quarters that only clergy, or only Catholics can compose good music for Catholic worship, which again limits the working pool drastically. All told therefore, one should not be surprised if there is a weakening in the area of liturgical music today as well.

³Pope Francis, "Music and Church: Cult and Culture, 50 years after Musicam Sacram," Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the International Conference on Sacred Music, Clementine Hall, Vaticano, 2017.

However, the danger becomes all the more serious if we find that musical training is kept far away from all except those with talent, forgetting that those without the talent are usually more numerous in comparison. Whereas this can bring down interest and standards noticeably, the deeper question to consider is “Should musicality and musicianship be the preserve of those with talent only? Does music make no contribution to the over all development of candidates in general? Does it not contribute humaneness, refinement of character, and general culture to their personalities?” So the question becomes wider. “How can the teaching of music bring benefits to all of the candidates regardless of their ability for music? And, does music benefit people in areas that are not strictly musical, but of larger concerns pertaining to human living in general?”

These questions become central concerns here. We want to assess the advisability of making music part of the curricula of education and formation. We want to understand deeper the wisdom in the Church’s assertion that music enjoys a “preeminence over all other arts.” Or to put it differently, “What does the Church stand to lose, by not focusing enough on music in the formation of the seminarian and candidate?”

The breadth and the newness of these questions are the reasons why this paper as a heuristic effort, will stand primarily on the experiences, both of the author and of the reader, by evoking reflection, insight and understanding. This will also necessitate situating observations within the spaces that the author is more familiar with, like the Salesian charism, provided it is reasonable to infer the observation’s applicability to more universal contexts. These approaches can yield valid insights, when beginning to think systematically about music as a valuable tool for education, and for its specialized areas like the formation of pastoral ministers.

Formation as Process

Before delving into the reflection, it is also important to establish a shared understanding of what is meant by formation. Granting that in each geography, culture and congregational charism the word formation will evoke different emphases. One needs nevertheless a working definition to start with like: “Formation is developing the competencies to tell the story of one’s life, as God is trying to write it with him or her.”⁴ This is a processual definition, that gives enough

⁴A longer version of this definition appears in J. Thannickal, “Formation to Maturity through Fuller Experiencing, Exploring Formative Potentials in Adversity,” in *Human Formation in Major Seminaries*. S.G. Kochuthara,

space to include the similarities and differences that emerge from the varieties of charisms and geographies. It is grounded in the belief that real formation is about creating the capacities:

(i) To develop an experiential view of one's own life and its vicissitudes from the Divine perspective.

(ii) To make a vocational response to God's invitation to an individual that may be contained in that divine perspective, and,

(iii) Giving witness to this personal story by telling it to the world, enabling others to do the same in their lives, and developing the skills and competencies needed for these interactions.

Formation thus differs from other methods of intervention like education and/or training in important and practical ways. If education is socialization in values, then formation is that socialization together with a personal commitment to the values based on one's belief in God. If education is about learning skills and knowledge, then formation is about learning skills, knowledge and a continuous critiquing of that knowledge in the light of the perennial principles drawn from one's relationship with God. If education means teaching the ways to find and use information, then formation is about finding information, using it and examining its connection with the fundamental commitments one has towards one's own spiritual self, as well as towards God who is active in human lives. Formation therefore, is education in all its aspects, enhanced significantly by one's understanding of God, and how one experiences the relationship with Him.

2. Value of Music in Ecclesiastical Formation

Can music be useful to advance the goals of ecclesiastical formation as outlined above? After all there is a rich tradition of using music in the Church for centuries. The vast volume of Church music in the west is a standing testimony to her efforts at addressing the pitfalls in musical experience and training seen from time to time⁵. It seems reasonable to hope that today's Church also has what it takes, to address any such slides. This reflection is itself an effort to positively address remedies for diminution of standards in our own day.

D.V.Painadath and T.T. Kottampally, Bengaluru, Dharmaram Publications, 374-395, at 382-383.

⁵Thomas E. Woods, Jr. has presented how the Catholic Church has played determinative roles in the development of the arts in Europe, music included. Thomas E. Woods, Jr., *How the Catholic Church Built Western Civilization*, Washington DC: Regnery Publishing Inc., 2003, Chapter Six.

Given below are four areas of human functioning where music seems to have influenced the decisions taken and actions carried out. In the reflective study that yielded them, several more were found. But for brevity's sake, four such areas are reported here. They are, Growth as Persons, Creating Community, Cultural Connect, and Creativity.

2.1. Music, Inducer of Transformative Growth as Persons

There is no dearth of statements in praise of the benefit that music brings to the human person. "Music gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination, and life to everything," said Plato. And as if to surmise his understanding of musical ecstasy, Mozart seems to have said that, "The music is not in the notes, but in the silence in between." And certainly not to be left out, Aldous Huxley mused, "After silence, that which comes nearest to expressing the inexpressible is music." Nobody who has enjoyed a few minutes of delightful music, could disagree with these giants on the intellectual and artistic landscape.

Music also brings learning, healing and transformation to humans in manifold ways. Yet it is not as if, music remains at the heights of the angelic, refusing to descent to the level of mortals. Music in fact, is beneficial for the ordinary levels of human existence. We begin now with exploration of education, of which formation is but one way.

Music as the Changer of Internal States

I asked some educator friends of mine whether music was helpful in education or not. One of the first thoughts that they had was that music influences students' internal states. Loreto Sister Carmela IBVM with a life time experience in the education of children said, "In my experience with children of all ages, I have noticed the tremendous value of music in their education."⁶ Changing emotional states is always easier to do with music, and that change can facilitate better learning, and perhaps quicker too. She explains it thus, "For example, Lisa, aged four, walks in crying because she lost her ball. On entering her class, she sees a room full of children singing nursery rhymes. Lisa then, brightens up and forgets the lost ball. This is true of teenagers too," insists Carmela, "and others who might have been deprived of parental love and family connections."

⁶Sr Carmela, Thomas Pulickal, Tom Karthik and Sr Celine Pinto, are well known educators in Kolkata and the North East of India.

Similarly, the positive value of music in instilling discipline, creating a sense of community, and the development of self-confidence, all of them hallmarks of good education, were highlighted by my other friends, Rev. Thomas Pulickal and Tom Karthik, who have spent their lives as educators in Eastern and North Eastern India. According to them, music can achieve these goals better than most other things.

Music as Therapy and Catharsis

Music therapy is a form of healing in which music is used professionally to help people with their mental issues. The word therapy as used here is more about restoring, or stimulating the healthier self, rather than curing diseases. For example, good and well selected pieces of music have the capacity to bring about significant reduction of sadness as well as several of the other elements that make up depression. The music to be used should be selected with care for its suitability for this purpose. One may read Hanser's book on *Music Therapy* to learn about its "ten stages of treatment planning, from referral to termination."⁷

Like other art forms, music has a cathartic effect on the musician, whether singer, performer, composer or director. Bunt, another well known Music therapist states that "Cathartic moments are a clear feature of making music and are very likely to occur during free improvisation. The purging of the emotions has played an important part in music's function since time immemorial."⁸ These days, a cursory search on google can readily show the research that goes into the many benefits of music including, lower blood pressure, decreased heart rate, reduced stress, lessened anxiety and alleviating depression. There is increasing evidence that making music enhances the immunological response, enabling the fight against viruses.

Music as Psycho-Educational Tool

From a psycho-educational perspective, music has had a significant role to play in re-educational situations. Don Bosco, the well known Italian priest and Saint, was dealing with boys whose psychological backgrounds had unimaginable scars from troubled pasts. And yet, Don Bosco influenced these boys to reach great heights in life. A very troublesome boy like John Cagliero grew up mature enough to be admitted to ordination and eventually became a Bishop and Cardinal, whereas many others became members of the clergy in other capacities. Very troublesome boys took to family lives

⁷Suzanne B. Hanser, *The New Music Therapist's Handbook*, 2nd ed., 1999, Preface.

⁸Leslie Bunt, *Music Therapy*, London and New York: Routledge, 1994.

displaying exemplary commitment and responsibility. Almost all the boys with Don Bosco settled down to honest employments accounting for themselves as honorable, law abiding citizens. Among the many methods Don Bosco used to achieve these transformations, undoubtedly one was music. He used to say that, a house for his boys “without music is like a body without a soul,”⁹ pointing clearly to a ‘Bosconian’ attitude to music as a method of choice to deal with problems in young people.

What about today? If the Holy Father deplores the low standards of today’s music in liturgies, the rest of us including formators should equally deplore the low standards of music in many of our houses and seminaries. Even congregations like the Salesians who were known for their dedication and commitment to music, sports, drama etc. today seem to be backing off on these methods in too many places.

In India, once it was western music that was taught. Then came vernacular in liturgy and the emphasis on local cultures, which pushed up Indian music to replace the western music. But the efforts were often half hearted, and today we seldom have the western or the Eastern to seriously respectable levels. There seems to be little or no realization that the musical world out there, has actually taken the opposite route and integrated western music into the Indian genre. As a result fusion music, an integration of both, has become the genre of choice in many fields. Worse still is the situation here and there, of reductionist choices like, the emphasis on therapy and counseling as the panacea for all ills, once again pushing out methods like music to the back-benches of educational and formational planning boards.

The questionableness of replacing music with counseling or therapy becomes clearer if we once more consider the experience of Don Bosco. He worked at a time in the latter half of the 19th century when therapists and counselors were only getting ready to take their initial professional steps.¹⁰ When Don Bosco was working full steam with his boys, the stalwarts of experimental psychology were only growing up. In other words Don Bosco did not have the advantages of scientific psychology as we know it today. Yet he produced amazing results.

⁹ P.S. Braido, *Prevention, Not Repression*, Don Bosco’s Educational System. Bengaluru, Kristu Jyothi Publications, 2000, Chapter 16.

¹⁰For example it is clear that whereas Don Bosco lived 1815-1888, Wilhelm Wundt lived 1832-1920, Sigmund Freud 1856-1939, and Ivan Pavlov 1849-1936. Other stalwarts came even later. Bandura was born only in 1925.

From these to conclude therefore, to give up practices like music, is hardly a wise thing to do. But yes, to complete the earlier example of the Salesians, one can say that if they give up music, if they give up sports and drama, if they give up the faith perspectives, and if they give up the three core elements of the Preventive System,¹¹ then the Bosconian results mentioned earlier will be harder to achieve; and then, things like therapy may need to be called in, whether they are good enough as substitutes or not.

The argument here is not that therapy or counseling is not beneficial to educational pursuits. They have their place, and Don Bosco being intelligent and open minded, would use anything that would help his poor and abandoned boys. However it would be highly unlikely that he would give up his time tested, humanizing and more universally applicable methods such as sports, dramatics and music, merely to replace them with something as specialized as therapy, counseling, or anything else.

Music Partnering with Positive Psychology

Fortunately today, there is an upcoming branch of psychology known as positive psychology. Music comfortably falls in the category of positive psychological approaches. In other words, whereas the inheritors of the time tested Bosconian methods seem to be tottering on their support for them, psychology instead seems to be catching up with these methods, even willingly incorporating some of their foundational assumptions, into their own psychological theorizing specially around flourishing and well being, like the positive psychology movement under Martin P. Seligman and others seem to be doing.

2.2. Music, Powerful Space for Creating Community

Music is a powerful space for participatory experiencing, listening, and community building. One may argue that even sports has an element of community and team functioning. However, there are some differences between music and competitive sports. Music has an openness that is more extensive than sports, because serious sports is designed to be played in a close knit team with an overt or covert intention to defeat, or at least outperform the opposing team. Instead, even in competitive performances of music, the losing team could still love much of the music created by either of the teams, and

¹¹Preventive system is the method of education gifted to the Salesians and the world, by Don Bosco, to deal with poor and abandoned youth, who otherwise would have to be subjected to the repressive systems of education, very much in vogue then. More on this can be read in Braido's book, *Prevention, Not Repression*.

enjoy it whether they have won or lost in the competition. This is what we experienced when some years ago, our Kolkata team's performance in Mumbai was over enthusiastically appreciated by the Mumbai audience, an incident to be narrated later in this article. All that the other teams asked of us was our recorded music, so that they could take it back to their places and perform their own versions of it for their home audiences. In other words after a competitive performance of music, much still remains that could bring enjoyment to both teams.

Polyhedron Style of Seating

Veritatis Gaudium, the recent document on Ecclesiastical Universities and formation programs, say clearly that a polyhedron style of seating¹² is preferable to the traditional seating like that of the lecture room. Music always had this style. A musical orchestra nearly always gets seated in a circle of some kind: full circle, semi-circle, quarter circle etc. because in music it is not enough to be heard, but very important to hear others. It's all about getting one's own part blended with each others', so that the resultant whole is that much more beautiful. Whereas disciplines like training, teaching, personality development, therapy etc. teach their trainees over and over how to listen carefully, for those with musical training, listening is of the essence, almost like the air they breath, without which they couldn't even exist as musicians; thus laying the foundation for a community that is cemented by the communion of hearts that, everyone longs for.

Music Reveals the Group as Resource

Music sounds fuller not alone, but in a group. Solos do have a beauty of their own, and yet a group performing the same piece of music brings about another perspective, often a better one. This is why we say, that music by its very nature promotes communion, and in a community of musicians one performer sees another as a resource to enhance and complete both. Let me recall how I and a 'large community' got to witness Yanni's great Orchestra perform at the Taj Mahal.

In 2014 after attending my conference in Dallas, TX, I flew into San Francisco, CA, to visit with friends from my university days. One of the first things they told me on arrival at the airport was that Yanni was performing at the Oracle Arena in Oakland that weekend. Having had an appointment fixed for that evening, I was really sorry

¹²Francis, *Veritatis Gaudium*, Trivandrum, India: Carmel International Publishing House, 2018, p. 24.

to have to miss the occasion and the spectacle being an ardent admirer of Yanni's music.

Now fast forward with me to 2020. One day in May this year, as I was saying the mass for the sisters at Entally, I asked them whether they knew about Yanni's music. They all said, 'yes'. So at the homily I felt comfortable giving a little reflection on Yanni's genre of music applying it to the readings of the day. Then at breakfast, Sr Celine Pinto, who has spent a full life dedicated to music education told us how she had attended the Yanni concert at the Taj Mahal many years ago, in 1997. She was gifted a Rs. 5000/ ticket by the District Collector of Lucknow where their school educated his child. On arrival at the gates of the venue, she was "not let in," she said, "probably because I did not have the dress code, until a past music pupil of mine spotted me and had me seated on a Rs. 10000/ seat." Celine enjoyed the mesmerizing music, and was back at her duty in Lucknow the following morning at the school assembly.

Having also heard this story that morning, I came home to Nitika and with all this information in my head, I felt compelled from within to sit at my computer and listen to Yanni's recorded performance at the Taj, on Youtube. The resulting feeling for me, was like connecting with a new community, with the music nearly as good as it was, and a storyline that had grown over a time lapse of more than 20 years.

We live today in a world where distances are not so forbidding any more. Love for music is a passion for those who have it, and not only do they get to places they want to go, but also the places seem to come to them very much like gifts. If they miss their passion in one place, their lives get filled nevertheless in ways unexpected. Music travels without borders. San Francisco to Agra is not an insurmountable distance for music.

The same with musicians. Without traveling much, things happen in their lives whose meanings they seem to be able to fathom. My sense of loss at not being able to attend the Oracle concert has been more than made up by the story of the sister which I followed up by going to youtube and enjoying in the comfort of my room some of the pieces performed at the Taj. No less was the role played by our sharing of the Yanni experiences at the altar of the Lord that morning, in creating a participatory communion between us passionate for music. Moreover I am right now also having the delightful opportunity to share this little story with my readers through this article, a story that ran from 1997 through 2020; and, from San Francisco to Kolkata all the way through beautiful Agra.

God's will revealed like this—some may call it synchronicity or serendipity—is plentiful in all our lives. But we need to become alive to them, and music can help. I believe musicians, and other people with artistic leanings, can certainly recognize these. Candidates or not, people learning music often end up alive to the aesthetic dimension in their lives, and if these events are well accepted and celebrated, then their lives can become filled with gratitude, praise and wonder, the stuff with which passions start, develop and fructify.

Music Elicits Collaboration, Not Competition

In music it is always about the final effect, not about individual parts. Similarly, for a group performing together, their focus is on the cumulative effect rather than individual brilliance alone. For music to sound good it is important that the players perform within rules accepted by all. Hence for good music to happen, collaboration is the really useful skill, not competition, or merely individual success.

Music Facilitating Empathy

Being a musician brings along many issues of life that are common to people in other walks of life. What is different is that a musician probably facilitates alternative ways of resolving these every day problems. This means that music is a source of empathy for its practitioner. A situation that I faced early in my tenure as Choir Director in a parish in San Francisco comes to mind, that might illustrate this power of music—to create empathy.

When I took over as Director of the adult choir there at the end of 1997, I also inherited a long standing conflict existing between the choir members and the chief soloist. The choir members did not like Bob Lance (name changed), and wanted him out, but he was refusing to go. When I consulted the pastor he told me jocularly, "That is your problem now Joe. Solve it." Quite honestly, I did spend a few hours in prayer before I made my move.

First, I gave a hearing to the choir members, and gave a chance to everyone to talk. Some of the complaints looked legitimate. Then I met the soloist in private. Rather than allow him to start, I took the initiative, and put this question to him, "Bob what is the reason that you do not want to resign? You know there are people who would rather have you go? Why do you want to keep this job?" Bob hesitated a bit, and then he came out frankly, "Father, I need the job to put food on the table. I have six kids, and without the income I will not be able to give them an education." After a brief moment of silence, I looked him straight in the eye and said, "Bob, I promise you, you will not go. You are going to stay." He just looked at me

disbelievingly for a while. Then I continued, “But now that you are staying, how about the complaints they have about you?” He asked me “Which?” So we went over each of the complaints and he agreed to work at each of them.

I went back to meet the choir once again, and told them quite firmly, “Bob needs the job and we are not going to ask him to leave. He has agreed to change some of his approaches, and I would like to give him a chance. Is there anyone who objects?” No one. That was it. What was more beautiful was that in a few weeks, the choir members started talking with Bob, and the relationships gradually improved. After a couple of years, and I had moved to another parish, Bob stood for a civic election. And who were his chief campaigners? The choir members, of course. And he won the seat to the city Council in San Francisco, a prestigious position.

Music Seeking out the Big Picture

I think being a musician helps us to empathize with people, and to find solutions that do not “spoil the music.” The musician in a director’s role is usually equipped to find a way for everyone to play their part better in the symphony. This is not to suggest that only musicians can be empathetic. No. Good upbringing, emotional intelligence, great faith perspectives, powerful conversion experiences and many such moments in a person’s life are effective pathways to developing empathy. But music is for sure, another such pathway.

An organist who can gauge the longing for God in the hearts of the congregation as it sings, and supplies the right modulations on his/her instrument to take that massive energy to a cathartic expression of adoration and love, not because he came prepared for it, but made it happen even as she heard them sing, as a creative response of the moment as it were, that musician is responding with empathy, not to one individual or two, but to an entire congregation of worshippers in their hundreds, even thousands. A good musician has a tendency to look eventually for better music, not for winners and losers. He or she knows that in an orchestra or symphony, either they win together or they lose together. The musical way, is quite exceptional, and in a league of its own!

2.3 Music, Agent of Cultural Connect

My Sadri Experiment

In 1987, Joseph Kandulna SDB, my colleague at Nitika in Kolkata, requested my help to record hymns composed in *Sadri*, a dialect among the *Aadiwasi* languages of the Central Indian Tribal belts. Initially I hesitated because I had no knowledge about the hymns in

that language, but then decided to help him nevertheless. It was a rudimentary work in terms of technology, but in cultural dialogue it was a great step forward for both of us. The hymns were composed in the styles of the *Sadri* tradition, but the accordion in my hands produced western musical accompaniment, with chords and sometimes the rhythms as well. And on occasion when we added the strokes of the *dhhol*, an *Aadiwasi* drum, the final sound had a majesty unknown to us till then.

As I worked with Joseph, I remember telling him more than once that someone should put some effort into ‘modernizing’ the concept of these hymns, with their powerful, yet simple and singable melodies, and with the lilting and dance-friendly rhythms. I came to realize only later that ‘modernize’ was probably an unkind and hurtful word for Joseph, though he never complained. What I meant really was that the power contained in these hymns and their design could easily blend with the modern idioms of the Indian music of those days. The time from the seventies onwards that I remember was one of great creativity in Indian music in the hands of the Maestros in Bollywood like R.D. Burman and others. Their film songs so mesmerized popular tastes that they are favorites at festivals even today after half a century. I had no hope that my dream of the eighties, would come to anything until one day, I was surprised.

Debidanga, My Surprise

Four years ago in 2016, I was privileged to be present for Christmas services in Debidanga, a village near the foothill city of Siliguri in north Bengal. And what did I find? Young *Aadiwasi* boys and girls dressed in jeans and tops, lustily singing the same hymns of those days. From the way these young people sang, those hymns sounded so much more ornate when accompanied by the technologically advanced synthesizers and digital instruments. I said to myself, and to the crowd later, that all this was a wishful dream in the eighties, but so gratifying to see come true today. Generations had changed but the hymns were still speaking their messages louder than ever.

Music as Cultural Ambassador

Music has unimaginable power with cultural transitions. Music is one of the quickest art forms to pickup on the changes occurring in societal life styles. Those who get trained in music stand at a unique advantage not only to recognize these winds of change, but also to give expression to their expanding imaginations.

A formee trained in music, should find it easier, to understand the prevailing cultural trends, albeit without the full grasp of their meanings. They can translate the insights from those changes into

real transformations of attitudes and behaviors of individuals and societies, changes that one can hear, feel and touch in their relationship with other cultures.

Music, Teacher of Cultural Dialogue

And how would this play out in a formation house? To begin with, when people of different cultural backgrounds have to sing and pray in an idiom proper of other cultures, the expanded imaginations that it releases can contribute significant insights for intercultural living. The initial difficulty that seminarians from other parts of India may feel, at singing or even liking *Sadri* music, can open up discussions that are fruitful for all, if they are led by teachers who have what it takes to turn such exchanges into truly formative conversations. Unfortunately what occurs in many seminaries today is that in terms of numbers the larger group of seminarians come from the *Aadiwasi* or other similar communities, but many of the hymns they are given to sing come from English or some other dominant language.¹³ If nothing is done to rationalize this state of things in terms of the population, then the cultural prejudices that this may produce, are likely to continue unabated, possibly even get sharpened on the way.

However if there is a formator with imagination, one who is also courageous enough to make the changes in the modes of worship that may be allowable and required, then the discussion that we spoke about can get to be a rich one, formatively speaking. Of course these formators should also have the ability to listen, empower, encourage, appreciate and above all, to teach these same skills of communication to the seminarians. Irreplaceable for such teachers are the qualities of a large heart, enriched by a tinge of adventure to experiment and explore. Then those engaged in the discussion are likely to return from it, enriched in such a way that there is in them greater appreciation and valuation of cultures other than their own.

The transformative edge in music, and in people committed to music, comes from the fact that they often encounter intercultural interactions, though not always verbal. Non verbal interactions in the form of music, or experiencing vicariously the feelings and the thoughts that originally inspired the song, and the ways of expression that the composer chose to build into them, can all become part of the musician's cultural repertoire as well. This experience may

¹³This may not be universally true. For example the situation could be different in other traditions like the Syro Malabar or Malankara traditions in the longer established Churches of south India.

not occur at the conscious level; but then, so much goodness and power in people actually originate at the unconscious level, as is being repeatedly demonstrated in psychology.

Can Cultures Imprison Music?

Can good hymns be imprisoned in a single culture? As for me, the western musical idioms including Gregorian chant, have immeasurable value, I having grown up feeding on these invaluable menus. But then the goodness of music can never be imprisoned in any culture. This is why when Indian classical musicians go abroad for concerts, quite often one is amazed at the number of non-Indians in the audience, and vice versa. Indian music has strands of expression that totally match those of western music in nearly every respect.

Unfortunately, rarely do we find Church musicians in India, who value what the experiences of the western Church can teach us about fostering musical excellence in liturgy. Merely to appreciate and adopt great western music in Indian worship is only one way to uphold their value for the Church. Decidedly another way is to be inspired by the story of the development of western Church music, and to see how that story of adventure can be recreated in other cultures like in India. In other words, when people passionate for music want to hear great Indian music, the Churches in India can and should become the places of choice, just like it had happened in the west earlier, when they flocked to Churches to hear great music.

It is up to the Church in India, to become explorers rather than mere consumers of India's music. Such exploration may reveal that Indian music can be as devotional and expressive as music anywhere else. And who knows, such repertoire could become the gift from us, the Indian Christians, to the musical patrimony of the Universal Church, a Church that still intends to become ever more truly universal and Catholic.

2.4. Music, Hot House of Creativity

Creativity means using the imagination to give origin to something, or to invent new solutions to problems, even long standing ones. Is music creative? Yes. After all a piece of music is the result of a composer's creative effort to distribute sounds in patterns that bring joy, pleasure and meaning to the listener. But can training in music provide the capacity to be creative in one's ministry?" The answer is also a great "yes."

Music and Creative Decision Making

When I was on the faculty of Salesian College in Sonada, north Bengal, I was asked by the provincial to present to the province an

Audio visual program for the Jubilee celebrations in 1984 of our Founder's canonization. I composed instead, a mini opera whose lyrics could also serve as the audio track for a slideshow. In the process the mini opera, a genre unfamiliar to a lot of people, was introduced in the amateur play "*And the Show Must Go on*" (1984).¹⁴ As a result, after the initial excitement about the Audio Visual format, the composition under the musical theatre format continued to be produced on stage again and again in several places, reaching tens of thousands, and that at a time when social media was no where to be seen in the human imagination.

Again in 1988, the centenary year of Don Bosco's death, the Salesian province, and the province of the Salesian Sisters, both of Kolkata, were invited like all other provinces in South Asia to perform at the concluding function in Mumbai, with one item each for fifteen minutes' duration. I thought fifteen minutes was too short for presenting anything meaningful. Turning it over in my head for a few days, I believe my creativity was activated and I was inspired to request for permission to mix the two teams from Kolkata, of the salesians and of the sisters. This was allowed and we put up a combined presentation, which gave us double the time, and twice the number of performers drawn from the boys and the girls. It was quite an arduous task to work out the entire two months long project. But finally when it was done, there were so many rich rewards not the least of which was the five minute long standing ovation that the Mumbai audience showered on us, to the surprise of the other teams. And back in Kolkata, those youngsters who today are adults in different walks of life, are still carrying forward their friendships, with several of them having taken to the film and TV industries. And for us the two congregations, it has thankfully left us, with an evergreen memory of an experience of creative collaboration, making real for us today the original creative spirit of the founders Don Bosco and Mary Mazarello, a spirit that was evident to the world in their time, more than a century ago.

Musical Creativity Enhances Regular Life as well

Creative decisions that succeed usually end up enhancing other areas of ordinary living as well. For example, as a result of the above projects, requests started pouring in from schools, colleges, Youth animation centers, Youth ministers' training centers, and clergy and religious

¹⁴This mini opera of mine has had successful runs in educational circuits for many years. It is written around the dream Don Bosco had at 9 years of age, where it is believed, that God and the Blessed Virgin revealed to him his mission in life, as well as the method by which that mission was to be accomplished.

groups from all around for animation programs of quality. They wanted something more than “standard educational stuff,” they said. The youth needed approaches that were creative in terms of content and method. This spawned many initiatives, which we scheduled on weekends, and it continued for several years. They gave us real contact with young people, and those who worked for them; helping us to lead them into serious engagement with their own lives as well.

As for me, these programs brought me face to face with the issues the youngsters and their ministers faced. Crashing into my life were also the societal issues affecting people around like, their lack of opportunities, unjust but powerful social structures, and the cities bursting at the seams due to the unmanageable population, as well as the lack of leaders with vision at the helm of affairs. In the midst of it all, I saw and participated in the ministry of our Church that was working hard and most sincerely but, making less impact than needed. Above all, these experiences instead of distracting us back in the formation community, only rendered us more competent at training the seminarians who were with us, because now we were no longer teaching theories gathered from books, but theories and thought patterns that grew out of the rich experiences with real people that we were dealing with.

Musical Origins of Creativity and Creative Origins of Music

Did I come up with the above creative responses because I had experience in music? Good question! We know that Music is creative by its very nature. Even if one is playing someone else’s music, creative sections called “improvisation,” are considered important in all the traditions of western music. Improvisation is very important in Eastern musical traditions as well. Especially in Indian music where it is called *alapa*, improvisation is considered the more exciting part in any recitation of the *Ragas*. Creativity therefore, is not only vital to the act of giving origin to music in compositions, but also one of the core dimensions of the rendition and performance of composed pieces.

Thus musical training in seminaries is bound to make the students creative. They will be creative in the way they study, and face examinations. They will be creative in the way they analyze problems and propose solutions. And, in the final analysis, creativity may be what will solve many problems they may face in their future lives of actual ministry.

Musical Creativity and the Spirit of Adventure

Creativity has characterized great innovators in the Church’s history, like the founders of religious orders, for example. Many

founders of congregations became what they were by creatively coming up with solutions that were considered unusual, to the problems that everybody in their surroundings knew about. A great Indian example is that of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara of Kerala, the founder of the congregation Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI). The way he got involved in addressing long standing social problems in India, with initiatives that at the time looked terribly unusual showed the creative mind of a person, a founder and a Saint, who today is being widely acknowledged as among the great reformers of Modern India. Was he a musician? Perhaps not in the strictest sense, but he was a dramatist and a poet. He composed prayer songs and verses, and had many more similar works written by others. He certainly was musical in a broad sense.

By teaching music to future Church personnel then, there is high likelihood that we are preparing the grounds for the creative functioning of the Church in a world that always stands in need of newly imagined solutions to existing problems.

3. Conclusion

To conclude we reiterate that music has had a rich tradition within the Church, which has been able to contribute much towards healthy ministry practices. The “superficiality” in liturgical music at times that the Pope reminded of, calls for a revaluation of the potential that music contains, not only for intellectual learning, but also to support the total formation of the candidates and seminarians. This will significantly enhance the Church's service for the spiritual and social needs of people.

Making musical training serious means a couple of things. First it has to be in the schedule of the institute. Second, whereas the real musical part of the training can be limited to those with talent, there are other parts like musicianship in a general sense, music appreciation, arranging sound mechanics, cultural bridge building, leadership, competency building, etc. which are essential parts of the musical experience that can be taught to all the seminarians. General classes on the importance of aesthetics and the arts can also be part of the general curriculum.

Most of the above practices will make musical training mainstream. Music should not be relegated to a corner of the curriculum. Rather it ought to occupy a place of prominence like other important subjects. Very often the part of the curriculum dealing with liturgical music is reduced, in practice, to the theology of liturgy in which a few lines on music may be inserted, if at all. This is seriously insufficient, because no amount of teaching the theology alone is going to equip a seminarian

with the awareness of music and its true power, unless the teaching and the learning is accomplished through an experiential understanding of music as art, and as an approach to the aesthetics of living.

Liturgical music is really one of the very few areas where lay people are allowed to participate freely, which is to say that joining in singing a hymn, is the one area where the largest population of Catholics are allowed to take part. But the present level of emphasis on music does not reflect this statistic. Steps should be contemplated so that the liturgical action of music is so supported that more of the Catholic population can participate in it actively and meaningfully. This can include also disseminating knowledge about good liturgical music to the population in general.

Religious superiors sometimes report a fear that candidates may leave after their musical training. They seem to say, “we are cautious to train them, because they may leave after getting the training.” A suitable answer to this would be, “Sister/Father, let them go if they want to. They could become useful as good lay people, and enrich the liturgical music, the only place where most of the worshipping community is allowed a free place in our liturgy.”

Training in music must be a joyful experience for the worshipping community in front of God. As someone who has taken years to see the wisdom of this principle, I can confess that after years of painful drilling sessions of my musicians and choirs, I have adopted instead a joyful attitude to teaching music, and find it very rewarding. Music should be enjoyed by the teacher and the student. It means that appropriate methodologies of teaching should be adopted, and adequate training to be a teacher of music should be imparted to potential teachers.

As the community of the seminary learns music, a lesson can also be taught about music’s therapeutic value not because formees are going to be therapists, but because many human emotions can be understood and dealt with in and through music. If one is able to discriminate between the different uses of music that are available, then they can also be taught how these different types of music can be used for purposes of healing at least at an ordinary and pastoral level.

Once care is taken of the above points, musical training will become automatically a topic of conversation. And, that is important for future priests and religious to be oriented towards recognizing, enjoying and using good music in their ministries, always to the greater glory of God!