EXPRESSING SPIRITUALITY: THE ROLE OF MUSIC AND ART
JOSHUA SMITH

From Buddhist chants and Gospel choirs, to the Bible's Psalms and Laozi's Tao Te Ching, to the various paintings, sculptures, and carvings that decorate mosques, churches, and temples across the globe, music and art have always played large roles in spiritual and religious traditions. Like language itself, art and music are two of only a handful of things found in nearly every culture around the world, both in present day and throughout history. Also on this list is one form or another of spirituality or religion. It comes as no surprise, then, that the three are so often found together.

Even today, you are hard-pressed to find a religious space (be it a Jewish synagogue, a Catholic cathedral, or a Shinto shrine) where music and various works of art are not prominently, if not centrally, displayed.

What draws us to such music and art that many perceive as beautiful? Even the simplistic repetition present in a Buddhist chant can draw a person into deeper depths of experience. Is there something inherently sacred about these forms of expression that draws religious people? Or is there something about spirituality that yearns to be expressed in ways beyond the ordinary, which many consider art and music to be?

Many have found solace in expressing themselves through the arts, and perhaps that is a common goal of the arts and spirituality. People often use spirituality as a way to find certain peace, either within themselves or in the outside world, that cannot be found otherwise. Is it a similar experience with the arts? Is that what binds them together, a search for peace? If that is the case, how then is it that chaos is often expressed in paintings or in the intensity of measures of music?

We come back again to expression. We must express what we feel and what we experience. In many Buddhist traditions, recognition of this chaos is a critical step in finding peace. And here again, the connection between religion and art. It seems that the domains so often overlap, that it is possible to see no essential difference at all.

So what is art, music, spirituality to you? Do you see the overlap? More importantly, do you allow yourself the chance to experience all three and the opportunities to express and explore yourself and the world?

“...You have sound, and then you have that extra something that we all experience, that emotional response to the sound.” —Dr. Eugene Rogers (see page 2 for more)
Café Spiritus is a new initiative started by Bethany Battafarano ’13 (Program Assistant for the Center for Religious and Spiritual Life) as part of Week with Religion at Macalester. This event is aimed at the exploration of spirituality through the arts, in a coffee house open-mic style setting, in which students from varying religious-spiritual backgrounds will come together to share pieces of art and demonstrate ways that they experience spirituality through artistic expression. Art shared will bring focus to ideas about life and higher power(s) or higher sense of morality – ideas which are by no means restricted to religion but may span a spectrum of spiritualities.

Most of the art at Café Spiritus will be performance art, with vocalists, instrumentalists, and spoken word artists taking turns sharing their ideas of spirituality. But the event will also exhibit visual art, with artwork displayed by members of the Macalester community and sharing reflections on their understandings of art and spirituality, both personal and communal.

Café Spiritus will be open to anyone who wants to perform or share their art and to the greater Macalester community, to come participate and learn about ways spirituality is experienced through art. If interested in performing, please contact Bethany Battafarano as soon as possible. The event will take place on Tuesday, March 23, from 7:00 to 8:00pm in the Center for Religious and Spiritual Life (lower lounge of Chapel).

Music and Spirituality According to Dr. Eugene Rogers

Dr. Eugene Rogers, Director of Choral Activities at Macalester, spends a lot of his time with music. When he is not directing rehearsals for the four choral ensembles on campus, planning concerts, and teaching classes, he spends his time traveling around the world, guest conducting other choirs. Having been a musician from age five, he seemed like a great person to ask about the connection between music and spirituality. In his crowded office, surrounded by scores of music, shelves of CD’s, a piano, and more than a few other instruments I do not think I could name, we started talking about his views on the subject. He responded, “I personally don’t think there has to be, when I think of a lot of musicians who don’t have that.” He went on to explain that it is possible to focus mainly on the technical aspect of music. Historically speaking, however, many types of music (Western art music specifically) trace their origins to the Church. “There’s obviously a connection in terms of just historical time periods. When one looks at a lot of music, it has its origin in the church of some sort, or synagogue, or whatever that faith is.” The ancient quality of music adds to its mysterious qualities. “Music has been around since creation. The human voice is the oldest instrument; it’s always been there. There’s something pretty powerful to think that every culture in the whole world has a way of expressing itself through music.” (Continued on page 4)
Week with Religion:

Celebrating Religious and Spiritual Life at Macalester

March 21-28

Have you ever wondered: What happens at Catholic Mass, or at a Unitarian Universalist gathering? What is involved in Shabbat service and dinner? How does zazen meditation work? How do multifaith conversations happen?

The Center for Religious and Spiritual Life (CRSL) with the student religious orgs are sponsoring “Week with Religion” at Macalester. Everyone is welcome to come and experience the vibrant diversity of religious and spiritual life at Macalester. The events are visitor friendly and all questions are welcomed.

For more information, please contact the Center for Religious and Spiritual Life:

Email: religiouslife@macalester.edu
Phone: 651.696.6298
www.macalester.edu/religiouslife

Week with Religion Events

(continued from page 1)

Thursday, March 25
11:30 AM – Compassionate Conversation (hosted by the Multifaith Council, CRSL)
7:00 PM – A Path Home: A Story of Thich Nhat Hanh, a touring performance of In the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theatre (Chapel)
8:00 PM – Small Group Discussion (Mac Christian Fellowship, Dory 214)
9:00 PM – Mac Unitarian Universalists Worship (Chapel)

Friday, March 26
12:00 PM – Muslim Prayers (Chapel)
4:45 PM – Sitting@Mac meditation (Chapel)
6:00 PM – Dinner & Discussion (MacProtestants, CRSL)
6:30 PM – Open Shabbat Service (Mac Jewish Org, Kirk 8 Lounge)

Sunday, March 28
4:30 PM – Roman Catholic Mass (Chapel)
5:30 PM – Lenten Dinner Discussion (hosted by Mac Catholics, Weyerhaeuser Boardroom)
8:30 PM – Protestant Vespers Service (Chapel)

CRSL Program Assistant Matching Game!

1. One of my favorite songs is Perfect Day, by Lou Reed!
2. I listen to contemporary Christian music. A lot.
3. I can still remember parts of what I sung at my Bat Mitzvah
4. One of my favorite activities is taking walks at night with some wonder-filled music; for example, Sigur Ros. I consider this to be an active form of meditation that moves my thoughts in new and exciting directions.
5. If language is the dress of thought, then music is the gift of communicating whatever your dress or not.
6. I like to color...that's like art. I always color inside the lines.
7. I sang at four different wedding services, so if anyone has any impending nuptials and he or she needs some musical accompaniment, let me know!
found a way to release or express through music... without pressure, without money, without class, without stage and lights. There's something inherent in that... that every single culture found it’s own version of this thing we call music.”

His personal belief is that there is some spiritual aspect to music, which is inherent in its very sound, because music is something that is both tangible and intangible: “You have sound, and then you have that extra something that we all experience, that emotional response to the sound. To me, music itself, that sound itself, has something inherent in it, because you can’t grab that but you respond. Our body responds to that. I think it elicits some kind of spiritual response. And for some, they are able to say it’s this, this, this; but that’s the brain interpreting it, not saying what’s happening in your body, because the body responds to something that’s gorgeous.” He explained why we respond to music, pointing to harmonies that “lock up,” the overtone series, when things tune. He explained how powerful group dynamics can be, when many people are working for a common good and trying to achieve the same thing at the same time, creating and recreating music together. All of these complexities work together in a musical experience to create wonderful moments of spiritual release.

According to Rogers, another way that music and faith are connected is in humankind’s intense need to express itself. Because faith is so personal, one of the few ways available to express one's faith is musically. Dr. Rogers described this as a way of expressing care and love through the gift of music. Adding sustained pitch to text is another way of meditating on something and finding new meaning in something.

The feeling of music is the same for him no matter the musical genre. He believes that when music is good, if the performer is truly open and vulnerable to the music itself, she can achieve the same moving, spiritual response. If you allow yourself to embrace the details of the culture, it gets you inside the original intention and inspiration of the composer, so that you can achieve a moment of honest emotion and realize what the composer was inspired to write. All music has spiritual depth, but you must allow yourself to get inside what the composer intended in order to fully understand its significance.

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**Upcoming Events**

**March 29**
- **Passover Seder**, hosted by the Macalester Jewish Organization and open to the campus community.

**April 1**
- **Maundy Thursday** dinner and service
- **Making murals**: Explore spirituality through art, discussion, and snacks. All are welcome for what will be an exciting and colorful experience!

**April 4**
- **Easter Sunrise Service**

*Please contact the CRSL for specific information*

**Center for Religious and Spiritual Life Staff**

The mission of the Center for Religious and Spiritual Life is to recognize and affirm the diversity of religious and cultural experience at Macalester College. This includes nurturing students’ exploration of their religious tradition, helping express values by engaging in local and global issues with the aim of repairing the world and by participating in the educational life of the college by promoting critical study, spiritual conversation and faith exploration.

(Left to right from top) **Lucy Forster-Smith**, Associate Dean for Religious and Spiritual Life and Chaplain; **KP Hong**, Protestant Chaplain and Assistant Director for Religious and Spiritual Life; **Bob O’Donnell**, CSP., Catholic Chaplain and Assistant Director for Religious and Spiritual Life; **Barry Cytron**, Jewish Chaplain and Assistant Director for Religious and Spiritual Life; **Elly Marlow**, Lilly Project Associate; **Pattie Lydon**, Department Coordinator.

**CRSL Program Assistants**

- Alex McLennan
- Bethany Battafarano
- Beth Moretzsky
- Clara Younge
- David Schmoeller
- Joshua Smith
- Lorin Leake

**Answers to Matching Game**

Lorin - 7
Alex - 1
Clara – 6
Joshua – 2
Beth– 3
David – 4
Bethany – 5