

THE INTERSECTIONALITY OF MUSIC, SPIRITUALITY AND FAITH IN ACTION

Why are hymns an integral part of most religions' worship service? Why are songs always sung on marches, picket lines, and demonstrations? I think Pete Seeger explained it best:

Once upon a time, wasn't singing a part of everyday life as much as talking, physical exercise, and religion? Our distant ancestors, wherever they were in this world, sang while pounding grain, paddling canoes, or walking long journeys. Can we begin to make our lives once more all of a piece? Finding the right songs and singing them over and over is a way to start. And when one person taps out a beat, while another leads into the melody, or when three people discover a harmony they never knew existed, or a crowd joins in on a chorus as though to raise the ceiling a few feet higher, then they also know there is hope for the world.

Singing uplifts every dimension: it touches our *physical body* as we fill our lungs with air and feel the vibration in our throats. Our *intellect* responds to the meaning of the words, as well as the pleasing rhythm and rhyme. Our *emotions* resonate with the melody and harmonies. And singing touches our *spirit*, most noticeably when we sing in a group, as Pete alluded to, but even when singing alone, we are connected to the long lineage of humans who found solace and inspiration in songs.

Song *writing* is a whole other dimension. As with any creative endeavor, writing a song is a mysterious, even miraculous process. Sometimes, I don't feel like I'm *writing* the song; more like I'm *channeling* it. I heard Arlo Guthrie explain it this way (paraphrasing here):

It's like I'm sitting by a stream, and I see a song floating by, so I jump in and grab it. Later, I see another song, and I'll jump in and grab it...It's a good thing I don't live downstream from Bob Dylan.

When I finish writing a song that I think others will relate to, I feel awed and humbled, like I've been given a gift to share; something to contribute to this amazing world that has given me so much. If it's a song that lets others know they're not alone in their confusion or sorrow, that's great. If it's a song that will motivate them to get up and make their own contribution, then it's a double gift.

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