

Music and the Image Bearer: A Philosophy of Musical Stewardship for BJU

Purpose

As a school established in the liberal arts tradition, Bob Jones University has a responsibility to educate its students in the essentials of culture and the arts and sciences. We believe the visual and performing arts are foundational components of human culture and are vital to the formation and education of the whole person.

The purpose of this document is to set forth our understanding of the purposes and value of music in the Christian life and to provide a helpful framework for students, faculty, and staff to explore and enjoy music to the glory of God. In addition, this document suggests guiding principles for applying this framework within our institution's various contexts of scholarship, worship, and recreation. Finally, this document articulates the philosophical foundation on which institutional practices and policies are built and regularly reviewed.

Foundational considerations

The image of God

Music is both a unique and a universal aspect of our humanity. From the earliest recorded civilizations,¹ music has always been an integral part of human cultures around the globe. From celebration to lamentation, relaxation to ritual, we turn to music to express and explore the range of thoughts, emotions, and feelings that accompany life's experiences. One of the seven liberal arts, music has been studied over the centuries as a cultural, spiritual, scientific, mathematical, and aesthetic phenomenon and is clearly established as an academic discipline in its own right. And though what we commonly refer to as musical talent varies widely from person to person, there is a consensus among scholars that music is a basic component of who we are as humans.²

As Christians, we recognize our capacity to create and appreciate beauty (including the musical variety) is a distinguishing mark of the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). We create because we were created in the image of a Creator. Throughout the Genesis creation account, we also find God intentionally and repeatedly pausing, evaluating, and appreciating His creative work (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31).³ And though music is not mentioned specifically in the creation account, scripture shows us a God who reveals Himself to us through inspired song, who rejoices over His children in song (Zephaniah 3:17), and who delights in hearing His people take up instruments and lift their voices in loud and skillful praise to Him (e.g., Psalm 33:3, Psalm 150) – both in this life and into eternity (Revelation 5:9-14). Clearly, our Creator is a musical being, and creating and appreciating beauty is important to Him.

Stewardship

As image bearers, we each have a basic responsibility to steward what musical capacities we hold for the glory of our Maker. We are called to submit our bodies to His service (Romans 12:1-2), yielding every aspect of our lives to God's grace-fueled, redemptive plan to conform us to the image of His Son (2 Corinthians 3:18, Colossians 3:10, Romans 8:29). For many of us, music is an avocational pursuit at most – a pleasant accompaniment to the activities of daily life or a hobby that we take up in our spare time. For others, we exercise dominion through music as our vocational calling, and with artistry as our aim.

Still others may attempt to dismiss the topic of music altogether, perhaps claiming to have little talent or interest in music. In each case, however, we must acknowledge that music is not simply a nicety that Christians are free to consume or discard at our leisure or use for our own selfish designs. As we, following the pattern set by our Creator, intentionally make time to appreciate and share the beauty of music, we live into our potential as His image bearers and cooperate with His redemptive plan for human flourishing (Genesis 1:28, Ephesians 2:10).

Worship

Nowhere is our stewardship of music more significant than in our worship – whether in the day-to-day life-as-worship offerings we present as individuals, or in the special privilege and responsibility that all Christians have to gather with fellow believers in corporate worship as mandated by Scripture (Hebrews 10:25). Scripture points to worship as involving our whole being – intellect, emotion, and body – in a loving response to the person and work of God, marked by gratitude and awe, informed by the truth of the Word, led by the Spirit, and offered in ways that are in clear antithesis to the surrounding fallen, corrupt culture (Psalm 16:9, Psalm 84:2, Hebrews 12:28). Considering music’s connection to who we are as image bearers and its unique ability to integrate our thoughts, emotions, and physical capacities into a unified response or expression, it comes as no surprise that music plays an important role in God’s design for our individual and gathered worship (Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16).

A framework for music in the Christian life

We see then that regardless of our own perceived musical ability, personal interests, or vocational calling, Christians must be intentional about music as we endeavor to live into our potential as image bearers and worshipers. Embracing this stewardship means we must confront the challenges posed by the destructive effects of the fall, both in our own hearts and in the cultures in which we live (Ephesians 5:15).

Music, like any other element of culture, does not function amorally; our intellectual, emotional, and physical responses to music hold moral implications. We recognize, however, that these responses are not always universal; culturally conditioned responses to various musical expressions change over time and from place to place, especially given the long history of the Church and the broad range of cultures and sub-cultures on every continent where the gospel of Christ has powerfully transformed a people for His name (Acts 15:14). Furthermore, the dynamic nature of culture and creativity means most if not all categorical statements on specific music genres, instruments, and performance styles can be imprecise and difficult to apply with consistency or integrity.⁴

As Christians, we must not avoid these issues because they are difficult. Nor can we dismiss them as mere matters of preference. These issues call for scripturally-informed, prayerful, disciplined consideration regarding our musical choices in any given context, and we must be willing to do the necessary work to arrive at biblically sound answers. The following framework is a sequence of four essential considerations intended to help our campus community make musical choices with an eye toward this ultimate question: how can we best fulfill our calling as image bearers for the glory of God and the good of others?

Virtue

We are instructed by the scriptures to pursue virtue in every area of life, and our musical choices are no exception. In the scriptures the concept of virtue refers primarily to discerning what is morally excellent

so that we may bring glory to God as we fulfill the purpose for which we are redeemed.⁵ We must ask ourselves then whether a particular musical choice causes us to sin and to disobey the word of God in thought, emotion, or action. If our use of or response to the music in question leads us to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, or the pride of life (1 John 2:15-16), we should reject it as a worldly interference in our calling to pursue virtue and bear the image of God.⁶

Appropriateness

If our use of or response to the music in question does not cause us to sin personally (if it is virtuous), then our next consideration must be in reference to the appropriateness of our choice. What is the intended purpose for using music in this situation (e.g., sporting event, recital, a romantic dinner, worship, etc.) and what morally excellent musical options are likely to support the purpose of the occasion? Music that is acceptable for use in one context may still be inappropriate for use in another.⁷ For instance, if our response to the music is one of excitement when the occasion calls for mourning, we need to re-evaluate the appropriateness of our musical choice (1 Corinthians 14:40).

Expediency

Music that has been deemed virtuous and appropriate for a particular occasion must also be considered in light of expediency (1 Corinthians 6:12). Certain morally excellent and appropriate choices (i.e., “lawful” choices, to use the Apostle Paul’s term) can be better than others for a particular person in a particular place at a particular time. Everything that is lawful is not, necessarily, expedient (Romans 14, 1 Corinthians 8:8-12, 1 Corinthians 10:23-31). We must ask, does this musical choice best accomplish my purpose as an image bearer in this particular place at this particular time?

One component of biblical expediency relates to the identification a particular music has within a culture or sub-culture. Historically, the question of expediency has been complicated by the identification of music within a culture. Some musical forms and expressions are strongly identified in particular cultures with a lifestyle that is immoral, idolatrous, or in some other way contrary to a Christian worldview – in a word, worldly. As such, that music should be avoided by Christians living in that cultural context because the music we sing or play becomes part of our personal testimony.^{8, 9}

A second important component of biblical expediency has to do with our responsibility to live carefully toward our own conscience and charitably toward the conscience of other Christians. This means that in certain contexts we may be called upon to forego a morally acceptable choice due to the constraints of the conscience of another brother.¹⁰ Similarly, this also means that to show Christian love and unity based on the gospel and not based on personal or cultural preferences, we may at times need to bear with the lawful choices enjoyed by other Christians.¹¹

Artistry

Artistry is skillfully crafted expression applied to any creative arena of life. From the creation account to the construction of the tabernacle and temple, from the Psalms to the descriptions of the new heaven and the new earth, the scriptures offer a timeless testament to God’s appreciation for skillfully crafted beauty. With regard to music, artistry has to do with skill and excellence both in the creation and performance of music. If we are to proactively pursue our stewardship as image bearers charged with appreciating and creating beauty, we cannot be satisfied with merely avoiding worldly music or identifications. Our approach to music must not be ultimately defined by retreat, but rather by an intentional pursuit of what is lovely, praiseworthy, and beautiful in music. Therefore as we weigh musical options that are virtuous, appropriate, and expedient, we should also consider the criterion of

artistry: does the music in question display evidence of intentional design, creative expression, refined skill, craftsmanship, and musical excellence?¹²

It is critical to note here that both fine art and folk art fall under the rubric of artistry, and both can be an excellent expression of our creative capacity and image-bearing. While our academic emphasis at BJU is on the fine arts, we do not restrict the ideas of craftsmanship, artistry, or excellence solely to the fine arts or to a particular musical style. This issue is especially important in the context of gathered worship, where a misunderstanding of artistry or excellence can lead to a divisive elitism and worldly pride.¹³

In the end, what matters most is that our musical choices – whether recreational, devotional, or vocational – flow from a humble stewardship of the image of God and a desire for His glory and the good of others as we cooperate with His redemptive plan for human flourishing.

A framework for music in the Christian life

Image of God → Stewardship → Worship (life and gathered)		
Motivates the following questions:		
Virtue	Is it morally excellent?	Philippians 4:8; 2 Peter 1:3, 5; 1 John 2:15
Appropriateness	Does it support the purpose of the occasion?	Nehemiah 8:9-12; Psalm 137; 1 Corinthians 14:40
Expediency	Is it the best choice given current cultural identifications?	Romans 14; 1 Corinthians 8:8-12, 10:23-31; 1 Corinthians 6:12
Artistry	Is it marked by skillfully crafted beauty?	Genesis 1:4; Psalm 33:3; Philippians 1:9-10, 4:8
Informs the following choices:		
Recreational Music / Vocational Music / Devotional & Worship Music		

Guiding Biblical Principles

Broadly speaking, the following principles may serve as helpful points of reference for any Christian desiring to glorify God and live intentionally with regard to music. More specifically, the following principles are intended to inform musical choices that directly and indirectly affect our campus community life.

Our musical choices should be motivated by love for God and the desire to steward the image of God for His glory.

Regardless of our own perceived musical ability, personal interests, or vocational calling, we recognize and accept our basic responsibility to steward to the best of our abilities what musical capacities we hold from a love for God and a desire for His glory (Colossians 3:16-17, Ephesians 5:19-20, 1 Corinthians 10:31, 1 Corinthians 14:15). Whether composing an instrumental work, creating a new setting for an

ancient hymn text, singing in gathered worship, performing in a recital, attending a concert, or building a playlist for recreational listening, we will seek to make musical choices that are marked by virtue, appropriateness, expediency, and artistry. We will intentionally make time to appreciate and share the expressive experience of music, thereby living into our potential as image bearers (Genesis 1:28, Ephesians 2:10; Revelation 5:9).

Our musical choices should be guided by love and respect for others.

In Colossians 3, the Apostle Paul prefaces his remarks on music with the exhortation to “above all these put on charity” (v. 14). In fact, based on 1 Corinthians 13:1, we could say that without love, our music amounts to nothing more than noise. In light of this, policy makers will accept the responsibility to lead in the meekness of wisdom (James 3), regularly evaluating institutional choices and cultural trends on the basis of virtue, appropriateness, expediency, and artistry, while taking care to avoid wounding consciences of other believers (1 Corinthians 8:12). Those who, as students or employees, have chosen to place themselves under said policies will also acknowledge the need for a charitable attitude toward each other and toward those charged with the responsibility of setting institutional policies as well as demonstrate a willingness to follow the policies that are set in place. When encountering differences of opinion, practice, or cultural tradition, we will give our fellow image bearers the benefit of the doubt (1 Corinthians 13:7) and humbly acknowledge our prejudices when they are exposed (Acts 11:4-17; Galatians 2:11-16).

Our musical choices should avoid worldliness and evidence a desire to pursue Christ-likeness.

We will avoid musical choices that encroach upon our full cooperation with God’s redemptive plan for human flourishing, both in our own individual lives and in the lives of those whom we influence. This includes refraining from performing, composing, or listening to music that encourages in us the sins of lust, covetousness, or pride (1 John 2:15) and other works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21), for these sins run counter to God’s redemptive work to conform us to the image of His Son (i.e., Christ-likeness; Romans 8:29). We will avoid music that we believe to be worldly because of its identification with the corrupt aspects of our surrounding fallen culture.

Our musical choices for gathered worship should be marked by doctrinal accuracy, musical accessibility, and reverent expressions of the contrition, joy, and hope that overflow from hearts of gratitude, adoration, and humility in response to God.

We will select music for gathered worship and devotion that appropriately engages intellect, emotion, and body in a loving, reverent response to God as revealed in scripture (Psalm 16:9; 84:2; 150). We will use music that encourages the broadest possible participation within our assemblies, both in singing and reflecting on doctrinally accurate, scripturally rich truths (Colossians 3:16).

Music in our campus contexts: Scholarship, worship, and recreation

As a Christian educational institution, BJU is responsible to make musical choices at an institutional level that we believe are in alignment with our mission and in the best interest of our community of students, faculty, and staff. In doing so, we also seek to model for our students how to think intentionally about their own decisions about music for the glory of God and the good of others.

Music intersects campus life in a variety of venues and occasions, each with differing purposes. Because we want our campus to be a place where music is appreciated, practiced, and enjoyed in ways appropriate to the various settings and contexts of a Christian liberal arts university, we want to set

reasonable expectations and clear boundaries that are aligned with the philosophy set forth in this document. With this in mind, we are applying the framework of virtue, appropriateness, expediency, and artistry in our contexts of scholarship, worship, and recreation as follows.

Scholarship

Since the school's founding in 1927, the inclusion of music in the curriculum has been tied to the University charter's mandate to "[educate] students in the essentials of culture and the arts and sciences."¹⁴ And though curricular offerings have changed and expanded over the years, music continues to play a significant role in the general educational process of the school, which is aimed at empowering people to reach their highest potential as image bearers for God's glory.

We take seriously, therefore, the responsibility to prepare future generations of composers, performers, ministers, and teachers, not merely for the benefit of what they will produce, but because their very work is inextricably linked to the exercise of dominion as image bearers.¹⁵ In its academic and artistic programs, the Division of Music seeks to empower vocational musicians to pursue and share the beauty of God through what we call redemptive artistry: yielding our musical gifts and skills in submission to God's plan to conform us to the image of His Son Jesus Christ, and wielding those gifts and skills for God's glory and the good of others in cooperation with His redemptive plan for human flourishing (Romans 8:29, 12:1-2; Ephesians 2:10).

In keeping with this mission, the Division of Music also serves the broader student body through courses and experiences designed to cultivate a basic understanding of and an appreciation for musical artistry and its place in the Christian life, develop perceptual skills, challenge parochial and unexamined views on music, and expand aesthetic values. Concerts, recitals, and guest artist performances presented throughout the year provide context essential for the application of these skills and values and the development of the whole person. Students further steward their musicianship skills through participatory, experiential learning in ensembles, in private or group lessons, and in opera, musical theater, and concert productions under the caring guidance of our credentialed and highly skilled music faculty.

Within this academic context, in order to appropriately appreciate, critique, create, and participate in the art form, our students will acquire a familiarity with the development of music from the earliest civilizations to the present, including a working knowledge of a broad range of genres, some of which we as an institution choose to exclude from our worship and recreational contexts (see below). The framework outlined above provides a tool for critique in these cases, which should be approached with care.

Worship

Bob Jones University enjoys a rich, musical heritage from a conservative Christian culture for which we are thankful and to which we are committed. Part of this commitment includes cultivating the appreciation, instruction, and use of music in worship contexts with particular focus on the rich hymnody, both ancient and modern, that God has and continues to entrust to the Church. In our campus worship contexts, we are strongly committed to using music that is distinctly Christian, that is conservative in style, that is clearly distinct from worldliness, that promotes unity on our campus, and that clearly reflects and evokes an appropriate love, joy, thankfulness, contrition, and reverence worthy of the true and living God whom we worship.

Moreover, we endeavor to make these musical choices with our whole campus community in mind, recognizing that our faculty and student body come from diverse backgrounds with a wide range of musical tastes who desire to faithfully follow the Lord and render Him acceptable worship. Paul reminds us there will be this kind of diversity in the body of Christ and admonishes us to endeavor to walk in unity (Ephesians 4:2) and to live in harmony with each other so that together, we may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 15:5-6). Therefore in our campus worship contexts we will prayerfully apply the framework outlined above to conscientiously limit our musical choices to those which the vast majority of our community can sing and enjoy without distraction, allowing us to focus attention not on our musical differences but on the One whom we have gathered to worship.

Recreation and Campus Social Life

We recognize that our student body comes from homes and churches with a broad variety of musical choices. We want to make clear that we understand each family and each church must make choices with regard to music that they believe are wise, that conform to Scripture, and that allow them to walk obediently and worship acceptably before God. We also have this same responsibility on our campus.

Therefore we will strive to make discerning choices about music used in a variety of campus events outside of gathered worship, such as concerts, dramatic performances, sports events, society meetings, and various celebrations. For these occasions, we recognize that there are abundant musical expressions that, while not intending to directly worship God, celebrate the good gifts of God that all people enjoy while we live in God's world reflecting his image; gifts of beauty, love, friends, family, even hope in sorrow, joy in sadness, and courage in danger. Music can capture all of these wonderful expressions in a moral universe designed by a holy Creator. Moreover, because of God's common grace in the world, such music can be written and performed even by those who have not come to faith in Christ, who are unaware that the good thing they have created demonstrates that they were made in the image of God with a capacity to know, enjoy, and reflect God. Therefore, in the variety of campus activities that are not intended for gathered worship we will draw upon this wider range of musical expression as fits the occasion and context, while applying the framework outlined above.

Conclusion

In this paper we have endeavored to set forth our understanding of the place of music in the Christian life as it relates to stewarding the image of God, worshipping Him in reverence, and enjoying music for His glory and the good of others. We trust the biblical framework outlined here and the principles for applying the framework within our institution's various contexts will provide our campus community with a tool for informing and evaluating personal choices and institutional policy with grace, humility, and gratitude for the wonderful gift we call music.

¹ In Genesis 4:20-22 the musical arts appear among references to agricultural, scientific, and educational vocations.

² Recent advances in the field of neurology and brain research point to the unique role music plays in language acquisition and other aspects of cognitive, social, and emotional development. E.g., Anthony Brandt, Molly Gebrian, L. Robert Slevc. (2012). "Music and Early Language Acquisition." *Frontiers in Psychology*. 3 (327); Steven Brown, Michael J. Martinez, Lawrence M. Parsons. (2006). "Music and language side by side in the brain: A PET study of the generation of melodies and sentences." *European Journal of Neuroscience*. 23 (10).

³ "And God saw that it was good." Observe that this was not confined to the seventh day, reserved as a luxury for the Sabbath. Rather, we see an integral pattern of creation and reflection woven into to the day-in, day-out rhythm of the One whose image we bear.

⁴ For instance, sensuality in music existed long before jazz or rock-n-roll. The waltz was a scandalous genre when first introduced in the 19th century, yet very few if any listeners today would associate the waltz with its seductive origins. Jazz also had early associations with questionable morals, but there is hardly a genre today, either “sacred” or “classical,” that remains wholly untouched by its colorful harmonies and rhythms.

⁵ See Philippians 4:8 – “if there be any virtue...”; 2 Peter 1:3 – “According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue”; 2 Peter 1:5 – “add to your faith virtue...”

⁶ Scriptures are abundantly clear about the reality and danger of worldliness. They speak clearly and authoritatively, warning and instructing Christians to recognize and guard against worldliness in our hearts and lives. Worldliness in the scripture has both an internal and external aspect. The scriptures speak to the inward temptations that lead to worldliness in thought or action; our flesh is tempted to embrace worldliness by yielding to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:15-16; Romans 12:1-2). They also remind us that expressions of worldliness exist in any given age and culture, as the world co-opts for its own use what God originally intended for good (James 1:27; Philippians 2:15; Ephesians 2:2-3).

⁷ Scripture offers several illustrations of the concept of appropriateness applied to musical choices for a given occasion: e.g., Nehemiah 8:9-12; Exodus 15; Psalm 137.

⁸ We affirm that image bearers in all cultures are called to and capable of musical expression that is morally excellent, that these musical expressions will naturally reflect regional and cultural distinctives, and that this diversity is a beautiful manifestation of God’s power to call to Himself a people from “every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation” (Revelation 5:9).

⁹ Within in every culture some musical expressions are more easily identified with the corrupt, immoral aspects within that culture than are others. Identifying markers differ from culture to culture and may also change within the same culture. Worldliness is ever-present but never static – that is to say that the particular cultural artifacts and forms by which a fallen corrupt culture expresses its rejection of God may change over time. So in every age and in every culture Christians must be aware of what particular expressions of worldliness are being used by the corrupt culture around them and stand in antithesis to them.

¹⁰ This is true in music as in other areas of life. The reason for forgoing is not necessarily the sinfulness of the choice but rather the loving care and consideration of another brother or sister in Christ whose conscience may not permit this choice. This is not a double standard but rather a display of loving consideration for a brother or sister in order that together we may show Christian love and unity based on the gospel. Paul reminds believers that the hard work of preserving unity through the bond of peace is not based on personal or cultural preferences but on genuine humility, gentleness, patience and Christian forbearance that is lived out between believers whose conscience may differ over a particular issue.

¹¹ See Paul’s epistle to the Galatians.

¹² Given the choice of two musical expressions, one characterized by poor or under-developed craftsmanship, the other by refined excellence, we ought to seek out the latter, not necessarily on moral grounds, but because artistry, rightly used, has an ennobling, restorative effect in the lives of those who cultivate an appreciation for it. Admittedly, this can be subjective, but it is a choice with which we are all faced nonetheless, and one which we are obligated to equip ourselves for as we have opportunity.

¹³ We must also understand that artistry takes time, effort, and guidance to develop. We should encourage fellow image bearers in their pursuit of musical skill and craftsmanship by affording appropriate opportunities for developing musicians to cultivate their skills through performance in a supportive environment.

¹⁴ The Charter of Bob Jones College [University].

¹⁵ Scripture contains several positive examples of vocational artists (e.g., Genesis 4:21; Exodus 36:2; I Chronicles 15:22).