

The Church Makes a Joyful Noise

After a series of rather unfortunate events and untimely departures, my Pastor reluctantly named me his new music minister, just months after I was saved. Since it'd take all day to catalog the series of cataclysmic events necessitating such a preposterous decision, I'll just tell you, his list of options included the Church gathering around an eight-track humming "Kum Ba Yah". Looking back, that might've been the way to go.

My only credentials suitable to the job were that I owned a guitar, and that the world's music scene had already busted my bubble concerning ever attaining fame or fortune with it. Despite those immense qualifications, I knew I had my work cut out for me. I had no background in Christian music whatsoever. I'd have guessed the first line to 'Amazing Grace' was probably "God is good, God is great..."

My first mistake was to open up the choir loft to whoever felt they could make a joyful noise. It was a wonderful recruiting method, but after the first week I was rummaging through some mismatched old robes to find enough to accommodate all the new noise makers when the Pastor pulled me aside. "Uh... Guy," he said, "I've noticed most of the church is positioned behind me now while I preach?"

I nodded, smiling with satisfaction.

"And while it's great to have a really BIG choir," he continued, "You do realize they should at least be able to sing, or members of this church?"

I winced and stomped at the new thought. On his way out he added, "Oh, and we're getting complaints about setting the neighborhood dogs to howling."

It turns out Pastor was not only patient and forgiving, he was one smart dude. He simply suggested I reposition my big loud rock-n-roll guitar amp over behind the choir loft. Sure enough, after a few more services a big portion of new volunteers were stepping down. Immediately things began to turn around, including Pastor, who was no longer preaching to the choir!

I continued to feel overwhelmed however. I must've been the only music director in history to show up Sunday mornings asking the drummer, "How's that first song go again?" I was suffering from a serious case of Melodical Aorta Malfunction, complicated by extreme Lyrical Lostitis. I recall one service in particular. I'd just finished a song when suddenly I couldn't get the rhythm to the next one in my head. Knowing how a delay breaks the congregation's focus, I plunged ahead anyway. However, all naïve hopes of everything ironing itself out were quickly proven totally unfounded. My singing and strumming weren't jiving at all. It was so bad the band couldn't even join in. Heads popped up all around the sanctuary. I just had to stop.

Still trying to appear in control, I swallowing what felt like a wad of cotton, and tried again, then again. No better. Eventually the service came to a grinding halt. Dead silence. I looked to the drummer, but he was ducking behind the cymbals. In desperation I eyeballed the exits, picturing myself making a fresh start somewhere else, Mexico perhaps. Suddenly, something really wonderful happened. The congregation began shouting words of encouragement.

"You can do it," they said, "Try again!"

Someone began singing the tune, others joined in. They laid a pretty good foundation, so I joined in with them. Soon we were all off and running like nothing ever happened. A roar of approval resonated throughout the room! Pastor winked and gave me the thumbs up.

Who needs fame or fortune? I still get chills thinking of how wonderful the Body of Christ can be when we heed the Apostle Paul exhortation. (*Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.* **Ephesians 4:2-3** NLT).

But anyway- That was many moons ago. I'm much more comfortable in my role as a reluctant music minister now. (Seems I'm still called upon every time a more qualified director moves off.) I've even learned three verses to 'Amazing Grace'! I've experienced my share of it too, from the Church; every time my brain takes one of those little siestas.

-Guy Sheffield 4-13-07