

MINDING THE LIGHT

Our Collective Journal, Chapter 17

WHEN HAVE YOU ENCOUNTERED THE LIGHT THROUGH MUSIC?

*My life flows on in endless song;
Above earth's lamentation
I hear the sweet though far off hymn
That hails a new creation:
Through all the tumult and the strife
I hear the music ringing;
It finds an echo in my soul—
How can I keep from singing?
<http://tinyurl.com/o7dpsbg>*

From the hymn, "How Can I Keep From Singing?" The words were first published on August 7, 1868, in *The New York Observer*. Titled "Always Rejoicing", and attributed to "Pauline T"

Jukebox Driver

I long to close my eyes, but I can't because I am driving. I have traveled this long road between school and home a thousand times, but today is different. Today I chauffeur my parents on a journey none of us are eager to take. Since finding out my dad has weeks, perhaps days to live, they sit in back and hold hands like teenagers.

A golf-ball sized tumor grows in my father's brain leaving little room for once simple tasks. A few months ago he lost the ability to read and had to give up his Civil Engineering jobs. Now he spends most of his mental capacity trying to piece words together. When he speaks, they tumble out of his mouth like a puzzle.

"Leaving second latter with the vice and – howdy-there goes!" I can't tell if this is a question, a statement or a plea. I nod and smile into the rear view mirror

Mom doesn't know how to respond either.

A few years ago her short term memory began drifting away. Childhood memories now gather like eggs in a mental nest. Sometimes she can crack open the faces and names of friends and family. Other times, the morning harvest leaves her nothing to hold on to but questions and confusion.

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I feel helpless. Why them? Why me? Why isn't life easier?

Without a way for us to communicate, silence sits between us like a fourth passenger.

I hum "Blue Skies" to pass the time. Suddenly from the back seat, I hear my dad's voice, "nothing but Blue Skies, do I see." (Mom) "Blue birds, singin' a song (together), nothing but blue birds all day long!" I add my alto line to the second verse and when we finish as a trio, they beg for another. Surprised and excited, I rack my brain – "Summertime and the livin' is easy (duet from the back) "fish are jumpin' and the cotton is high...(trio)...Oh your daddy's rich and your ma is good lookin' so hush little baby, don't you cry."

Fascinated, I realize that if I begin the line of an old familiar tune,

MINDING THE LIGHT is (usually) a bimonthly collection of stories from the lives of members and attenders of West Hills Friends, a Quaker meeting in Portland, Oregon. Among Quakers, "minding the Light" means noticing, listening for and paying heed to the voice of our Teacher.

Early Quakers kept journals about their relationship with God to share with the community. A well-known example is John Woolman's journal, which has been continually in print for more than 200 years. Quakers believe that the Light of Christ is in everyone and that God speaks to everyone, giving us all stories to tell. We hope to carry on the tradition of sharing stories about minding the Light by publishing them for our community and making them available to others on the web.

Each issue is organized around a query about minding the Light. Our writers speak from their own experience, not going beyond the measure of Light they've been given. We hope these stories will transform our way of seeing God and each other and that they will bring comfort to those who seek news of God's presence in the world.

somehow they can access that part of the brain that holds melodies AND lyrics. The hardest part is coming up with the first line. I dig deep for anything: jazz standards, hymns, silly camp songs. Song after song we gain momentum like a train and slowly transform our collective pain into a gift. Each song connects us with a shared memory: singing in church, harmonizing at home, hiking in the woods. Music becomes the balm we now use when words fail.

Snaking through fields of fragrant alfalfa and over hills of dark pine, I am a jukebox driver, fed with the quarters of my parents' enthusiasm and joy. Through music, something otherwise inaccessible is drawn from our memories and we weave a love song. On and on I drive and we sing with abandon, winding our way to goodbye. 

– J. Townley

On Earth as it is in Heaven

One of the most meaningful ways that I have encountered the Light through music was during my sophomore year at George Fox University, when I took a History of Latin America course. The class was one of my favorites, and it included watching a 1986 film called *The Mission*, which depicted a Jesuit mission in South America. The movie touched my heart, and my less than favorable opinion of missionaries at the time, became more complex. A huge part of the story is about the redemption of a former Spanish slave trader, who dedicates his life to trying to undo the damage he caused to the native community; his name was Mendoza.

The song in the movie that stuck with me was an orchestral score called "On Earth as it is in Heaven." It starts slowly, with the strings, and leads into an angelic sounding choir. Today this song makes me think about the Kingdom of God, and the mystery of that always helps me to pray. How can the Kingdom be present now, and also on its way? How do I live in the Kingdom? How do I work to get there?

After I was done with that class, my love for history grew, and so I decided to take it on as a second major. The professor who taught that class would become my advisor, and was one of the people who reached out to me when I was in desperate need of help at Fox. This song makes me remember his kindness, and how I want to pray to have the eyes to see the needs that surround me.

The song also makes me think of Common Ground, and how I would pray for them. On the days where I felt like we had achieved a success, I would often fall asleep with this song playing, and visions of the happiness of future LGBTQ children. On the days where I felt defeated and angry, I'd shut myself in my room and play the song. Eventually my tears would stop, my fists would unclench, and my heart would soften again.

God only knows how many times I've listened to that song on repeat, but the Light I encounter in it makes me remember, and it leads me into something new, every time. 

– A.J. Mendoza

<http://tinyurl.com/mcuaf2y>

He's Chasin' Me

Sundays we'd climb the hill
threading our way
on the worn path,
fern banked, sprinkled
with pine needles,
damp breezes lifting off the lake,
sun slipping
through pines and cedars.
A line of girls in blue chambray shirts
with sailor collars edged in white,
we'd take our orderly seats
on split-log benches
strewn with hymnals.
Circled around the fire pit,
we'd wait for Althea to say,
"Open to Hymn 66."
Every Sunday we would start there.
"We gather together
to ask the Lord's blessing.
He chastens and hastens
his will to make known."
Every Sunday I would
fly off my bench,
flit between the pines and birches,
God chasing me
in a game of tag.

– Peg Edera 

*In praise or lamentation,
peace or desperation,
any way I do, I come into
the presence of the Lord.*
Refrain from "Any Way I Do"
by Dave Carter.

In this chapter there are a number of stories that include links to online songs. For easiest access, visit our website, www.mindingthelight.org and click on each link

Is there a God?

For years I had been questing, endlessly searching – is there a God? I tried reading books on the different ways to call God (Creator, Higher Power, Divine, Universal Energy). I attended Native American ceremonies. I walked in nature where I found incredible peace. I read Peace Pilgrim’s “Steps Toward Inner Peace”. I attended Jewish ceremonies and Christian churches. I even tried praying. I believed I saw God’s light in my baby son, but I wasn’t sure. It felt like the more I searched the more confused I got. So where is this God?

One mundane day when I was cooking, I was playing Joan Baez, a musician I dearly love. She sang the now-famous civil rights song, “Oh Freedom, Oh Freedom, Oh Freedom over me. Before I’d be a slave, I’ll be buried in my grave, and go home to my Lord and be free.” Her piercing voice sparked a light, a voice inside of me. Before I knew what happened my heart was so full I thought it would burst. My body throbbed with the overwhelming joy I felt. Unable to contain myself, I threw open the doors, ran outside and was singing the song at the top of my lungs, along with Joan.

Who knows why I finally found God in this way, but that is how God chose to come to me. As far as the slave part, I had felt like a slave in my head, limited by my own perceptions. I instantly found God in that split second and I have never looked back. 🔥

– Kristine Kiser

Listen to the song here:
<http://tinyurl.com/ndy5a53>

Minding the Light

K.D., Ben, Leslie and I were out at the VA’s long-term care facility in Vancouver one evening playing music for the guys. It was a thing I sort of felt led to do, and they thought it was a good idea and could make it so we went together. We played “Country Roads,” and “Ghostriders in the Sky,” and a bunch of fun tunes. We all sang, and traded lead vocals; Leslie had her violin. I brought my little amp and we’d borrowed a mic stand and music stands from the meeting house. We’d rehearsed a set-list. It was all set up with the volunteer coordinator.

The guys were pretty mixed: some had been in care and rehab for months, and some lived there. A guy in a wheelchair was a Korean War vet. There were guys in pajamas and guys in slacks and shirts. We didn’t need the mics, really, there were only about a dozen people, besides us, counting the aides and caregivers. It was their cafeteria. The lighting was fairly low, as I remember, and they sat around in chairs, some up close and some hanging back. I can’t imagine what they were carrying or how they managed. We were all there together.

We wanted to play songs they’d know, so I didn’t play much of my stuff. Besides, my stuff is pretty Jesus-y, which wouldn’t be fair. Towards the end of the set though I played a tune I wrote when I was first trying to get sober, a piece called “See My Freedom Come.” I was getting through it in pretty good order, finding the balance with my voice and guitar; when I was feeling pretty comfortable I looked up to see if it was going over. People were listening. There

was a guy in the back, a younger guy, no real visible wounds or whatever. He was way deep in the song. His eyes were closed and he was sort of moving his head in time. He had a look like a smile or like his mouth hurt. He was way deep in the song.

I’m a pretty good songwriter, but I don’t really know what music is. Sometimes I wonder what it looks like to a sensible mammal, like a dog. What’s a dog see when he sees a string quartet? A bunch of people standing around doing incomprehensible things. They’re not eating or fighting or having sex or picking fleas off of each other. My cat used to leave the room fast when she heard me open the guitar case.

I’m glad we went. K.D. and Leslie and Ben are friends. We entertained and diverted lonely, burdened, hurt men who made a space for us to give our gifts. I not only don’t understand music, I don’t understand anything, but it doesn’t matter; He says, “Go here and do this,” and we try to mind and that’s enough. 🔥

– Derek L.



[Soul Chair, Bob Henry]

Celestial Harmony

Today is Sunday, January 26th. Before today, I didn't expect to write anything for this chapter of Minding the Light. I'd drawn a blank for this topic. I'm not a musician, and while I like music very much, I'm not knowledgeable about past composers or present-day musicians or styles. I just enjoy it without knowing the style or the artist or group. My experiences haven't been much to relate, other than enjoyment – until today, in meeting, when we were singing.

My experience today was like none before. As a group, we were singing "Deep Peace", our voices blending and sounding beautiful with the harmonies, but I was experiencing much, much more. . . I felt as if I were on the edge of a huge, celestial choir that was singing the same song, like the heart of the galaxy singing. It was much louder and even more harmonious than our group alone. The clarity and sweetness resonated in an astoundingly beautiful way. This ecstasy didn't last long, but it brought tears to my eyes and filled my heart with gratitude and love.

These paltry words can't capture the experience, but it moved me to my core and filled me with awe. The grandeur and beauty of that moment were a gift far beyond words. 
– Anne A

Light Brigade

Sally Gillette, Clerk
Mike Huber, Recording Clerk
Carol Bosworth
Peg Edera
Pat Matthews
Julie Peyton
Cindy Stadel
Britten Witherspoon

The Light Illuminates Pride

Early in my music teaching career, I recall working with a student, perhaps 10 or 11 years old. I'll call her Mary. Mary was pleasant, easy to work with, and put practice effort in; however I never felt a strong teacher-pupil connection or that she embraced being a musician.

After a few years of lessons, Mary took the summer off. At the first class back, she told me she had been learning a new piece. Mary proceeded to play the melancholy ballad written by Randy Newman, "When She Loved Me," from one of the Toy Story movies. I believe she had it memorized. As I listened, I was overwhelmed with emotion. Mary had connected deeply with the music and was playing it with more expression than anything I'd heard prior.

When the moment came to say something, I most likely offered positive feedback. I also felt tremendous pride for the beautiful music that Mary had created. But along with my sense of pride were voices cautioning against: "You should be humble." "Being proud is selfish." Expressing pride will swell that child's head." Inside my head, pride was not ok. Pride was negative and something to be avoided.

Along with my own feelings of pride, I felt with certainty that this was a moment when Mary should feel proud of herself! So I took a risk, something teachers often do, and expressed my pride towards Mary and encouraged her to feel proud of herself.

Now, many years later, I find it curious that when considering, "when have I encountered the Light through music," that this is

the scene that immediately returns to me. The Light began to teach me the positive side of pride from my experience with Mary, but as I continue exploring my relationship with pride, I'm left with these questions:

- When should we be proud of our family, our friends, ourselves?
- What might be blocking our ability to experience the positive emotions of pride? 
- Aaron Pruitt

Query for Chapter 18

Our next Query: *When did an experience of the Light help you to discover something about yourself?* Tell us a story.

Your stories can be submitted in any publishable format: narratives, poetry, songs, art, other.

We publish stories as told to the extent that they fit within our guidelines.

Story Deadline: 5/18/14

Citadel of Otherworldly Light

One day I was sitting at the piano, just dinking around on the keys and I came up with a bit of music that I thought was pretty cool; I wonder what I'll call it – I know! I'll call it Citadel of Otherworldly Light. But then I got caught up in the everyday routine, and I forgot how it goes.

Years later, sitting at the piano, I came up with a bit of music that I thought was pretty cool; I wonder what I'll call it – I know! I'll call it Citadel of Otherworldly Light! But again, I got caught up in the routine and forgot how it goes.

Last fall our son Devin was visiting us from Taiwan, and one day I just sauntered over to the piano and started dinking around on the keys and came up with a bit of music that I thought was pretty cool. Devin walked over and said that's good, Pa. What do you call it? Hmm, I don't know. I think I'll call it Citadel of Otherworldly Light.

A few weeks after Devin left, I was walking to work through Wilsonville's Memorial Park on one of those crisp, cold October mornings with the mist hanging and the trees all gold and crimson, and I started thinking, man, I am so blessed! I am so blessed because I can sit down at a piano and dink around on the keys and come up with something that makes me feel so good and maybe it makes other people feel good too, and this was just something I started doing when I was a kid and I never stopped, and look at this world! Look at this beautiful, blessed world, with all its color and music and the lovely faces of people and the feel of cold air on your face and this WORLD... isn't going to last forever. We have to leave it. And I started feeling sort of sad.

But wait. This world we live in. It's just stuff. Mineral, animal, vegetable, vapor; Earth, Water, Fire and Air. Neither beautiful nor ugly, it's just stuff. What makes this world beautiful is the light shining on and in and through it. That Light comes from another world. It comes from the Mind of God. And our consciousness is nothing more than the mind of God shining through us. When we look at the world and see it as beautiful, lovely, holy, that's

because we are seeing it through the mind of God.

And when we leave this world the only thing we are leaving is the stuff. The Light of God that illuminates our consciousness continues. It's like a grasshopper slipping out of its old brittle body and moving on. The Light of God continues. Perhaps it goes on to illuminate another world, who knows? That's not the point. The point is, the Light goes on.

Having thought that, I felt a little better. 

— Jim Nail

[To hear Citadel of Otherworldly Light #3, follow the link below:]

<http://tinyurl.com/qg29qzr>



[Piece on left, *Cantus* ("Song" in Latin); piece on right, *Laus Deo* ("praise be to God" in Latin). Stained glass, Anne Witherspoon.]

Next Query for Young Friends

We encourage the participation of young Friends (of any age). Please consider helping younger children tell their story in words or images.

Query for Young Friends (or older Friends who prefer this query):

When did God help you see something about yourself?

Story Deadline: 5/18/14

Comfort in the Night

For the first time all day I was alone. Not really alone, nurses bustled about down the hall and the whole hospital building buzzed with the hushed vibrating energy that was still new and uneasy to me. My sister had just left and I knew her leaving came with both relief and worry for her. This hospital was hard for her, but she had been my rock for hours.

For the last time in a week I was all alone. The pain hadn't become tear-wrenchingly unbearable yet. The nurses' faces still shined with optimism and hope. But as I was left alone, alone for the first time all day, alone for the last time for a week, I cried. I was on the edge of a chasm though I couldn't see it at the time. All I knew was I was alone, ill and scared.

I found myself searching my mind and heart for something to comfort me. A fragment of a story, a glimpse of a melody. Where had I heard it before? I don't even know. But I found what I was looking for on YouTube (G(!)d(dess) bless the internet!) and listened to it all night.

The Lord is my Shepherd;
I have all I need,
She makes me lie down in green meadows,
Beside the still waters,
She will lead.

She restores my soul,
She rights my wrongs,
She leads me in a path of good things,
And fills my heart with songs.

Even though I walk, through a dark and dreary land,
There is nothing that can shake me,
She has said She won't forsake me,
I'm in her hand.

The song is “The 23rd Psalm (dedicated to my mother),” written by Bobby McFerrin and performed by the choral group Cantus. I’ve never been much of a Bible reader and the imagery of God as a shepherd has never resonated with me. A tall, thin, bearded god with a white robe and a shepherd’s crook reeks of watered down Bible stories for children and patriarchy.

C.S. Lewis reminds us, though, that we don’t have to understand how something works to know that it does, whether that thing is a good meal or god’s sweet comfort. I don’t know how these words— words that may or may not describe how I view the Divine— came to make themselves known to me that night. I certainly do not know how they soothed my very being in that dark and dreary land of the OHSU emergency room, but I do know that they did. 

—Alyss

[The song/video that comforted Alyss can be seen at this link:]

<http://tinyurl.com/psalm23cantus>

*It acts like love - music,
it reaches toward the face,
touches it, and tries to let you know
His promise: that all will be okay.*

*It acts like love - music, and
tells the feet, "You do not
have to be so burdened."*

*My body is covered with wounds
this world made,
but I still longed to kiss Him,
even when God said,*

*"Could you also kiss the hand
that caused each scar,
for you will not find me until you do."*

*It does that - music –
helps us to forgive.*

Rabia of Basra (c. 717-801)

[Rabia of Basra is a beloved 8th century female Islamic saint and mystic and a central figure in the Sufi tradition.]

Communion

One night I was at an evening worship service with my mother. The interior of the church was softly lit. It seemed to be glowing, perhaps from candlelight. The congregation was singing a hymn when, suddenly, I began to cry. At first slowly, but within seconds I was sobbing, and then I was crying uncontrollably. My mother handed me the keys and told me to go sit in the car. I had the sense that it was to spare either her or me further embarrassment. I went out to the car and remained there until the service was over.

This experience was one I have puzzled over. It was never discussed and there wasn’t anyone who could have helped me to make sense of it. But it was a memory I clung to because there seemed to have been something transformative about it. It felt as though something had shifted or melted or cracked open. There was something so beautiful and hopeful and precious that I could only cry in the face of it.

I grew up in a world of books, fantasy, and interior landscape. Members of my immediate family rarely connected or interrelated with one another, but seemed to live parallel lives. We lived miles from extended family. I had attended seven different schools by the time I was fifteen and I had only transient connections with teachers or classmates. I had been sent to a variety of churches in several denominations and had not found a sense of belonging in any of them. Church, school, and home were part of the world I moved through, often with a book in front of my face and almost always in a reality of my own making. I viewed the world from

the inside looking out in fear, suspicion, and isolation.

In that moment, however, I experienced communion as something more than the religious rite I had been brought up with. I experienced intimacy, mutuality, accord, connection...

In that communal lifting of voices in worship I encountered the Light and it was almost too beautiful to bear. 

—Mica Coffin

Antigua Experience

A few years back I had the honor of being part of Progressa, a Guatemalan Friends teaching group. Our mission was to provide one-on-one English tutorials to university age young people who spoke little or no English. Most of the students were from educationally underserved villages whose first language was a local dialect, with Spanish being a second, or even third, tongue. Based in the magical old capital city of Antigua, Guatemala, we had endless opportunities for exploration after intense morning and afternoon classes.

One particular day in early December, a motley group of 10 or 12 teachers and students decided to walk to one of the many colonial church ruins. My tutee during that time was a 19 year old first-year law student named David. He proved himself to be a quick learner, a stellar soccer player, and a great companion for our afternoon excursions.

Upon arrival at the ruins our group hovered about, exploring various nooks and crannies, rooms for prayer and contemplation, dormitories, etc. We descended a

stone staircase to reach a chamber with a rounded ceiling and astounding acoustics. As if directed to do so, we gathered in a circle, each testing his/her own personal sounds apprehensively in that 16th century sanctuary. With no warning whatsoever, a clear, rich, resonant, and spine-tingling baritone voice filled the space with a Latin rendition of Ave Maria.

My jaw dropped. Where did this young man from rural Guatemala learn to sing like an angel? Ave Maria? Words cannot adequately describe the sense of awe, gratitude, Light, and Presence that hushed all other thinking and movement while we listened to the music. To me, it was beauty defined through sound. My heart swelled and I wanted to stop that moment in time, to savor and hold it, make it last, preserve it by depositing it in my recording memory bank. Its poignancy, depth and lucidity brought me to tears, as did the seeming perfection of being there at that time, with those people, astounded by the fact that the bearer of such musical brilliance was none other than my student, David.

A round of joyful applause from the bystanders above punctuated the song's ending, followed by continued singing among our beaming group, in three and four part harmonies, as we explored and discovered musical repertoire commonalities. David melted back into the larger group, but the magic continued – not of the same essence – but lovely, powerful, and joyous all the same. I felt like a child at a surprise party hosted by God himself, where everyone receives gifts - a full uplifted heart and a sense of wonderment over hidden treasures revealed. 
– A/W

Song of Peace, Place of Peace

In the spring of 2010 my husband and I took a trip to occupied Palestine. On a Sunday morning we worshipped at Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem. Also visiting there was a group from Germany who sang “Dona Nobis Pacem” as a gift to those attending.

That afternoon the choir went their way and we went ours, spending time in Ramallah with the Ramallah Friends Meeting and Quakers from many places in the world as we celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Friends Meeting House.

From there we traveled to Jenin to the home of Canaan Fair Trade. Upon our return to Ramallah some good friends said, “You must visit Neve Shalom, Wahat Assalem. It’s an intentional community where Israeli Palestinians and Israeli Jews have chosen to live together in peace. It is only about 30 minutes to Ben Gurion Airport, where you can get your 4 a.m. flight with no problem. We will take you there.”

We enjoyed Neve Shalom, Wahat Assalom, sipping tea and meeting folks from the community. We were delighted to find that there was a building just for meditation and schools that were bilingual. As evening approached we strolled out to look over the valley as lights began to twinkle on toward the airport.

A woman approached and, as strangers often do, we asked, “Where are you from?” “We are Lutherans from Germany. We are on our way home,” she replied. “Oh, we met a group from Germany at Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem. They sang “Dona Nobis Pacem.” It was

beautiful,” we said. “That was us!” she exclaimed as others from the group walked over to join us.

There in the lovely quiet and fading evening light together we raised our voices in “Dona Nobis Pacem, smiling and weeping at the same time. Our song of peace and for peace floated out into the silence as we parted ways from Neve Shalom-Wahat al-Salam.

– Lorie Wood

[See photo of the Rainbow Gate at www.mindingthelight.org

[A version of Dona Nobis Pacem with one woman singing 3 parts can be found at this link.]
<http://tinyurl.com/obyc9le>

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Light to fight the shadows

In the spring of 2013, after returning to work from maternity leave, I began advocating for a student with a disability who shall remain unnamed. Our new-to-the-field psychologist insisted that the student didn't qualify for specialized instruction because test scores were too high. Yet the teacher continually expressed concern that the student's needs were not being addressed.

This was the kind of situation that involved multiple team meetings and conversations in which, at many times, we all walked away with a different understanding of the same information. After three months of consistent research, shared resources and follow up with the team between myself, the special education team, parents, professional consultations, and the general education teacher, we began to make some headway in documenting the student's needs and finding the right channels through which to pursue an improved plan.

This was a highly emotional situation for me. Every time I spoke with the child's mom, I could feel her emotions running over. Love and appreciation abounded. I knew that I was doing the right thing in spite of the turmoil I felt within our team – a group with whom I had previously felt completely safe and secure. Suddenly nothing felt secure. I was filled with fear and anxiety over where I fit and what my role was. But these conversations with the parent spurred me on.

As this situation finally came to its end, we had one of our last gatherings (the kind that you have

with the team before the official meeting). As I sat with the team, full of emotion, an experienced psychologist who had been asked to help us with this specific case calmly reviewed all of the information about this student including file review regarding diagnosis, documentation of skills, and options available for addressing concerns. He gave credit to me for having "done a lot of work to gather information". Others agreed. There were no arguments. The plan was in motion. A path cleared with everyone working together. I sat through this meeting in silence. In this moment all of my hard work and emotional laboring paid off. But I could hardly say a word. In the end I didn't have to.

As I drove home, the building emotions that I'd been holding at bay for several months overwhelmed me. They had no name. Just questions and a mystifying yet familiar pain. I had gotten what I wanted for this student. So why couldn't I celebrate it? And why couldn't I speak with confidence when my entire team was ready to listen? I sat with these intense feelings and questions for nearly an hour. Then as I was nearing home, I heard this song ("Read All About it, Pt. III, by Emeli Sande), which put words to my experience:

<http://tinyurl.com/8zj2x4m>

The floodgates opened as light poured into me and I felt a release of all that had been stuffed inside. 
– Name Withheld

I play the notes as they are written, but it is God who makes the music.
J.S. Bach

Journeys

Come walk with me,
the journey is long....
the journey, the journey,
the journey is long

And in isiZulu:
Hamba nathi kalulu latu (repeat)
Kalulu, kalulu, kalulu latu (repeat)

A powerful gift of music came to me on the Scottish island of Iona, halfway between Ireland and Scotland. It is known for the abbey that St. Columba founded. St. Columba retreated to Iona after a bloody war over scripture. He felt responsible for having been part of the cause of so many people dying, so he went into exile on the first island from which he could not see Ireland. The monks of the monastery he founded were all pacifists, which made it difficult when the Vikings came marauding.

Other than St. Columba, Iona is known for being where the veil between earth and heaven is thin, and Spirit is extra accessible. There is now a retreat center in St Columba's rebuilt abbey on Iona, and I went there for a workshop about Pilgrimage.

The Iona Community met in the abbey for worship every day at 9 a.m. and 9 p.m. On Tuesday evening, we had a service about pilgrimage. We all stood up and processed halfway around the church to the song "Come walk with me, the journey is long." We sat in new chairs and heard the message before getting up and processing around the other half of the church to "Walk with me oh my Sisters/Brothers." Both songs were sung over and over, like the songs from Taize.

On Wednesday, we took a pilgrimage around the island. It was about 50 degrees, and we were walking in the wind and the rain from the dying edge of a hurricane. As we trudged through the Scottish mud, cold and wet heads bent pushing against the wind, we began singing “the journey, the journey, the journey is long.” The song actually got us to the other side of the island, where they fed us on hot tea and flapjacks. Then we struggled and sang our way back.

I knew the song had taken root in my soul, along with the posture of hunching against the wet wind as we walked forward. I had not realized just how deeply the roots had grown. Within a year of my returning to the states, my mother had a stroke, and as I accompanied her struggles to return to health, I realized that I was living the song they had given me in worship in Iona. Come walk with me, the journey is long, the journey, the journey is long.

Come walk with me (us) the journey is long... (repeat) the journey, the journey, the journey is long. 

As a side note I was fascinated to discover that “Hamba Nathi...”, the isiZulu version of this song, was used in the movie *Invictus* about Nelson Mandela and South Africa. It can be heard at: <http://tinyurl.com/yc5ebrt>
– Dorothy Day

I have often felt a motion of love to leave some hints in writing of my experience of the Goodness of God.”

John Woolman

Good Friday

Measured by the scope of itself, Good Friday ends in silence and death. I've given up trying to lead worship on Good Friday. It's too painful for me.

A few years ago, a small group of us gathered for worship on Good Friday. I was only there to worship. That is, nothing was expected from me. I could wander into the brokenness and grief of Good Friday without feeling responsible for anyone else's experience. I could turn all of my attention inward.

I sat with my head in my hands. Although I was grateful to them for creating a safe space, the people around me faded to the periphery of my awareness. At one point, there was an activity for those who chose to participate. I think candles were involved. Notes were written, and placed in a basket. I stayed in my seat, wandering through the labyrinth of my own inward places.

I gave myself permission to feel some of the things that I keep locked away: grief, loneliness, and all those nameless shadows that haunt us. It felt good to know that I was safe enough to travel in this direction.

Then, the singing reached me. The lyrics were simple. The voices were woven into soaring harmonies. It was so beautiful, and so present. The music carried the people around me back into my awareness. These lovely people were singing. The singing reached me.

I don't remember any of the words. The music wasn't conceptual; it wasn't meant to teach me anything. The music

wasn't social; I didn't feel compelled to blend my voice with the voice of others. The music was spiritual. The sound was an expression of God's presence.

In the context of my grief and loneliness, the music was transformative. It was an expression of love in the place where I felt least lovable. It was an expression of community, where I felt most alone. None of my shadows were banished, but they lost their dominion over me. It was like finding a sunlit window in the darkest cavern. It was a reminder that Universe is larger than my current surroundings.

Even on Good Friday, the music reached me.

Often, I choose not to sing in worship. I find it more rewarding to give my full attention to the music as it pierces the shadows within me. The shadows may remain, but they feel less formidable when there's music pouring through them. 

– Mike Huber

When you think about the role of priests and Levites in the early days of Hebrew worship, do you consider the importance put on music, or the number of Levites involved in music? These quotes illustrate the seriousness with which the Jews viewed singing and the playing of instruments.

Those who were musicians, heads of Levite families, stayed in the rooms of the temple and were exempt from other duties because they were responsible for the work day and night.
1 Chronicles 9:33

Four thousand are to be gatekeepers and four thousand are to praise the LORD with the musical instruments I have provided for that purpose.
1 Chronicles 23:5