

Be Still, My Soul: An Introduction for Choir by the Composer

(This is a transcription of the introduction given by JD Jude Jicha to the Sanctuary Choir at First Congregational UCC Appleton on October 16th 2024.)

I'd like to start by praying together using some really old rhyming song lyrics. These are so old that no one knows what the original music sounds like; we do know that the passage is marked "a song for voices", plural, meaning a song for choir.

Let's pray, from the Tanakh book of songs:

ka-VOH ki-VEE-tee a-do-NAI, I put my hope in Adonai;
va-YAYT ay-LAI va-yish-MA shav-a-TEE, he inclined toward me and heeded my cry;
vai-ya-a-LE-ni mi-BOR sha-ON, he lifted me out of the pit of misery;
mit-TIT ha-YA-ven, the slimy clay;
va-YA-lem al-SE-lah rag-LAI, and set my feet on a rock;
ko-NEN a-shu-RAI, steadied my legs.
vai-YI-ten b'-fi SHEER kha-DASH, He put a new song into my mouth;
te-hi-LAH le-lo-HEE-nu, a hymn to our God;
yir-U ra-BEEM v'yi-ra-U, may many see it and stand in awe;
v'-yiv-t'-KHU ba-do-NAI, and trust in Adonai.

Repeat after me: Dear God, when you help me climb a mountain [choir repeats], let me not squander the opportunity to use my voice [choir repeats]. Amen.

Hit it, Doc Natty... [first verse of piano/vocal version performed by Dr. Nathan Birkholz & JD Jude Jicha]

For me, this piece is a pilgrimage, and I am asking you to come with me on the journey. Just like John (Albrecht) is called to create divine harmony by building unity out of cacophony, I have my own personal ministry to fulfill, and so do you. Because you have been and you will continue to be a gift from God for more people than you will ever know, and that gift, that light, is meant to be shared, not hidden under a bushel.

The function, or purpose, of music is connection. It connects sensory perception with ideas and emotions. It connects the space we are in by filling it with waves and vibration. It gathers people together and causes them to connect with one another.

Anxiety occurs when there is a perceived physical or emotional threat. Unfortunately, enough negative experiences can cause the nervous system to misfire or even go into continuous stress alert. When we sing together, our nervous systems begin to connect and coregulate, and they're saying to each other: "You are being heard and seen. You are not being dismissed or rejected. You are safe now."

In addition to this miraculous phenomenon, we are all built with a neurological system whose connections detect and respond to the presence of God, even though we've yet to understand its evolutionary function. Therefore, "Believing" in God is besides the point. God exists for you and within you, even if God is a rose by another name. So, in a way, finding God is like finding a part of yourself. And, somewhere between the cracks, where connection is being created, is the place I most often find God.

I packed all of my bags for this pilgrimage. So, as we set out on this road together, I want you to know that it is okay to bring along all of your emotional baggage, too, so that the connections we create may help you unpack some of it along the way, and so that your naked, authentic, divine truth resonates and shines. Let's sing together. [rehearsal begins]