

Measuring the Music (Part 12)

Biblical Tests for the Christian's Music

Text: Eph. 5:10

Introduction:

1. Having studied the key Scriptural truths in relation to music, we need to learn to apply these principles in our music choices both in our personal lives and in the church.
2. This session will be a practical workshop where we analyze a series of music samples and seek to apply the Scriptural principles we have learned.
3. To that end we will use a music assessment sheet with four Scriptural tests to apply to music.
 - The Music Test
 - The Message Test (lyrics)
 - The Glory Test (performance)
 - The Separation Test
4. Some considerations with the use of this sheet:
 - Some of the questions are designed for the Christian musician. We should be willing to learn from the Christian musician who holds to a biblical framework for music just like we learn from the Christian scientist in his field of knowledge. In all things, the Word of God is the final authority!
 - Don't worry if you can't answer all the questions. Just fill it in the best you can and you should be able to answer enough to determine a song's character.
 - The purpose of this exercise is to try and help you to establish a biblical framework in your heart and mind for making discerning choices with music. It is designed to get you applying the Scriptural principles in a practical way.
 - In summary, we want music where, as far as possible, there is a consistent message between the man (performer/artist), the music and the message.
 - When analyzing music, start with the very clear Scriptural pillars and use them as your primary reference points for determining if a song is sacred or not. Be careful of judging music based on your own opinions rather than the clear guidelines of God's Word.

TESTS FOR CHURCH MUSIC

On the basis of our studies regarding the *Biblical Philosophy of Music*, the student is encouraged to develop a *music standard* that would be suitable for an Independent Baptist Church music ministry. This exercise would help you to clarify your own convictions concerning music and to know if you would be able to serve in the music ministry of a particular church. In order to help facilitate such an exercise, the following questions are fielded.

I. IN RELATION TO MELODY

A. Is the song built upon the melody, the harmony, or the rhythm?

Basically, music that is primarily melodic is more complicated in rhythm than harmonically based music; if, on the other hand, the rhythmic forces are dominant, both melodic and harmonic elements are subdued.¹

B. Is the melody distorted by unnatural syncopation?

Syncopation sometimes arises naturally out of the rhythm of a melody. Rock produces an unnatural syncopation which reacts against the metre of a song and overpowers the whole metrical framework.² This phenomenon is sometimes indicated by unnatural pronunciation of the lyrics.

C. Is the melody distorted by scooping and excessive ornamentation?

Ornamentation in music is like the adorning (Gk *kosmos*) of a beautiful Christian woman. (I Peter 3:3 c.f. Ez. 16:11)

II. IN RELATION TO HARMONY

- A. Does the harmony contour and beautify the principal melody of the song?
- B. Does any part of the harmony work autonomously?
- C. Does the harmony draw attention to itself and so detract from the beauty of melody?
- D. Does each harmony part move melodically?
- E. Are there any parallel dissonant intervals such as consecutive sevenths and ninths?
- F. Are there any chords that slide chromatically rather than resolve harmonically?
- G. Are there any dissonant harmony elements that do not resolve or whose resolution is so long delayed as to become almost detached from the harmony context?

III. IN RELATION TO THE RHYTHM

- A. Does the rhythm arise naturally out of the melody?
- B. Is the rhythm autonomous in its relationship to the rhythm of the melody?
- C. Does syncopation (if any) arise naturally from within the melody and thereby support the melody?
- D. Is syncopation forced onto the song from without and thereby upset the metrical structure of the song?
- E. Is there a rock rhythm in the song, with its repetitive, artificial stress on naturally weak beats?
- F. Does the rhythm draw attention to itself rather than the melody?
- G. Does the rhythm so dominate the song so as to subdue melody and harmony?
- H. If the worshippers were to put movement to the rhythm, what part of their bodies would they move and would their actions tend to be vulgar or even obscene?

IV. IN RELATION TO THE MUSICAL TRINITY

- A. Is the music in balance melodically, harmonically and rhythmically?
- B. Is the ordering principle observed where the harmony gives its glory to the melody and the rhythm in turn supports the harmony?
- C. Does the music sound -as one? II Chron 5:13

V. IN RELATION TO THE LYRICS

- A. Does the music support the natural metre of the lyrics?
- B. Does the music distort the natural metre of the lyrics?
- C. Does the music force the unnatural pronunciation of the lyrics?
- D. Are the lyrics true to the teachings of the Bible?
- E. Do the lyrics give our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ the reverence due to his Person?
- F. Do the lyrics have good doctrinal content?
- G. Are the lyrics so generic that the song could be sung to man rather than to God?

VI. IN RELATION TO PERFORMANCE

- A. Do the singers and musicians portray the spirit of worship or showmanship?
- B. Do the singers portray the attitude of adoring saints or carnal lovers?
- C. Does the singer use breathiness to give the feeling of intimacy?
- D. Do the singers employ a harsh or throaty timbre?
- E. Does the singer use non-verbal sounds such as *groaning*?
- F. Is the appearance of the music ministry befitting an audience with the King of Kings?
- G. Is the dress code aesthetic, modest, gender distinctive and harmoniously adorned?

END NOTES

¹ New Grove Vol XV p. 810

² Makujina p. 135, 149

³ John Makujina quotes from Kimberly and Lee Smith's book, Oh, Be careful Little Ears. They say:

⁴ The problem with rock is not syncopation per se, but a syncopated beat in dominance to the harmony and melody, which it usually overwhelms. Makujina expands: -Kimberly and Lee Smith whose treatment of syncopation is one of the most nuanced and balanced of any CCM opponent, add that syncopation is misused (i.e. becomes unnatural) when it conflicts with the melody rather than complementing it... Oh, Be Careful Little Ears, 44-45,66. ||

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MUSIC ASSESSMENT SHEET

Title of the Song:

Name of Soloist/Group

Assessed by:

THE MUSIC TEST:

Is the melody primary? Does the song emphasis melody? “Speaking to yourselves in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Eph. 5:19)

IN RELATION TO MELODY	
Is the song built on?	Melody <input type="checkbox"/> Harmony <input type="checkbox"/> Rhythm <input type="checkbox"/>
IN RELATION TO RHYTHM	
What Metre? 2/4,4/4, 3/8, 6/8 etc	2/4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3/4 <input type="checkbox"/> 4/4 <input type="checkbox"/> 6/8 <input type="checkbox"/> 12/8 <input type="checkbox"/>
Balance with Melody/Harmony?	Muted <input type="checkbox"/> Balanced <input type="checkbox"/> Overpowering <input type="checkbox"/>
Syncopation?	Natural (from melody) <input type="checkbox"/> Unnatural (foreign to melody) <input type="checkbox"/> None detected <input type="checkbox"/>
If Rock beat what pattern?	da-DA-da-DA <input type="checkbox"/> da-da-DA-da <input type="checkbox"/> da-da-DA <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/>
IN RELATION TO HARMONY	
Does it Beautify the Melody?	Plain <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Beautiful <input type="checkbox"/>
Draw Attention to itself?	No <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Pronounced <input type="checkbox"/>
Unresolved Dissonance?	Undetected <input type="checkbox"/> Mild <input type="checkbox"/> Pronounced <input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/>
Sliding Chords?	Undetected <input type="checkbox"/> Mild <input type="checkbox"/> Pronounced <input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/>
Any Jazz or Blues elements?	Jazz <input type="checkbox"/> Blues <input type="checkbox"/> Undetected <input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/>

THE MESSAGE TEST:

Do the lyrics communicate a clear, biblical message? “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” (Col. 3:16) “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth.” (Jn. 4:24)

How are the lyrics pronounced?	Natural <input type="checkbox"/> Unnatural <input type="checkbox"/> Overpowered by the music <input type="checkbox"/>
Are they synchronized with melody?	In sync <input type="checkbox"/> Ahead of beat <input type="checkbox"/> Behind the beat <input type="checkbox"/>
Scriptural content & substance?	Strong <input type="checkbox"/> Weak <input type="checkbox"/> Generic <input type="checkbox"/> Vague <input type="checkbox"/> Repetitive ¹ <input type="checkbox"/> Average <input type="checkbox"/> Un-Scriptural <input type="checkbox"/>
High Honour to our Lord?	High <input type="checkbox"/> Man-centred <input type="checkbox"/> Cross-over <input type="checkbox"/> Feelings/experience oriented <input type="checkbox"/>
Edification?	Spiritually Edifying <input type="checkbox"/> Fleshly Entertaining <input type="checkbox"/> Mix/in between <input type="checkbox"/>
Other?	

¹ I.E., Lacks substance. Not many words repeated over and over.

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THE GLORY TEST:

Does the performance bring glory to God? Is it spiritual and Christ centered or sensual, worldly and artist centered? “Speaking to yourselves in psalms, hymns and **spiritual songs**, singing and making melody in your heart **to the Lord**” (Eph. 5:19) “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, **do all to the glory of God.**” (1 Cor. 10:31)

Spirit portrayed?	Humble <input type="checkbox"/> Affected <input type="checkbox"/> Showmanship <input type="checkbox"/> Sensual <input type="checkbox"/>
What kind of worship?	Adoring Saint <input type="checkbox"/> Carnal lover <input type="checkbox"/> Mix/in between <input type="checkbox"/>
Vocal techniques?	Natural resonance <input type="checkbox"/> Breathy <input type="checkbox"/> Throaty <input type="checkbox"/> Groaning <input type="checkbox"/> Vocal Fry ² <input type="checkbox"/> Pop/rock Style <input type="checkbox"/> Sensual/intimate feel <input type="checkbox"/>
Scooping & sliding?	None <input type="checkbox"/> Mild <input type="checkbox"/> Pronounced <input type="checkbox"/>
Vocal Ornamentation/Improvisation?	None <input type="checkbox"/> Adorned <input type="checkbox"/> Gaudy <input type="checkbox"/> Subtle <input type="checkbox"/>
Appearance?	Modest <input type="checkbox"/> Sensual <input type="checkbox"/> Gender distinct <input type="checkbox"/> Aesthetic <input type="checkbox"/>
Body Language	Sensual body movements (e.g., dancing, jerking) <input type="checkbox"/> Hands Raised/gestures that draw attention to singer <input type="checkbox"/> Intimate with microphone (e.g., hand held, close to mouth) <input type="checkbox"/> Appropriate/Befitting a sacred song <input type="checkbox"/>
Edification?	Edifies the spirit <input type="checkbox"/> Appeals to the flesh <input type="checkbox"/> Mix/in between <input type="checkbox"/>

THE SEPARATION TEST:

Does the song and its composer(s) represent a dangerous bridge for a conservative, fundamental church to CCM and other compromise? “Take us the foxes, **the little foxes**, that spoil the vines: for our vines *have* tender grapes.” (Song 2:15) “A **little leaven** leaveneth the whole lump.” (Gal. 5:9) “Now I beseech you, brethren, **mark** them which cause divisions and offences contrary to **the doctrine which ye have learned**; and **avoid** them.” (Rom. 16:17)

Do the composers have links to blatant, unscriptural errors?	Charismatic Movement <input type="checkbox"/> Ecumenical Movement <input type="checkbox"/> World of Secular Rock and Roll <input type="checkbox"/> New Evangelicalism <input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/>
Do they have strong ties to the world of CCM or is their reputation primarily that of a classical/sacred composer?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Unclear <input type="checkbox"/>
Any potential problems with their philosophy of music? Other issues?	
Note: Knowing just where to draw the line in this area can be a challenge to navigate at times. If in doubt, seek counsel from your pastor or a godly Christian who understands the principles of godly music.	Eph 4:11-14 “And he gave some...pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine , by the sleight of men, <i>and</i> cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;”

² Vocal fry is “a way of speaking (singing) in which the voice is very low-pitched and has a characteristic rough or creaking sound.” (Oxford Dictionary)

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<u>Any final thoughts/observations?</u>	
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Conclusion: Remember that good Christian music is built around melody, is an outflow of the filling of the Word and Spirit and its purpose is to edify the saints and exalt the Saviour (Eph. 5:18-19; Col. 3:16-17)