



GOSPEL HANDS

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Do Deaf people enjoy music?

By James Campbell, IPM Instructor/Evangelist



Writing about music is challenging for me because I don't enjoy it. I recognize my bias, so I'm striving to be as objective as possible. Despite trying to understand why so many people love music, I've concluded that my profound deafness plays a significant role. Growing up in complete silence, I had no concept of music. Discovering that music was everywhere—in grocery stores, elevators, and seemingly every waking moment—was a shocking revelation for me, and it seemed like madness.

My daughter, Maddy once mentioned that her English paper was about a medical genetic treatment to restore hearing in deaf individuals and asked if I would be interested in it. I told her I wasn't, as my deafness is an integral part of my identity, and I wouldn't want to change that. She pointed out that restoring my hearing could cause immense stress since I

couldn't simply turn it off, potentially leading to trauma. This further solidified my belief that listening to music every waking minute would be overwhelming. I could assume that no music would be too traumatic for hearing folks.

Research indicates that between 1 and 3% of people do not enjoy music at all. These individuals are not tone-deaf and can understand the emotional significance of a song, but their brains simply do not find listening to music rewarding. In the deaf community, I suspect this percentage is much higher, possibly around 80%.

Hearing loss, or deafness, affects each person differently. Some individuals with hearing loss might struggle to hear certain tones or higher voices. Meanwhile, others, including those who identify as Deaf, can perceive the full spectrum of sound through vibrations and rhythm. Some deaf individuals might enjoy music because their hearing peers do, possibly due to peer pressure.

Deaf individuals who lost their hearing as teenagers or who have some residual hearing might enjoy music more than those who were born completely deaf and don't find music enjoyable. To gain insight into this, I reached out to my church interpreter, Alicia, and asked her several questions.

She explained that there are some hearing people in our church who don't sing at all; they just stand there. Some sing in their minds and move their lips without making a sound, while others simply enjoy listening to the music. In other words, not everyone sings, which was surprising to learn.

In contrast, all the deaf members stood in front of the audience and felt pressure to participate in the singing, fearing they would be judged for not joining in. As a result, they sang the songs without truly enjoying them. Some deaf members chose to arrive at church after the songs had ended, while others decided not to attend at all.

From my experience attending both deaf and hearing churches, I can outline the differences between the two. In deaf churches, services typically include two short songs that last less than 10 minutes. In contrast, hearing churches often feature long songs that can last anywhere from 20 to 40 minutes, which can be overwhelming for deaf individuals. One deaf ministry at a hearing church decided to conduct their own singing in a separate room while the hearing congregation did theirs. When the singing ended, the deaf ministry joined the hearing church for the sermon.

In conclusion, music is not for everyone, especially for some Deaf individuals. Incorporating flexibility and sensitivity within your deaf ministry's approach to music can help them have a more positive experience and possibly even start to enjoy singing.

The command to worship - music or not?

By Kevin Maki, Director of IPM Deaf Ministries

"...but be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;" Eph. 5:18b,19



One of our young Deaf ladies insisted that she wanted to see the handbell choir. As her Pastor, I suggested there was no real way for us to provide interpretation since there were no words. It was less than 5 minutes before she returned in tears to our Deaf service after realizing that there was great emotion attached to her recollection of "hearing" music before she became profoundly deaf. Had I been quicker to recall scripture, I probably could have helped her avoid this unnecessary exercise: 1 Cor. 13:1 puts sounding brass and tinkling cymbals, as bright and shimmering as they might be, in their rightful place!

So what is it about music that stirs the heart in a way that other forms of media cannot?

Before God created the very first Deaf person, the morning stars "sang" together and the sons of God "shouted" for joy! (Job 38:7) Furthermore, when the multitude of disciples began to "rejoice and praise God with a loud voice" Jesus commended them and stated the

fact that if they should keep silence, the stones would "cry out." (Luke 19:37,40) In other words, there was and is a very primitive need for God's creation to make musical noise in worship towards the Creator.

The problem arises when our love for self is exerted over the love of others. All of us have preferences. There is nothing sinful about that. However, if I insist that my trumpet be used in the Deaf church for worship, I am not edifying the body of Christ, His church (1 Cor. 14:8,12). Despite all the skill that I may display in producing a pure God honoring tone and perfect pitch, the Deaf cannot hear at this frequency range! Furthermore, if we insist that all 4 stanzas of all 4 hymns being sung by the hearing congregation be interpreted and copied by the Deaf, we often end up producing some sort of robotic poetry of word, word, word without ever bridging to the meaning that was intended by the author to stir the heart.

So, does that mean we should abandon all efforts to satisfy the command of Eph. 5:18b?

Of course not. Part of being "filled" with the Holy Spirit includes the idea of corporate worship "speaking to yourselves" and the other concept is individual worship "making melody in your heart to the Lord." This, I would suggest, requires a delicate balance. Not all Deaf people have the same background. For those that have residual physical hearing, there may indeed be some ability to bridge the gap between the hearing world of music and the Deaf equivalent of poetry. With some creative work, I have seen song leaders light up the faces of the Deaf congregation with smiles as a subtle shift in word play is used for a repetitive song: "My God is so great..." morphs into "My (heavenly) Father is so great..." and then changes again as the signer declares through spelling "My A-B-B-A is so great...". I have also seen the successful use of storytelling to help bring out the visual nature of a song. George Mattheson wrote of vivid colors and striking images, even as he was going blind, in a way that has captivated Deaf signers who have witnessed a friend lose eyesight first to Usher's syndrome and ultimately becoming fully Deaf-blind. Suddenly a hymn takes on meaning which strikes a chord in the heart of a person who is able to relate to the desperate need that we all have to turn only and always to the Creator!

Our Deaf church normally only signs one song possibly before or after the preaching hour. Culturally, this is sufficient for the people with whom we minister. When I go to Africa, the Deaf may sign 3 to 4 songs especially in a camp setting before each preaching session. Just as in their culture there may be friendly "competition" between groups of choirs, the campers may be spurred on to divide and practice a team song before coming back together in corporate worship. This makes perfect sense because the Deaf are a subset of the majority culture of the hearing people. While a hearing service in America is preceded by at most 20 minutes of music (1 song for the Deaf), the African worship may extend past an hour of worship and praise (3 or 4 songs for the Deaf). God doesn't prescribe just how much music is necessary; instead, God just desires our hearts to move our lips, hands, or even feet to glorify Him! "Take my hands and let them move, at the impulse of thy love." (from Frances Havergal's "Take my life, and let it be")

O come, let us sing unto the LORD: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms. Psalms 95:1-2

What does music mean to me?

By Marta L. Galdamez, IPM Deaf Ministries Assistant

What music means to me...



Growing up as a hearing person with music all around me, I learned to appreciate different types of genres and languages. Gradually through the years I have understood that being a hard of hearing person now the music, tones and beat are completely different.

Three years ago, I considered myself a hearing person, always enjoying the sound of instruments and listening to the harmony of female and male voices in a beautiful melody and joy. Today, I consider myself a hard of hearing person with the limitations of missing the lower tones in certain songs and hymns. I won't compare my situation with others (hearing or deaf individuals), but I realized that my love for music has not diminished nor listening to the beautiful melodies which it is not as clear as before. I am more convinced that attending music concerts in the past was the cause of my hearing loss as

I have gotten older.

We know that deaf and hard of hearing people are different in the perception of different environments. Deaf people enjoy the full sound through vibrations while hard of hearing people enjoy high-frequency and loud sounds with high pitch voices. Besides, when we talk about music most of the time we think about the sound it projects; usually when we associate the sound, we pair it with the beat.

Psalm 100:1 says "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord..." this passage does not make a distinction between the deaf, hard of hearing or hearing people. These days we compare many ways of making music, especially taking in consideration the "feeling" element. For a deaf person it might be difficult to identify with a song or a hymn that never was sang. As James states, the deaf feels obligated to follow the interpreter not understanding the meaning of the song. For a hard of hearing person like me, to be able to enjoy the melody and harmony of a song this needs to be played and sang through high sound and voice.

Many years ago, I was interpreting a special music for the deaf who were attending my church that Sunday. I believe that the way I "felt" the song and used my hands showed its meaning, When I finished, I could see some tears in one deaf lady's eyes. I praise the Lord for using my hands to minister to the deaf. A missionary friend of mine once said: "Sign the way the deaf will understand." Something I have kept in mind.

Today, modern music with the lights and entertainment have been focused on the person's feelings. For hard of hearing people is a distraction most of the time, especially where loud instrumentation overpowers the voices. Since the 70s the vocals have been quieter, and the instruments have been louder making it less accessible to those with hearing loss. Use of hearing aids can remedy these issues to a degree, but they are not available to many people with hearing loss and come with their own set of problems. Some users might prefer to adjust their music with software rather than listen to the mix through hearing aids.

In summary, right kind of music can be edifying and pleasant for the hearing as well as the deaf if it has a positive message. The power of music can be limitless, unfortunately, many musicians and songwriters take advantage of people's minds and feelings.

Music in the Hearing and Deaf Community

Alicia People, Arlington Baptist Church Interpreter



Music has been precious to groups of people all around the world for centuries. As early as the first century, musical scores have been preserved: giving us a window to what once was and providing modern humanity a connection to people of the past. My parents played music in our home all my life. As children, our evenings concluded with hymns on a CD player to help my sisters and I go to sleep. My mother, being a skilled guitarist, taught my oldest sister and me how to strum and play guitar chords. Elizabeth, my other sister, learned to become a proficient pianist and played classical pieces by Bach, Beethoven, and Debussy almost everyday from middle school to adulthood. Naturally, I developed a love for the music I grew up with because hearing those familiar tunes remind me of childhood comforts. However, it has always intrigued me how one song draws out completely different responses depending on who the listener is. I can listen to a hymn and be moved to tears, while another person can hear the same hymn and be bored out of their mind. There is not one concrete reason

this occurs. We develop preferences based on our upbringing, our values, and our experiences.

Chatting with a Deaf friend of mine, James Campbell, I listened to his personal thoughts on his dislike for music and found them quite interesting. To use his words: "Despite trying to understand why so many people love music, I've concluded that my profound deafness plays a significant role." He went on to express to me the disconnect he feels when watching people who can hear become moved with emotion when listening to certain music. However, we both agreed that there are plenty of Deaf people who love music and consider it a positive addition to their life. I believe this is parallel to why hearing people also can have little interest in music. That is, it depends on what component of music interests us. Undoubtedly there are aspects of music that can be expressed visually. The visual part of music does not exclude Deaf people from enjoying it. Rhythm can be expressed visually. Emotion can be expressed visually. Poetic lyrics and the feeling of sound vibrations moving through an instrument can again, be expressed visually. These components are part of what makes music beautiful to all people. On the other hand, some aspects of music, like the combination of notes which make up a tune, can only be enjoyed by hearing.

True, you can still feel the different vibrations of a note, but this experience still cannot detect a tune. If I were not able to hear the tune of a song, I'd be in the same boat with James because my personal love for music comes from hearing those pretty tunes growing up. Music reminds me of family and love. For others, though, their love for music comes perhaps from watching a dancer leap and twirl on a stage with perfect rhythm; or from seeing a drummer tap his drumsticks wildly while feeling each beat in their chest; or reading the lyrics to a song as the words influence imagery and paints a picture in your mind. If any of those reasons draw you to music, losing your hearing would not take away the love you have for it.

Rev. Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, the Father of American Deaf Education, wanted the Deaf to trust Christ as Savior. He wrote to his future wife.

"...Three men prayed ardently for all the deaf . . . , that God would bless Mr. Clerc and Mr. Woodbridge and me, and give all the deaf . . . clean hearts and enable them to trust in Christ and repent of all their sins. The thirty persons sang hymns and some of the ladies cried very much. I heard them weeping. How kind they were to pray for the deaf . . . ! Oh! Do not forget God and Christ. Pray for a very clean heart. Trust in Christ. Avoid all sin. And may God bless you my dear pupil..."

