

Moravian Music 101 *(Very Short Form, especially for use in Moravian congregations)*

The Moravian music heritage is alive and well, and for this glorious past and present gift, we thank God. The richness of Moravian music arises from the hearts of its composers, text-writers, and musicians. This richness results from the composition of pieces written to as high standards as the composers and authors can reach, and from singers and players reaching for their very best musicianship to communicate their music.

People often ask, “What is Moravian music?” The answer? Music written or arranged by Moravians, or based on Moravian texts or tunes. Or even music which is loved by Moravians and has been “adopted”. Some of these beloved works (“Bethany” on Palm Sunday, or “Thou Child Divine” on Christmas Eve) were written by composers who were not Moravian.

What is good church music? Music which is well written, in whatever style; and music which expresses good theology. Music in the “classical” style may be too hard for some congregations, and for them, classical music is not good church music, for it does not express their best musicianship. What is important is that church music be quality music in whatever style, and that it be presented as well as possible. In the church there is no room for laziness or indifference, and this holds for music as well as for anything else.

You’ve heard of our rich musical heritage from the 18th and 19th centuries, and indeed it is a treasure – some 10,000 manuscripts and early prints of music used by the Moravian settlers in early America. The Moravian Music Foundation is proud to be the custodian of this collection, unlike any other in the world. But it is exciting to know that Moravian music is still being written. You are probably aware of living, working composers and poets, people who are writing for a specific need. In true “Moravian” tradition, these people have other “day jobs,” and their music and poetry come from their experiences in the world. The Moravian Music Foundation houses a growing collection of 20th century Moravian music, and has already begun a collection of 21st century Moravian music, so that people in the 23rd century can know what Moravian musicians were doing in this time!

The validity of a music program for a congregation does not depend upon numbers. It depends upon the hearts of those involved. And the most significant part of the music program of any congregation is not its choir, or brass choir, or trombone choir, or church band, or even its music staff – it’s the congregation itself. The congregation itself is the “first choir”. The richness of Moravian music arises from the hearts of those who practice it, and in their connection to the Lord. Visitors to Moravian congregations feel this and are moved by it.

Let us take time to recognize the value that our music has played in our worship and in our lives, as we sing familiar songs and some not-so-familiar. And let us be thankful that God gave us this gift, this peculiar phenomenon that certain ways of combining sounds, pitches and rhythms and words, can touch our hearts as well as our minds, can express things which mere words cannot, and can draw us closer to one another and to our God. Thanks be to God!