

Kathy Hillman: Music, the universal heart language of worship

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"Music is the language of the soul. God is the author of music." (J.D. Riddle, 1946)

Music has permeated my life. Gran rocked me to sleep singing hymns. To my parents' chagrin, next-door neighbor Bill Rountree coached me on "The Aggie War Hymn" before his wife, Margaret, taught me "Jesus Wants Me



for a Sunbeam."

Kathy Hillman Grandmother Robinson gave me piano lessons, and Mother made sure I knew to stand for Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus." In high school, I became First Baptist Church of Eldorado's barely adequate pianist.

Some of my favorite music memories revolve around Paisano Baptist Encampment. "What was your favorite song?" I asked 9-year-old Rachel after our annual Mitchell Family sing-along this summer. Her "One Bottle of Pop" wasn't a surprise. Everyone at the party, whether 3 or 93, loves that number.

"How about church songs?" I continued. Our song sheet includes a variety,

from “Deep and Wide” with hand motions to “Oh, How He Loves You and Me.” Thoughtfully, Rachel picked “I’ll Fly Away.” That’s the preference of my husband, John, too.



What Jennifer Hillman sings with the Praise Team at Easter. (Kathy Hillman Photo) What’s your favorite? Our daughter, Holly, chooses “Holy Ground.” Our younger son, Michael, likes “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing.” His wife, Jennifer, who sings on a praise team, lists “How Great the Father’s Love for Us,” which she sang at their wedding. My answer depends on style and memories. “Shall We Gather at the River” holds special significance because Holly and Kevin selected it for their Guadalupe River-side wedding, and Mother insisted the congregation sing the hymn as we exited her funeral.

However, if I could just choose one, B.B. McKinney’s “Glorious is Thy Name” ranks first. The words worship, and I enjoy the chorus. McKinney led music at Paisano before my birth and edited the milestone 1940 *Broadman Hymnal* that probably shaped Baptist worship “more than any

other book except the Bible.”



The choir at First Baptist Church in Austin performs in 1959. (Photo courtesy of the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives) In response, the Baptist General Convention of Texas formed the Church Music Department in 1945 and employed J.D. Riddle to promote the hymnal, conduct workshops, train choirs, encourage paid music directors and match churches with music ministers and evangelistic singers. In a precursor to today's music controversies, Riddle promoted "heart congregational singing" and warned against both "semi-jazz" and too-formal selections.

V.F. "Pete" Forderhase directed the department from Riddle's death in 1954 until 1971, when Sam Prestidge took the reins. The purpose expanded to "assist churches in establishing, conducting, enlarging and improving a music program which teaches music to members; trains persons to lead, sing and play music; and provides music in the church and community."



Performance by the Singing Men of Texas. (Photo courtesy of Singing Men of Texas through the Texas Baptist Music and Worship office) In 1975, Prestidge founded Singing Men of Texas. They have performed across the world, glorifying God and proclaiming the gospel while providing inspiration, fellowship and encouragement. Singing Men will celebrate their 40th anniversary with a special concert on Tuesday evening, Nov. 10, at Cottonwood Creek Baptist Church in Allen during the 2015 BGCT annual meeting. Singing Women of Texas commemorated their 20th anniversary in 2014.

Recent years have seen a myriad of changes in music and worship. Once upon a time, church size and location determined music presentation that consisted primarily of choirs, solos and ensembles accompanied by piano and/or organ. Not so now, with multiple worship services, styles, instruments and philosophies—often in the same congregation—along with cowboy-focused worship, as well as services in 69 languages.



Baptist hymnals on Kathy Hillman's grandmother's piano. (Kathy Hillman Photo) However, one truth remains: Music and worship are vital components in every church.

Brent Edwards serves as Texas Baptists' interim director of music and worship. "In this era of ever-evolving worship ministry, a one-size-fits-all approach has long-since passed," he explains. So, the [music and worship office](#) listens "carefully to the needs of Baptist churches across the state."

Consultations and varied events and workshops provide opportunities for learning, sharing, fellowship and worship, regardless of church size or service style:

- Worship Summit, this year in September in Plainview and San Antonio, honors the request of worship leaders and music ministers for opportunities to learn from proven professionals while sharing with peers about worship styles, challenges and celebrations.
- Fiesta Ring, a festival/workshop for handbells, includes a mass-ringing service.
- Children's Worship University is filled with practical, creative, challenging and inspiring sessions for children's worship and children's

choir leadership.

- Everlasting Choir Celebration for Boomers and Beyond provides encouragement, networking, rehearsal and performance under a master director.



I'm thankful God created music to touch the soul. I'm also grateful B.B. McKinney gifted us with a hymnal he called "heart music for the masses" and wrote in my favorite hymn, "Let the saints of ev'ry nation sing Thy just and endless praise!"

Kathy Hillman is president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. She also is director of Baptist collections, library advancement and the Keston Center for Religion, Politics and Society at Baylor University.