

The Magical Power of Music

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This address was given at the 2000 Family Expo Conference

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Music is a gift from a loving Father in Heaven to bring peace and light into our lives, to sooth us when we are weary, to bolster us when we are down, to invigorate us when we need motivation, and to help us feel our Savior's love surrounding us. There is a place for music in the lives of all of us, even if we can't sing a solo or can barely sing along, even if we can't play a musical instrument or can't read a note. Music is for everyone. We are grateful to all who do have these talents, for they bless our lives by creating the music that we love. Still, we do not have to have these talents in order to love and be blessed by music.

When I was a young girl I used to occasionally spend the night with a cousin. She had a beautiful soprano voice and a natural ability with music. As we would lie in bed she would name a song and say, "You sing the harmony." Then she would start and I would join in singing the melody with her. She would be quite disgusted with me and say, "I said, sing the harmony." We'd start again and the same thing would happen. Then she'd say, "Okay, you sing the melody and I'll sing the harmony." As soon as she started I would join her singing the harmony. My voice only knew how to follow whatever her's did. Finally, she would give up and we'd both sing the melody.

Many years later I would lie in bed with my seven year old son, John, and we would sing together. (Knowing how to sing well is not a prerequisite to singing with children—they love you just the way you are.) We would press our cheeks together sometimes, singing the melody, and the effect was magical—almost like a vibrato sound as our two voices became one. He said, "Is this what they call singing in harmony." I could only say, "Close enough for us." Those were sweet moments as we sang Primary songs together,

with this mother hoping the messages would sink deep into his heart, and the hearts of my other children as I did the same with them.

Church leaders have said, “Through music, man’s ability to express himself extends beyond the limits of the spoken language in both subtlety and power. Music can be used to both exalt and inspire or to carry messages of degradation and destruction” (Priesthood Bulletin, Aug 73, p. 3). We know Satan uses music to destroy, and we must counteract his determined efforts by using music to exalt and inspire our children and ourselves. You have the power to bring the right kind of music into your home. When you do it with kindness and love it can work a miracle in your family. Here are some ways this can happen:

(1) The right kind of music calms family contention: I was riding in the van with my daughter-in-law and their four children, ages one to seven. We had been out doing errands for some time and they were getting tired and fussy. I had taken my place—“Grandma you sit here with us!”—in the back seat with a child on either side all buckled in. The two youngest were in the middle seat in their car seats while Mom sat in the driver’s seat. (No one up front with Mom—air bag). As time wore on the children became tired and out of sorts. Some whined, some cried, and all were very unhappy. I couldn’t seem to calm them. All my tricks were used up and I was tired, too. That’s when their mother put a CD in to play. As soon as the first strains of music began to fill the car, everyone went quiet. It was the sound track to *The Prince of Egypt*. They had heard it many times before and loved it. The music was mesmerizing. All the whining and crying stopped and they began to quietly sing along. The one-year-old was caught up in the magic of the moment and was calmed as well.

On another visit I noticed the power of music in their home once again. It was Sunday morning, with a little contention and chaos settling in. These wise parents put on a CD of Primary songs and the mood completely changed. My husband and I were touched as they began to sing along, “I love to see the temple, I’m going there someday.” It’s hard to fight while you’re singing about the temple. Appropriate music can calm the soul and bring the Spirit of the Lord into a home, no matter the age of the family members. Some may say, “Not so with my teenagers. They don’t want to listen to the music I choose.” That’s the time you validate their feelings with a comment like, “I understand. Nevertheless, we will be playing this music this morning.” Be kind, gentle, respect, and . . . firm.

One mother reported that she played sacred and uplifting music every morning as her family got ready for church. She said her teenagers didn’t like the idea at first. They had their own music. She kindly and firmly set the standard without preaching about bad music and played the music. She said it didn’t take too many weeks until they all seemed to like it. “At least,” she said, “they were being cooperative and the Spirit could be felt in our home.” That leads to the next point.

(2) The right kind of music keeps youth and all of us on track: President Ezra Taft Benson, in a talk he gave to the youth, said, “We encourage you to listen to uplifting music, both popular and classical, that builds the spirit . . . learn the hymns . . . Don’t listen to music that is degrading” (Ensign, May 1986, p. 45). Did you notice? He said, “popular.” Popular music is fine as long as it is “uplifting.” There is great power in quoting the prophets, and that includes what they have said about music. You can tell

them your point of view, but if you quote a prophet it has greater power. After all, who is it that reveals His will to the prophets? The Savior.

Knowing that the Savior cares about the music they listen to can be persuasive. Don't quote it, however, during the heat of the moment—when they are listening to their inappropriate music. They don't listen during the heat of the moment; they are too busy defending. Wait until a calmer time and then you might say, "I've been thinking about music and the power it has in our lives. Let me share with you what the prophet said," then quote him. Sometimes night time is a good time, quietly in their rooms, or during a calm dinner table discussion. Or have a family home evening devoted to the value of good music. Have them give input regarding what songs they believe would be uplifting and let them come up with ideas about how they can incorporate wholesome music into their own lives. They will be more likely to go along with what they come up with.

However, it's not always that simple. One mother shared her experience with her 17-year-old son who had become caught up in music with degrading and evil messages. She said,

Kevin was listening to music that I did not approve of and, in fact, was very worried about. My once kind, cooperative son had turned into an irritable kid with a very bad attitude. He had one tape that was particularly terrible that I tried to talk him into getting rid of. When I told him that the music was having a bad affect on him he disrespectfully yelled, "It is not!"

I knew I needed help with this problem and I began to pray very specifically for the Lord to help me. I asked that He would somehow help Kevin see how destructive this music was and that he would stop listening to it.

One night Kevin drove some of his friends to a ball game at the school and on the way home after he dropped everyone off something happened. He was alone in the car, listening to his "bad" tape. As he listened he said he had these thoughts: "I don't want to go home. I don't like my parents. I don't like home. In fact, I don't like life. I wish I was dead." At that moment he saw another tape wedged between the seats right by him. He picked it up and read, "Bounce Back." Thinking it was some cool group that one of his friends must have left he decided to listen to it. He pulled his tape out and put *Bounce Back* in. Little did he know that this tape belonged to me and was produced by the Church to lift and inspires people. Happy, bright songs with messages of hope and goodness filled the air. His thoughts changed to: "I think I'll go home. My parents aren't so bad. In fact, life is pretty good, after all."

These thoughts surprised him. He jerked the tape out and put his "bad" tape back in and as he listened those awful feelings returned. It scared him. He pulled it out and put *Bounce Back* in again and listened all the way home. He ran into the house shouting, "Mom, you're right! You're right!"

"About what," I said.

"About the music." With that he took his "bad" tape and unstrung the tape, went over to the wood burning stove and threw it into the fire. "I don't ever want to listen to that music again."

Then he asked me if he could borrow some of my tapes to listen to. I had many with good uplifting messages. He chose ten tapes and asked if he could borrow them for awhile. I was thrilled. He then called his friend, Todd, a boy who had fallen away from the church and had been pulling Kevin with him. He had Todd bring over his big collection of tapes. When he arrived he said, “Todd, will you let me keep your tapes for two weeks—I’m not even going to use them, just keep them here—and will you listen to these ten tapes and no other music for that two weeks. It’s just an experiment.” Todd answered, “Whatever.” He took the tapes and left.

Two days later, not two weeks, Todd came to see Kevin. “You know those tapes of mine . . . well, I don’t ever want them back. I don’t know what’s happening to me, but, man, I think I want to go on a mission.”

The two boys decided on an additional plan: “Let’s call all the kids in our ward and have them bring their tapes and we’ll have a massive *fireside!*”

Kevin and Todd both served missions and (I don’t know what happened to Todd) Kevin was married in the temple a few years after he returned. Yes, music has magical power.

(3) The right kind of music improves grades and learning ability: On a KSL TV report given March 29, 2000, Ed Yeates reported on a BYU School of Music finding. He said, “Researchers say music may actually modify brain activity in children. It can even improve their cognitive skills. That’s according to national research that seems to reinforce studies now underway at Brigham Young University.” He went on to report that a school in Provo, Utah, Wasatch Elementary, was using classical music to polish their children’s skill in awareness, judgment and language. They are proving that music makes a difference in a child’s learning abilities. They also have them clap and march to the rhythms of Beethoven. Jerry Jaccard of BYU School of Music said:

Researchers in Hungary were among the first to show a change in students. Children who listened to, moved to, sang, read, and wrote simple classical tunes or folk songs that were similar to classical music . . . those children who were able to do that every day had significantly higher scores in reading, writing and math.

Might this have been a reason that a prophet, President Benson, said, “We encourage you to listen to . . . classical [music] . . .”? (See prior quote.) All parents want their children to succeed in schooling. How wonderful if playing, humming, and marching to classical music could increase their learning abilities. Another unsuspecting magical power of music.

(4) The right kind of music helps us teach and learn true principles: President Boyd K. Packer said: “We are able to feel and learn very quickly through music . . . some spiritual things that we would otherwise learn very slowly” (BYU, 1 Feb. 1976). In view of this, consider the following times you could teach with music:

- **At family home evening** (as discussed earlier). You could have a singing period where you learn and memorize a new hymn. A reward, such as out for pizza or ice cream, could be a reward when one is memorized by everyone old enough. Make it fun. When a hymn is in the mind of a child or an adult it will serve as a gentle reminder when needed. Elder Dallin H. Oaks said: “The

singing of hymns is one of the best ways to put ourselves in tune with the Spirit of the Lord.”

- **As part of your family scripture time.** I was visiting in the home of a nephew recently and was very impressed at how he and his wife had each child participate in reading the scriptures. Even the little ones who can't read took a turn with Mommy or Daddy reading a few words and the child repeating until a complete verse had been read. They seemed to love it. The older ones read fluently because this had been their pattern for some time. At the conclusion they sang hymns and Primary songs. While I was there the father asked what song they wanted and in unison they shouted, “The Spirit of God Like a Fire is Burning!” They all sang it with great enthusiasm, and I was deeply touched. I could tell music was an important part of their scripture reading.
- **Sing songs at bedtime**—even just one song will linger in a child's mind as he or she falls asleep.
- **In church classes** singing can be the exclamation point to a lesson. It can open hearts to an understanding that might have been missed otherwise.
- **In missionary work** music can help nonmembers receive the gospel. A Young Women's president, Marci (not her real name), experienced this power in sharing the gospel with her nonmember sister. Marci was the only member of the Church in her family. She yearned for them to enjoy the glorious blessing of the gospel, and felt special concern for her sister who had wandered down a terribly destructive and immoral path. She had tried many times to tell her about the Church but was rebuffed every time. She simply didn't want to know and wouldn't allow her sister to talk about religion at all. Marci had tried everything and then decided to send her the tape *I Walk By Faith*, which has songs of the Young Women Values on it. She was almost positive her sister would not even listen, but felt to send it anyway.

She did listen, mostly out of curiosity at first, until she came to the song *My Nature is Divine*. She kept rewinding and playing that particular song, listening and being touched by the words: “Could it be, oh could it be a sign that deep within this simple soul of mine I sense by some miraculous design, my nature is divine.” She began to wonder if there was something about this church her sister belonged to and decided to attend a meeting. On the following Sunday she looked up the address of an LDS church in the phone book and went, not know anything about meeting times. As she opened the door and walked into the foyer she heard the strains of music and these words: “Could it be, oh could it be a sign that deep within this simple soul of mine I sense by some miraculous design, my nature is divine.” She felt like she had come home. Missionaries taught her the gospel and her whole life changed. She was baptized. Music had brought her home—home to the Savior whose sacrifice allowed her sins to be washed away. A witness to the words of Pres. J. Reuben Clark: “We can get nearer to the Lord through music than perhaps through any other thing except prayer” (Gen. Conf. Oct. 1936).

(5) The right kind of music helps heal sickness: Raymond Bahr, director of coronary care at St. Agnes Hospital in Baltimore, MD says: “Music therapy ranks high on the list

of modern-day management of critical care patients” (Psychology Today Magazine, Dec. 1985, p. 54).

I was deeply touched by the story of a little boy who sang to his sister almost every day as she was growing inside his mommy. When she was born she had serious health problems, so serious that she was not expected to live. She was in intensive care and no children were allowed. The little boy begged his mother to let him see her. “I have to sing to her,” he said. He begged to be able to see her. When she was near death the parents realized how important it was for him and that it would be his only chance to see his baby sister. The nurses protested, but the parents insisted. The little boy ran to his tiny sister and began to sing the song he had sung to her so many times before, “You are my sunshine, my only sunshine, you make me happy when skies are gray, You’ll never know dear how much I love you. Please don’t take my sunshine away.” Her vital signs immediately improved. The nurses said, “Keep singing, keep singing.” This tiny baby fully recovered. Once again, the magical power of music made the difference.

(6) The right kind of music re-ignites romance: Give your marriage the gift of music and it can fan the flame that sometimes dims under the pressures of life. When my husband and I do our marriage retreats we encourage the couples to listen—on the way to the retreat—to the music they used to listen to when they were courting. It’s interesting to see how this can put them in a loving mood. One wife said, “That was fun. We hadn’t listened to that music for a long time and it brought back so many fun memories of our early romantic times together.”

My husband, Gary, knows how to captivate me when I get all too busy in my office writing. He will put on the CD and play *That’s All I Ask of You* from *Phantom of the Opera*. It lures me right out of my office and into his arms. I can’t resist the feelings this song stirs in me. Another CD that we both love is James Oneil Miner’s CD *Dream With Me*. It’s loaded with beautiful love songs played by this master musician. Martin Luther was right on target when he said, “Music it is one of the most delightful presents God has given us.” Let it re-ignite the romance in your marriage. My sister-in-law has this great little saying on her refrigerator: “Where words fail, music speaks.”

(7) Connects us with the Savior: Elder Oaks said, “Sacred music has a unique capacity to communicate our feelings of love for the Lord” (Ensign Nov. 1994, p. 3). Sometimes the best expressions of gratitude for a great sacrament meeting or conference are given through the singing of a closing hymn. At the close of some sessions of General Conference the choir and congregation will sing *We Thank Thee O God for a Prophet*, and tears of gratitude cannot be withheld.

Sometimes the Spirit can speak to us through music. One woman told how she was depressed and had been praying for answers to problems that seemed overwhelming. One afternoon she sat down at the piano and began to play the hymns. As she played she found answers to her prayers in the words of the hymns, and she felt the Lord’s love for her.

When Gary, served as bishop on BYU campus a few years ago I was able to serve with him in a Relief Society calling. He tried something new for a sacrament meeting. He called it a musical testimony meeting. A student could come forward and tell what his or her favorite hymn was and why. After telling what it was that made the hymn meaningful

to him or her, the congregation would sing one verse of that hymn. It was one of the most touching, spiritual meetings I have ever attended. Those young people shared their hearts in a way they never had before. When everyone sang the hymn, after hearing the reason it meant so much to the student, they sang with a new fervor.

Music is filled with memories. I can't sing the hymn *I'll Go Where You Want Me to Go Dear Lord* without thinking of my dad finally realizing his dream of having his own farm when our family moved from Ogden, UT to Vale, Oregon. I was a young girl just ten years old. This hymn was sung at the farewell sacrament meeting just before we left . . . and we all cried as we sang. To this day it helps us remember dear friends left behind when we moved far away to make a dream come true.

Through the years I have been able to share my own testimony through the songs I write with my cousin Janice Kapp Perry. I'm always filled with a deep sense of gratitude for her gift to compose the perfect music to go along with the words I have prayed and worked over. She and I share a special bond through music. One of our favorites, written for the Young Women's album, is *I Am of Infinite Worth*. It is a testimony of the great love the Savior has for each one of us, individually. We wanted it to help all young women—and everyone who would hear the song—to feel that they truly *are* of infinite worth to Jesus Christ. We thought that if they sang it using the word *I*, they would realize his personal love for them. We hope we accomplished our goal. Fortunately, Gary is a soloist and enjoys singing our songs so he often closes our firesides by singing *I Am of Infinite Worth* as part of our testimony.

The Lord said, "For my soul delighteth in the song of the heart: yea, the song of the righteous is a prayer unto me, and it shall be answered with a blessing upon their heads" (D&C 25:12). I have mentioned but a few of the many blessing that have been "answered . . . upon [our] heads" and I feel certain there are countless blessing that yet await all of us through the glorious gift of music. It is my prayer we will use it to "exalt and inspire" ourselves and our families.