

The outline text of Thanksgiving Talk by The Reverend Nicholas Mottershead, Sept 2023

I repeat again my welcome to you all for this Service of Thanksgiving today. As we gather here in the National Musicians' Church, we are drawn together, united, by a shared love for those who created music, a shared love for music itself, a deep appreciation of the profound impact it has had on each of our lives, and for many, to seek comfort and healing for the loss of loved ones.

I hope and pray that as we do remember and commemorate the lives and contributions of musicians, we can carefully and appropriately navigate the *personal* from the *collective*. We are drawn together as a community to not only commemorate musicians who together have enriched the souls and illuminated the hearts of many, but we also commemorate them individually, for the personal lives enriched, those of family and friends. We are also drawn together in this Thanksgiving, to offer our prayers to you as individuals, many of whom are still grieving the loss of your loved ones.

I am sure all here agree, that in a world often filled with turmoil and uncertainty, or at times just not enough love and joy, music has and continues to serve as a beacon of hope, a source of comfort, love, healing and a path to bring us into communion with others. As Ray Ayers, the composer and Jazz artist said "*The true beauty of music is that it connects people. It carries a message, and we, the musicians, are the messengers*". So, as we come together, not only to express our gratitude for musicians, we also want to express our gratitude specifically for your musician, your loved one, who has gifted so much to so many.

There is an African proverb many of you may know which says, "*it takes a village to raise a child*" but I would add, that whilst "*it can take a village to raise a child*", it can take just one musician to change a village, a community, a whole generation or two even. But you all know that don't you as you have known musicians, and many are musicians. Music, as we have all experienced, possesses the extraordinary power to evoke emotions, heal wounds, unite hearts, unite souls, unite communities. It is a universal language that unites us all, regardless of our backgrounds or beliefs. Indeed, music is a powerful force that transcends time and space, touching the depths of our souls, transforming sorrow into joy, despair into hope, and discord into harmony, in the now and in the not yet.

As many reflect on this year's Proms, and it was wonderful last Sunday to have the end of Proms Service back here at Holy Sepulchre with the Promenaders, and the choir of Holy Sepulchre, it is amazing to think of the legacy of Sir Henry Wood. This season had 84 concerts, welcomed over 3,000 musicians with a wealth of outstanding performances across an eight-week season. Over 3 million watching it on TV over the opening weekend and nearly half of the audiences at the Royal Albert Hall were attending a Prom for the first time.

As I said, "*it can take a village to raise a child, but it can take just one musician to change a village, a community, a whole generation or two even*". We won't know all the stories of lives changed by the music of our loved ones, but none of us should underestimate the impact of their music. When I was born my mother, who had been a nurse, took up the guitar, and became quite good. Playing with and getting to know some amazing guitarists such as John Williams, Julian Bream, and Gilbert Biberian (who wrote a classical piece for her) but alongside performing mum's real passion was to teach the guitar to school kids to help others to know the joy of music. For the next 20 years my mum taught 2 guitar classes most days after school, in our house for about 5 or 6 young people each class, and some individual lessons.

a bedroom soon became repurposed, and was known as the “music room” , guitars on all the walls remember coming home from school and hearing guitar most nights. some learning classical guitar, some folk guitar, some jazz and more than a few Rock guitarist but mostly just to love music in the way they wanted to play. Coming into your home to hear your mum bashing out Highway to Hell by ACDC or Free Bird by Lynyrd Skynyrd was often an interesting moment for me and my school friends.

I also remember years later in my late twenties getting ready for a rugby game for our town rugby club, and of the 20 or so players getting changed, more than half of them, both backs and forwards I hasten to add, had been taught guitar by my mum at some point during their schooling. Amazing all of them still remembered most of the songs she taught them as they broke into song in the changing room with many of my mum’s favourites. I share this here today because like many of you, I am grieving. My mother died at the end of last year but if you had been here last Friday at the dementia friendly concert, you would have seen a tear or two in my eyes, as the music I heard took me back to the lovely times with her, with the music enabling that memory as well as offering comfort to it. I am not one to believe we get over the loss of a loved one, or that our grief will pass, or shrink but I am one to believe that music possesses the unique ability to express what words often fail to convey and importantly can swell and grow our capacity to cope with grief and pain.

Music, I believe, can connect us not only to each other but to the divine as well, revealing the kingdom in the here and now. Music is often quite rightly described as a glimpse of heaven on earth, as we are transported to a higher plane, as if we are touching the very edges of heaven. ..but I say it can be even more, a heavenly gift bestowed upon us. The Bible tells us of King David, who played the harp to soothe the spirit of Saul. His music was believed to have the power to drive away evil spirits as well as bring comfort to troubled souls.

So, as we each listen to music, often with tears in our eyes, in those divine moments, it is as if heaven itself descends through the music, increasing our capacity to live life again and bringing peace and comfort. Music somehow seems to place the words in our second reading from Revelation on our hearts and help us know that in time *“God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away”*.

Today, we commemorate the lives and legacies of musicians, commemorate the lives and legacies of your loved ones, your musicians, who I am sure have left an indelible mark on many hearts and souls, including yours. Their music will have been woven into the fabric of many lives, past, present, and future and along with the music of many of our beloved musicians, has been nothing short of a divine, celestial gift, sharing the harmonies of love, joy, and healing with a world in need of a touch of heaven. We not only honour the memories of your loved ones but also extend our gratitude to all those who supported, encouraged, and shared their loved ones with the world. The earthly and heavenly world is a better place for music and musicians. Thank you and Amen.