The Church has, effectively, lost its interest in serious music. Both amateur and professional music students who excel are not given a place of importance in the Church.

Some time between my twelfth and thirteenth birthdays, I was called as the ward organist. This red-letter day was the first in a series of stepping-stones provided by the Church that led me to my life’s work. It was not always convenient for a growing teenager to rise to every Church occasion, but the steadfastness of my parents coupled with my commitment to my calling produced a kind of record for church attendance.

First of all, I performed regularly at the organ console for three meetings each Sunday—priesthood meeting, Sunday School, and sacrament meeting. But in those days, the “regular meeting schedule” for an active Latter-day Saint included not only the usual Sunday meetings, but also quarterly stake conference (with two general sessions and an evening youth session), various kinds of Scout meetings, stake and ward choir and chorus practices, festivals, dances, parties, firesides, and roadshows. When these meetings were accompanied by hymn singing or keyboard music of any kind, I was called upon. The Young Men’s and Young Women’s Mutual Improvement Associations (MIA) were themselves devoted to helping our personal development in music, dance, drama, and sports, as well as giving us religious training. Regular participation in the mid-week MIA meeting was obligatory.

But even earlier, and on a smaller scale, I remember my Primary teacher insisting that I perform, along with other members of my class, a small recital each year for a graduation procedure. All of us, with our differing gifts and interests, had our talents fostered by this lovely lady and her desire to help us grow. The enjoyment we knew in the name of music and art was indeed heaven for young hearts.

From all of this, my rich private musical training was supported and augmented by invaluable “on-the-job” experience, of service to music in and for the Church.

In addition to my calling as ward organist, my bishop gave me five dollars toward the costs of attending the Church-sponsored music workshops that provided weekly lessons from members of the Tabernacle organ personnel—Alexander Schreiner, Frank Asper, and Roy Darley. This training, and my own lessons from a fine private piano teacher, occasionally overseen by my great uncle, former Tabernacle organist Tracy Y. Cannon, put me in the hands of a supportive coterie of excellent musicians who promoted good music in the Church and assisted many developing musicians.

I remember sitting at the console of a well-worn organ until midnight hours as a teenager, with lights completely dimmed in the chapel except for my small reading lamp, thinking I was the greatest musician in the world as strains of my grandiose improvisations poured from the instrument. How was I to know that this art of improvisation, modulation, and transposition was taught in a most organized fashion for all respectable organists in any music conservatory, and that this was what is expected of all good church musicians in the Western world?

My mission in France and Belgium provided opportunities to share musical experiences with members and non-members alike, both secular and sacred. I returned with a feeling of success. Like a priest or monk or trained musician of earlier times, I had, in effect, been taught and nurtured by the needs and programs of the Church for my professional career. I knew that I had to share music with the world.

Training in keyboard music was not all I owed the Church and its programs. Activities in theatre, dancing, choral music as well as many evenings of sports supplemented the regular weekly activities. I shall never forget such magnificent youth experiences as singing in the Salt Lake Tabernacle for general conference under seemingly stern directors who made us memorize our music and called us to task if we showed signs of weariness or lackluster, or the thrill of dancing in the MIA.
dance festival at the University of Utah stadium with 5,000 other young people to the scintillating rhythms of rhumbas, tangos, fox-trots, and folk dances from various nations. Even school activities, loaded with music productions, were flavored with the influence of the Church. Seminary activities were dovetailed with secular musical activities; my young life in Salt Lake City was an intertwined whole, combining the finest aspects of a middle-class family background enhanced by endless activities and numerous acquaintances, provided largely by the Church.

After my mission, I moved my dream of becoming a professional musician into the reality of high productivity. Because of my Church experience, I did not doubt the possibility of realizing my dream to be "the world's greatest composer."

Through undergraduate studies and graduate school, the Church was always there for support and sustenance, and as an avenue for expression, new experience, and experimentation. It always seemed that a musician's life in the surroundings of the Mormon faith was sensible and workable. There were ever-expanding opportunities for using arts in the Church. Never did I feel the conflicts I often heard other musicians discuss, the struggles, the great difficulty in coping with the lifestyle of the performing or practicing artist. I rarely felt any conflict between art, its "muse," and my ordinary, comfortable Mormon lifestyle. I just assumed that you did in life what seemed most appropriate to your God-given talents, your experience, and your expertise.

With graduate study finished and the world to conquer, I was left to my personal devices to provide for my family and future. Teaching was my favorite challenge, and performances were the enhancement and by-product of my own music making. Always, the Church and its programs were part of this package. Teaching in the Church seemed to go hand-in-glove with teaching in a school or a conservatory. It was all part of the same thing, because, to me, music represented the language of angels, and whether one made music in a studio, a concert hall, a cathedral, or a Mormon chapel, it all seemed natural, appropriate, sacred.

I never avoided performing music in the Church because it was not "professional." Making music was part of my heritage. If a choir was called for, all you needed was a conductor, an accompanist, some good music, and willing singers. A little bit of musical taste was helpful and provided the uplift when the performance finally rang through. I have been part of choirs from the most humble Primary gathering to the most auspicious collection of Saints in temple dedication services, choirs of all shapes, sizes, and tastes, conducted by superior musicians, and also innocently led by willing amateurs who did their very best.

Over the years it became apparent that the more training one receives in the technical aspects of music making, the more determined one becomes to help elevate the levels of expectation and performance practices. The comfortable relationship of volunteerism in the Church and the ability to conscript members to serve in a variety of assignments allowed for a development of musical programs based on the needs of the Church as directed by leaders. Because of the temporary nature of rotating assignments in the lay-directed Church, it was not uncommon for me to alternate between serving as a musician and a variety of other assignments, including bishop. The joy of participation, along with the thrill of seeing others benefit from attempted musical excellence, has accompanied me throughout my life.

One doesn't easily forget musical experiences, simple or grand, when the artistry displayed went heavenward and touched a congregation or reached a troubled heart. One doesn't easily forget an awakening of a troubled soul to the magic of life developed through musical contacts. The magical universal language touched by the hand of God was meant to illuminate the Saints in their worship and development programs. Joseph Smith must have had similar thoughts when he inaugurated a singing school in the Kirtland Temple. And I remember Elder Boyd K. Packer's response to a young, inexperienced, newly sustained bishop's counselor posing the question in a regional leadership training session about how to organize a good sacrament meeting: "Get some good music, and everything else will fall into place."

The provision of heartfelt music to accompany, bolster, sustain, and enhance spiritual quests and sacred events has been known to humankind from the beginning. (Christ's birth itself was heralded by a choir of angels.) I know that my short life with its variety of musical experiences is only a small taste of what music is, even to this world.

HOWEVER, a change in Church music has gradually arrived. It began with a dramatic alteration in the workings of the Church.

In 1980 the Church announced the consolidated meeting schedule. Gone was the opening service of Sunday School with its hymn practice. Gone were the midweek MIA, Primary, and Relief Society meetings. All at once it seemed as if the varied activities of the Church had vanished in favor of one long Sabbath meeting. As this adjustment was being made Church-wide, it soon became statistically apparent that fewer and fewer young LDS people were participating in the arts. Whereas the festivals, roadshows, and other musical productions had once been the "artistic staple" of the Church, it was no longer possible, expedient, or of interest to pursue these ambitious projects.

Gone were the dances, choirfests, choral festivals for amateur musicians, and weekly activities promoting the development of the musical arts. The general Church Music Committee was disbanded, and local priesthood leadership was no longer charged with developing and creating musical excellence in the Church. The handbooks continued to recommend a ward choir, but gone was the possibility of assembling the Saints for an adequate practice time, and gone were the instructions necessary to facilitate the development of such practices. Gone were the training sessions for musicians. No longer were young keyboard talents developed for the purpose of continuing performance on the sacred instrument—the organ, which would be the only link to a time-honored "sound of worship" in Church service. Now,
entire services passed without a smallest minority participating in the hymn singing of the day. Teenagers were never exposed to musical excellence, and the Primary children were relegated to singing easily taught ditties of inconsequential flavor. The Church was now left essentially destitute of music, and most of an entire generation has grown up without a firm, stable introduction to music, be it sacred or secular.

Of course, the Church is not alone to blame. The much-discussed wounds to healthy society—breakdown of family, drugs, television addiction—do not help. Throughout society in general, the change from an active agrarian society to a passive consumer society has had its influence. The once great American tradition of buying a piano as a first major family purchase has suffered from inflation and other economic problems, but even more from the availability of television and other "passive" alternatives. Young people can now buy a Walkman and put a wide variety of tunes in their ears with the push of a button instead of making music by painstaking training. Stereos, computers, and electronic machines now replace the time-honored piano. Ironically, these machines that can make music all by themselves have now reached such a level of complexity that many people who buy them don't know what to do with them.

But before the modern music synthesizer, there was another musical instrument of great power and varied possibility. So large, complex, and expensive as to be unavailable for general home use, this instrument has for hundreds of years found its place at the center of uplifting congregational worship. For me, the demise of organ playing is the most tragic aspect in the decline of Church music. Given the travails of the Mormon pioneers carting instruments from Nauvoo to Salt Lake City, one wonders if the Salt Lake City Tabernacle organ would have been built if the project had been initiated in the late twentieth century. No longer does organ music play any part in the worship services. Since nearly everyone sensed a need for more music in a service than the singing of hymns, and since the music from the "purple book," though not recommended for Sunday worship service, was available and sanctioned, the sound of this music and like compositions became familiar and began to be performed almost universally in the services and in general Church meetings.

It is ironic that even though hymns were the first recommendations for worship service, the opportunity even to teach hymns to the members did not now exist. This was important, not only because the Church is continually adding new members unfamiliar with our hymns, but also because the publication of the new hymnbook in 1985 presented us with a considerable number of hymns unfamiliar even to life-long Church members. The recent re-introduction of Sunday School hymn practice is a step back in the right direction, but in many cases it is a half-hearted one, easily pushed aside for "more important" aspects of the Sunday services. In spite of this, it is still true that encouragement to do music on a wide scale does not presently exist in the Church.

It takes no great powers of observation to notice the decline in hymn singing throughout the Church. One needs only attend a regular sacrament service and look around during the singing. And no hymn singing is well flavored without the support of a strong organist who can enliven the rhythm and accentuation of musical structure by excellent performance. This process will continue to create a slow, sad death for music in the Church. Music is rarely successfully taught to adults, but, by those who know how, it can always be successfully taught to the very young. But there are no programs in the LDS church encouraging the very young to musical excellence. Singing "Popcorn Popping on the Apricot Tree" three times per month does not enliven or excite potential training in youth.

The trends in Church music are easily identified. They are manifest by such sentiments and statements as the following: "We will sing the first verse only"; "We will forego hymn practice today because the sacrament service was too long"; "Could you accompany me tomorrow morning in Church?"; "We will discontinue choir practice for the summer"; "I just want him to be able to play the hymns when he goes on his mission"; "That's all right, we'll just sing the hymns without the piano"; "It doesn't matter; it's just for Church"; "Twenty minutes is enough for choir practice"; "We can't have those kinds of instruments in the church."

Today's worship services are a mediocre variety of syrupy popular melodies that stir up emotions, but cannot stir and uplift the soul.

These trends should not surprise anyone. When Mormon children turn twelve, they graduate from Primary having sung many lovely "little" tunes for nine years. Now they move on to priesthood and young women's programs. Shy, capricious, adventuresome, reluctant, troubled by peer pressures, nagged by parents, disturbed by their ever-growing bodies and spirits, presenting themselves as music makers is far from their thoughts. Or is it? It is a rare teenager in the modern world who does not own a headset that connects to a tape or compact disc player, which he uses to sequester himself into the realm of private music listening for hours every day. Most of the music these young people hear represents the popular forms of the leading singers and instrumentalists of the day, mostly advertised through top forty radio stations, television commer-
cials, music videos, and dances.

After several years of this kind of musical experience, the young Mormon reaches adulthood and is suddenly called to turn from worldly pursuits to enter a spiritual plane never before known. One of the first things to strike the missionary is the awesome importance of music in his or her life, perhaps created by its sudden absence. Unfortunately, many mission presidents tell the missionaries that all music is forbidden, except that sung by the Tabernacle Choir, little realizing that this period in a young person's life, with new spirituality and maturity, would be the optimum time for introduction to beauty. Instead, immediately cut off from something that was so important, private, and individual, the only outlet for the young missionaries is to sing. This they do with great fervor in all meetings and missionary gatherings. Again, this would be a wonderful time for discovery and expression of great beauty. However, the only "appropriate" tunes these missionaries can sing are the ones they stopped singing seven or eight years before. These are the songs they last sang in church with any enthusiasm. They have lost seven years of great possibility. There was no instruction and no outlet. Their church has forsaken them in the area of musical education and excellence.

But for all the breakdown in musical training and activity in the Church, a great many trained musicians continue their hopes and quests for excellence. Trained musicians, however, often seem to pose a threat to Church leaders and members. Often, their expertise is resented or seen as elitist or arrogant, and some difficulties can be created by a professional musician's willingness, or unwillingness, to participate voluntarily in Church music activities. Still, there are many trained musicians in the Church who are willing and able to serve.

Unfortunately, it is not only the limitations of Church music programs, the token mention of music by any priesthood authority, the reluctance on the part of leadership at all levels to deal with music, the lack of encouragement for the development of music by the very young, the lack of practical training of pianists, organists, conductors, or vocalists, and the lack of outlet for fine musical performances in the Church that discourages trained LDS musicians. They are also dismayed by what has rushed in to fill the void, so to speak—a new, pervasive style of "religious pop" music, a style once relegated to nightclubs, discotèques, movies, and teenage dance parties. This has now completely infiltrated our Church services, dragging a once non-liturgy oriented church, trying to rise from unsophisticated "pioneerism," into musical oblivion. Instead of striking anthems by well-rehearsed choirs, accompanied by excellent organists or instrumentalists, most musical presentations in today's worship services are a mediocre variety of syrupy popular melodies accompanying unimaginative words which "relate to gospel principles." In the worst sentimental tradition, these tunes and lyrics may stir up emotions in the susceptible, but they cannot stir and uplift the soul. They point not to God, but to the world and its values, musical and emotional. It seems that President Spencer Kimball's hopes for Beethovens and Michaelangeles in the future of the Church have been stalled.

The Tabernacle Choir, of course, continues to render the lovely anthems and popular music of the day, sprinkled with the masterpieces of choral literature. But even their repertoire has become more catholic (that is to say, universal), appealing to a wider variety of tastes, and including music from movie scores and Broadway productions. Given the easy access via television and video productions to the Tabernacle Choir or general Church meetings, it has become a sort of dictum that if "it" is sung in a general meeting of the Church, "it" must be okay. If "it" is sung by the Tabernacle Choir, we must be able to sing "it" in church services. Other organizations sponsored by the Church, such as the Mormon Youth Symphony and Choruses, also render concerts of mostly quasi-popular music, giving still more support to the notion that if "it" is performed in the Tabernacle venue, "it" is appropriate for any Church event. Hence, popular music, Broadway show tunes are all stirred into the melange of that which is now considered "sacred." There is little discrimination among the producers of sacred music from the secular. Notwithstanding, mature Saints are quick to distinguish that which is heaven-sent from that which is not. By instinct and sensitive personal feelings, hearers recognize the beauty and excellence of sacred music. Compared side by side with a rousing anthem of the same message, a quasi-popular tune accompanying semi-serious lyrics will never be mistaken for sacred.

So, the Church has, effectively, lost its interest in serious music. Fewer and fewer Saints are being assisted in their spiritual development by the music provided by their church. There are few statements as to whom the music program of the Church should be addressed and of what it should consist. Based on past traditions and the joy of music making, it would seem that Saints and priesthood leaders would welcome specific guidelines to assist them in promotion of this sacred art. BYU sponsors an annual workshop for Church musicians, continually fostering the ideas and excellent new techniques which would contribute to the development of Church music. However, the workshop has never been empowered to administer the materials presented or analyze the long-reaching goals or values of these presentations. Hence, the information available remains dormant and of little use to the Church worldwide. In general, both amateur and professional music students who excel are not given a place of importance in the Church in any particular musical calling, setting, or function.

As all things cycle, we can hope that the thoughts of the prophets regarding music and the worship service will again permeate the general Church. For the sake of true worship and beauty in our lives and enhancement of spirituality, I hope that music will sometime take a renewed place of honor in the hearts and practice of the Saints. There is nothing like the beauty of an angelic choir, accompanied by a magnificent organ, to nurture thoughts of heavenly presence.

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STROLLING FROM THE DELI, GROCERY-LADEN

There is this new generation rising among us without the will to live: psychologists argue the pattern of life's incapable intellectualizations, educators argue lack of moral courage; I have walked among the garden idols, seen my leaders tricked into the marriage of admitted deviancy and failed nerve. Still, the plaster statue-sellers cry, "what is wrong, what is wrong?" as our youth continue to die, daily.

There are parties to attend: we blame them their dying as we stroll home arm and arm full excited over the boiling of lobster, the sweet interior of cracked claws, the spicy artichoke leaves, the musky scent of Chianti freshening across the maple lowboy

—SEAN BRENDAN BROWN