

Hymns

Hymn - a song of praise to God <sing a *hymn* of thanksgiving>: a metrical composition adapted for singing in a religious service <a book of *hymns*>; a song of praise or joy <in jolly *hymns* they praise the god of wine — John Dryden>; something resembling a song of praise: **PAEAN** <The novel is a *hymn* to childhood and innocence.

Why Hymns?

In a time when music serves as a source of conflict in many churches, the goal of the Center is to return peace-and power-to the Church. Music can do this. As Martin Luther said, "Next to the Word of God, music deserves the highest praise." When music and the Word of God are combined, a powerful...

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Tunes, Meters & Other Hymn Info

When we sing a hymn, we are singing history. It may be a brief time span or one encompassing hundreds of years. Writers of the text, or poem, usually appear on the left side of the page while writers of the music appear on the right side. Almost always the tune name is in ALL CAPS on the right side...

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Singing Hymns: God's Vehicle for Truth

John Chrysostom, (see our last newsletter) often wrote of the church's responsibility regarding singing psalms and hymns. As you remember, Chrysostom lived in the fourth century, a century that was dominated by a theological rift perpetuated by the early Christian theologian, Arius. (His followers w...

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Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs: Music to Shape the Soul

O may we soon again renew that song, And keep it tune with Heav'n, till God ere long To his celestial consort us unite, To live with him, and sing in endless morn of light." Since the time of Plato, these words of John Milton have framed a universal belief concerning music. Music is an essential...

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Hymns and Praise Songs

Here are some thoughts to help clarify differences between traditional hymns and praise and worship songs. A hymn is a formal song, sung to God in public worship, typically by the entire congregation. For our discussion, a metrical psalm also fits into this definition of a hymn. Technically speaking...

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Singing Hymns: Augustine on Music

Of all the early church fathers (leaders), Augustine (354-430) is perhaps the most renowned. In the history of Christian thought, Augustine is arguably the single most important theologian of the early church. His influence is still felt today and the church is indebted to him for his writing on a w...

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Augustine: Wisdom for Today's Church

Let's look again at the wisdom of Augustine, a fifth century Christian who many regard as the most important figure in the history of the church. As we related last time, Augustine struggled over the use of music in the church. As a pastor and a bishop, he understood that music had the power to insure...

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Singing Hymns vs Praise and Worship

Hymnody	'Praise & Worship' (CCM) Music
Written for congregational singing.	Written for performance.
Words (hymn) and music (hymn tune) are interchangeable, yet the music submits to the words.	No such flexibility, as the words are subsumed into the music.
Long shelf life: Good hymns last for centuries and are passed on for generations.	Short shelf life: The most popular praise songs last a few years, rarely more than a generation.
Four-part harmony and wide musical range, contributing to vibrant congregational singing.	Limited musical range; sung in unison style that does not lend itself to strong congregational singing.
Contains varying degrees of structure complexity derived from its strong musical heritage.	Structurally weak and the music is derived from simplistic popular form.
Values the interrelationship of melody, rhythm, and harmony	Melody dominates the structure of the music
Represents the liturgical heritage and choral tradition of generations: In this way, hymns are incarnational.	Reflects an attempt to escape or reject that heritage: In this way, choruses are Gnostic.
Reflects a <i>normative</i> understanding of culture; sees music as having inherent value and beauty, something good in and of itself.	Reflects a <i>relative</i> understanding of culture; reduces musical forms to a utility, as means to 'reaching people.'
Pipe organ friendly	Guitar based
Natural acoustics work best	Electronic amplification a necessity
Uses poetic meters	Poetry and meter not a concern
Masculine & robust	Feminine
Maintains aesthetic standards	Lowers aesthetic standards
Antidote to the current cultural disorder	Reinforces the current cultural disorder
Favored by churches with origins in the Protestant Reformation	Favored by churches of more recent origin--"non-Reformation Protestant" churches.

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Hymn Meters

The meter of a hymn text is not to be confused with the meter of the music. The meter of the music is the arrangement of the rhythm into regular patterns of stress called "measures", and is signified by the "time signature", a symbol at the beginning of the staff (e.g. 4/4, 6/8, etc.); the hymn meter is the pattern of syllables and stresses in the text itself. There is obviously going to be a relationship between the two, but they are not the same thing.

Finding the meter of a hymn text is simple--just count the syllables. For example, in the text "All people that on earth do dwell", we find the following:

All peo- ple that on earth do dwell,
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Sing to the Lord with cheer- ful voice;
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Him serve with fear, His praise forth tell,
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Come ye be- fore Him and re- joice!
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Each stanza of this text falls into four lines of eight syllables each, which can be expressed as "8.8.8.8" for short. Now look at "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow":

Praise God from Whom all bless- ings flow;
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Praise Him all crea- tures here be- low!
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Praise Him a- bove, ye heav'n- ly host;
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Praise Fa- ther, Son and Ho- ly Ghost!
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Notice in the third line that we have "heav'n-ly" instead of "heav-en-ly"; if we had kept all three syllables, the meter would be 8.8.9.8. The reader has probably already thought about the fact that "All people that on earth do dwell" and "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow" are sung to the same tune, Old 100th. The reason they both work with that tune, is that the OLD 100TH tune has four phrases, each of which can accommodate eight syllables of text. In fact, any other text in the hymnal that has a hymn meter of 8.8.8.8 can be sung to the same tune--but something that is 8.8.9.8 would run out of notes in the third line before it ran out of syllables!

Long Meter

8.8.8.8 is actually quite common, and is one of the original handful of hymn meters that the English psalm-singers of the Reformation used in their psalters. When Isaac Watts began to popularize the singing of original hymns, he stuck to these few patterns as well. 8.8.8.8 was called "Long Meter" or "LM" for short, because it has four long lines of eight syllables, as opposed to mixing in shorter lines as other meters did. You can still see the "LM" indication in many hymnals, above the author's name on the left-hand side.

The Old 100th tune is used in Praise for the Lord for yet another text, #64:

Be- fore Je- ho- vah's aw- ful throne,

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Ye na- tions bow with sac- red joy!

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Know that the Lord is God a- lone;

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

He can cre- ate and He de- stroy.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

By now it should be apparent that there are many texts that fall into this "Long Meter" pattern, and that any melody that fits one should fit them all. For example, it is possible to sing the following with the OLD 100TH tune we have been discussing:

When I sur-vey the won-drous cross,

On which the Prince of glo-ry died,

My rich-est gain I count but loss

And pour con-tempt on all my pride.

And conversely, we could sing "All creatures that on earth do dwell" to the tune of "When I survey the wondrous cross". Not that it would necessarily be a good match; what is possible is not always musically satisfying. We could, for example, force the following Long Meter text to fit OLD 100TH:

Fa- ther and Friend, Thy light, Thy love

Beam- ing through all Thy works we see.

Thy glo- ry gilds the heav'ns a- bove,

And all the earth is full of Thee.

It has the right number of syllables, but the natural stress patterns of the words "Fa-ther" and "beam-ing" contradict the rhythm of OLD 100TH. A better adaptation would be to sing it to the tune of "When I survey the wondrous cross". And for an interesting recasting of a text, try singing "All creatures that on earth do dwell" to the mellow, quiet tune of "Father and Friend"!

Short Meter

The next hymn meter we will look at is "Short Meter", abbreviated "SM", also one of the old psalm-singing meters. Its pattern is 6.6.8.6, alternating shorter six-syllable lines with one eight-syllable line.

One well-known Short Meter text is "Blest be the tie that binds":

Blest be the tie that bind
1 2 3 4 5 ^s 6

Our hearts in Christ-ian love;
1 2 3 4 5 6

The fel-low-ship of kin-dred minds
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Is like to that a-bove.
1 2 3 4 5 6

Wesley's "A charge to keep I have" is also in Short Meter:

A charge to keep I have
1 2 3 4 5 ; 6

A God to glo-ri-fy;
1 2 3 4 5 6

A ne-ver-dy-ing soul to save,
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

And fit it for the sky!
1 2 3 4 5 6

Obviously you could sing "A charge to keep" to the tune of "Blest be the tie" with no problem. Another Short Meter text is "Rise up, O men of God!" (PFTL#553):

Rise up, O men of God!
Have done with les-ser things!
Give heart and mind and soul and strength
To serve the King of Kings!

This might be sung to the tune of "Blest be the tie", but that melody doesn't seem to suit it; it would work better to the tune of "A charge to keep". For that matter, the words of "A charge to keep" would be a good fit to the tune of "Rise up, O men of God!" if you wanted to try that.

Common Meter

"Common Meter" or "CM" is 8.6.8.6, and is called "common" because (for whatever reasons) it

was the most used in the heyday of psalm-singing and early English hymnody. One of the most famous hymns in the English language is in Common Meter:

A- ma- zing grace! How sweet the sound,

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

That saved a wretch like me!

1 2 3 4 5 6

I once was lost, but now am found;

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Was blind, but now I see!

1 2 3 4 5 6

Another Common Meter hymn is "I'm not ashamed to own my Lord"(PFTL#298):

I'm not a- shamed to own my Lord,

Nor to de- fend His cause,

Main- tain the ho- nors of His word,

The glo- ries of His cross!

The texts and tunes of these two hymns are potentially interchangeable, although the effect is a little odd. The tune AZMON ("I'm not ashamed to own my Lord") is also used in *Praise for the Lord* for the Common Meter hymns "O for a faith that will not shrink" (#462) and "O for a thousand tongues to sing" (#468); the latter hymn appears with another tune as well.

Why the big three?

Long Meter, Short Meter, and Common Meter were virtually all there was in the psalm-singing of the 16th and 17th centuries, and in the first phase of hymn-writing (Watts) of the early 18th century. Why this was the case is question with some fairly interesting answers. First, the psalter translators, and the earliest hymn-writers (such as Watts) were amateur poets, and tended not to branch out too much or get too fancy. They stuck with patterns they knew.

Second, music was not printed on the page with the words in psalters or hymnals until well into the 19th century. When a new psalm or hymn was introduced, it was just sung to a tune that fit. (This is why you may run into a familiar text with an unfamiliar tune, or vice versa, in the hymnal of another religious group, or among our brethren in Great Britain; the text/tune matchup of one musical tradition may not be the same in another.) There were a number of good tunes that fit each of the three meters, so as long as you wrote a text in one of those, you could count on people being able to sing it.

There were several reasons for this situation. Music printing was a specialized skill that was not always available or affordable before the Industrial Revolution led to cheap, mass-market printing. On top of that, during the 1500s-1700s the ability to read music was for the most part restricted to those who could afford to study privately, which was a privilege (and status

symbol) of the nobility and the upper middle class. But besides these practical reasons, there was an innate conservatism in the psalm-singing tradition that resisted making the music too much of the focus. A few serviceable tunes in each of the meters was considered good enough, and there was even a certain amount of resistance to putting music on the page with the words. (Interestingly, Alexander Campbell felt this way as well.)

When Isaac Watts came on the scene with original hymns, he was working in the context of the psalm-singing tradition and simply wrote in the meters with which he was already familiar. If he had decided to write in anything else, he would have had to find tunes to go with his new meters, and then would have had the challenge of getting people to learn them. It was enough of a battle to get people to accept the idea of singing anything but psalms.

Charles Wesley, however, was in a different situation. For one thing, the Methodist movement moved in social circles that had more access to formally trained church musicians, and made more pretense to poetic sophistication. Wesley still wrote many hymns in Long Meter, Short Meter, and Common Meter, but he also wrote in a variety of other meters as well. For example, he wrote several popular hymns in 7.7.7.7 D (the "D" means "doubled"), such as:

*Hark! The he- rald an- gels sing,
"Glo- ry to the new- born King!"
Peace on earth, and mer- cy mild;
God and sin- ners re- con- ciled!
Joy- ful, all ye na- tions rise,
Join the tri- umph of the skies!
With an- ge- lic hosts pro- claim,
"Christ is born in Beth- le- hem!"*

and

*Je- sus, Lo- ver of my soul,
Let me to Thy bo- som fly
While the near- er wa- ters roll,
While the tem- pest still is high.
Hide me, O my Sav- ior, hide,
Till the storm of life is past;
Safe in- to the ha- ven guide,
O re- ceive my soul at last.*

It would be possible to sing "Jesus, Lover of my soul" to the tune of "Hark! The herald angels sing", but the cultural association of that melody would make it a surreal experience to say the least.

Wesley also wrote some texts in 8.7.8.7 D as well:

*Love di- vine, all loves ex- cel- ling,
Joy of heav'n, to earth come down,
Fix in us Thy hum- ble dwel- ling,
All Thy faith- ful mer- cies crown;
Je- sus, Thou art all com- pas- sion,
Pure, un- bound- ed love Thou art;
Vis- it us with Thy sal- va- tion,
En- ter ev- 'ry trem- bling heart!*

and

*Come, Thou long- ex- pec- ted Je- sus,
Born to set Thy peo- ple free.
From our fears and sins re- lease us:
Let us find our rest in Thee.
Is- rael's Strength and Con- so- la- tion,
Hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear De- sire of ev- 'ry na- tion,
Joy of ev- 'ry long- ing heart!*

Both of these texts have lovely tunes in our hymnal, and either tune would do well for either text.

Over the years, as possibilities broadened and the old tradition of mixing-and-matching tunes gave way, there even more complicated hymn meters. One example of a fairly complex hymn meter that would still allow an interchange of text and tune is the following:

*Un- to the hills a- round do I lift up
My long- ing eyes.
O whence for me shall my sal- va- tion come,
From whence a- rise?
From God the Lord doth come thy cer- tain aid;
From God the Lord, Who heav'n and earth hath made.*

and

*Lead, kind- ly Light, a- mid th'en- circ- ling gloom;
Lead Thou me on!
The night is dark, and I am far from home;
Lead Thou me on!
Keep Thou my feet, I do not try to see
The dis- tant scene; one step e- nough for me.*

Both of the preceding have a stanza structure of 10.5.10.5.10.10, and their tunes would be interchangeable.

Another aspect in which the Wesley's were also quite influential was the encouragement of learning new hymn tunes. The singing-school movement in the American colonies, and the music education movement of the 19th century, ensured that eventually there would be fewer reasons to rely on a mix-and-match approach. As printed music became cheaper to produce, and as the gospel song movement introduced popular-music styles to church music, it became more expected to introduce a new hymn with new music written specifically for that text.

Why does it matter?

Even though we don't do it much anymore, it is worth knowing that the mix-and-match approach existed, because it is still possible for a congregation to sing an entirely unfamiliar hymn using a familiar tune. Suppose, for example, that you want to sing "O God, our help in ages past" (PFTL#470), but the congregation doesn't know the tune. Above the author's name you notice "CM", or "Common Meter". Looking in the Metrical Tunes index in the back of the book, you find a list of over 50 other hymns that are in Common Meter. Looking through these, you try a few out with this text:

*O God our help in a- ges past,
Our hope for years to come;
Our shel- ter from the stor- my blast,
And our e- ter- nal home!*

Our old standby AZMON ("I'm not ashamed to own my Lord") would fit. So would NEW BRITAIN ("Amazing grace"). ORTONVILLE ("How sweet the name of Jesus sounds") is another possibility. It would even be possible to use ORLINGTON ("The Lord's my Shepherd", PFTL#642) if you could get the repeat right on the third line. At any rate, there are possibilities to work with here. My pick would be NEW BRITAIN ("Amazing grace")--everybody can sing it from memory, and it has an appropriate mood. That, of course, is a matter of taste!

What is Metre?

Why Should I Care?

And If I Should Decide to Care, How Do I Use It?

[Why Should I Care?] [How Do I Use It?]

Let's take the second question first (briefly): One reason to care is that by using the principles of metre and the resources of this web site you will be able to sing the entire book of Psalms, as well as many other parts of God's word. This paper will explain the basics.

Metre: (British spelling of meter) "The specific rhythmic pattern of a stanza, as determined by the kind and number of lines: rhythm in music; especially, the division into measures, or bars, having a uniform number of beats." Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, World Publishing Co. 1957

So much for the dictionary. What does "metre" mean in practice?

As used in church hymns, metre is simply the pattern of syllable counts in the lines of a verse. For example, here is a verse from a well known hymn, with the syllables marked:

The¹ Lord's² my³ shep⁴-herd⁵, I'll⁶ not⁷ want⁸

He¹ makes² me³ down⁴ to⁵ lie⁶

In¹ pas²-tures³ green:⁴ he⁵ lead⁶-eth⁷ me⁸

The¹ qui²-et³ wa⁴-ters⁵ by⁶

Notice the numbers next to each syllable, and then notice the pattern of the number of syllables in each line. (Hint: look at the number by the last syllable on each line.) The pattern is 8,6,8,6. That is the "metre" of the verse—8,6,8,6. The 8,6,8,6 pattern is also called "common metre." Common metre is often abbreviated CM. Two other patterns that are frequently seen are called short metre (SM) and long metre (LM).

Short metre has two less syllables on the first line. The pattern is therefore 6,6,8,6. Here is an example:

Blest¹ be² the³ tie⁴ that⁵ binds⁶

Our¹ hearts² in³ Christ⁴-ian⁵ love⁶

The¹ fel²-low³-ship⁴ of⁵ kind⁶-red⁷ minds⁸

Is¹ like² to³ that⁴ a⁵-bove⁶.

Long metre is 8,8,8,8. Here is an example of long metre, this time without the numbers. See if you can count it out as 8,8,8,8

All peo-ple that on earth do dwell,

Sing to the Lord with cheer-ful voice!

Serve Him with joy, His prais-es tell;

Come ye before Him and re-joice!

Common metre, short metre and long metre are almost always referred to by their letter abbreviations (CM, SM, LM). Other metres, of which there are many, are simply referred to by their pattern. Some examples are: 8,7,8,7 and 10,10,10,10. Some songs do not follow a regular metrical pattern and are designated "irregular" metre.

Metres in the music

Words are generally grouped according to a single "repetition" of the metre of the verse. The verses can be used "as is" with appropriate music. For example, the version of Psalm 23 above is most often sung to a tune named "Crimond," which consists of a single repetition of common metre (CM) music.

Tunes such as Crimond (and the short metre (SM) tune we use with "Blest be The Tie That Binds") are fine for shorter songs, but they can quickly become monotonous when used for longer songs. Something is needed to break the monotony, or to delay its onset.

One technique for breaking monotony is the use of a refrain, or the repetition of the last one or two lines of a verse. These two techniques are also very effective for emphasizing a key thought of a verse or the whole song. Although rare, there are places in the Psalms themselves that use this technique. (Psalm 136, for example.)

When the goal is to adhere as closely as possible to the original Psalm or to sing as much as possible of a longer Psalm then a refrain or repetition would interfere with the goal by introducing unnecessary words. Something else is needed to allow us to sing more of the Psalm without the monotony of repeating a short, simple tune too many times. The obvious solution is to use a tune that is "longer" than just a single repetition of a metre. The simplest approach is to use a tune that extends to two repetitions of a standard metre, which is often referred to as a "Doubled metre tune."

Doubled Metre Tunes

Sometimes a song will use two repetitions of a metrical pattern. When this is done the pattern is said to have been "*doubled*." Doubled patterns are indicated by adding a "D" (or "d") to the metre designation. Doubled common metre, for example, would be abbreviated CMD. (Occasionally you will see it as DCM, but CMD is favored.) Another example would be 8,7,8,7.

If words are written for a standard metre, they will almost always work well with a doubled version of the same metre. Try Isaac Watts "I Sing the Mighty Power of God" for an example of a song that uses Common Metre Doubled.

As you explore the various settings of the Psalms you will find here, make it a point to try double metered tunes. These tunes will greatly enhance the number of verses of the Psalm you can sing before you get tired of the tune. In our music selection pages you will find the doubled metre tunes immediately following the "single" metre selections for each metre.

Now that you know what metre is, let's move on to our other two questions. If you're already sold on the idea you can skip straight to a practical example in: How Do I Use It? Otherwise, read "Why Should I Care?" for a little more background on the uses of this concept.

[Why Should I Care?] [How Do I Use It?]

Paul Lusher



Paul's passion for church music started at an early age. As a boy alto, he was singing professionally at age eight in churches and other venues. Originally trained in choral music, his lyric tenor voice led him to various opera and oratorio roles in his twenties and thirties. His professional career ended in his late thirties, but he remained active as a studio voice teacher in Chicago.

In addition to Paul's interest in vocal performance, he maintained a church position over the years. His first paid position began when he was a senior in high school. Since then he has worked in several different churches. His longest tenure was in Wheaton, Illinois where he ministered at historic College Church for almost ten years building a music program of over 200 singers. In addition to training choirs, he was instrumental in the design of a new sanctuary and the installation of a new 59 rank Schantz organ.

Paul and his family live in Grand Haven, Michigan on the shores of Lake Michigan.

The Center for Church Music has long been a dream for Paul. For almost thirteen years, it has been on the drawing board. Over the past eleven years, it gradually has become a reality. The launching of the Adoration Songbook is the first of several projects devoted to music of the church. Paul says, "Music and the church are inseparable. Over the past 2000 years, there has been an ebb and flow in regard to church music, and particularly, the singing of hymns. At the dawn of a new century, we have a great opportunity to again define the purpose and place of music in the church."

The Center is dedicated to this proposition. God willing, the Center will be a positive influence for Christ and His Church. As CS Spurgeon said, "When your heart is full of Christ, you will want to sing!"

Academic Background of Paul Lusher

B.M. Choral Music--Arizona State University
M.M. Vocal Performance--Arizona State University
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