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A Thesis Revisited

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AN LDS SOUND WORLD FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: A THESIS REVISITED

Warrick N. Kear

As part of the background to my 1997 Doctoral thesis with Professor Douglas Davies at Nottingham I conducted a nationwide survey of the musical practices and attitudes of 12 to 18 year old Latter-day Saints in the British Isles. Significant findings from that survey were:

1. A wide discrepancy between the qualities of religious, musical experience of LDS young women as compared with that of the young men.
2. 85% of young women aged 12 to 18 said they enjoyed singing, compared with only 65% for young men.
3. 53% of the young men in the sample admitted to hardly ever singing the hymns in Church.
4. A definite support for my pro-feminization hypothesis.

These findings¹ informed and reinforced my subsequent theories of a musical feminization and further ideas about the dysfunctional use of silence in LDS music culture.

Recent experiences in my family and Church life have served to strengthen a belief in those initial findings and also to reinforce ideas about their increased relevance to today's LDS youth. I believe there is an imperative to redress the balances in favour of the musical activities of young men in the Church, but more on that later.

¹ Warrick Kear, PhD Thesis 1997: *Music in Latter-day Saint Culture*, page 303.

My paper will, of necessity, be concise and my ideas condensed. A more detailed account of these theories is to be found in my doctoral thesis and my paper in the *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*.²

Firstly, let me explain the historical origins and reasons for my use of the term “musical feminization” in LDS culture. Admittedly, these artificial designations might be regarded, in today’s world of gender equality, as being a little out-dated. However, in the more conservative world of religious music the characterization of music in terms of masculine and feminine does apply. I chose to employ melodic characteristics stereotypical of maleness and femaleness. I have designated three categories³.

1. LDS Church Music with a **masculine** nature is energetic, with a strong pulse, jaunty rhythms, and wide-ranging melodic lines whose lyrical content is generally appealing to the young male. For example: “Let Us All Press On” (243)
2. Music of a **feminine** nature is gentler in rhythm and pulse, slower tempi, less angular with more flowing melodic lines. The lyrics would tend to be more introvertly personal and appealing to females. For example: “Where Can I Turn For Peace?” (129)
3. Music that cannot be placed easily in either of the above categories.

In 1985, after a decade of research and preparation by the Church music committee under the direction of Apostle Boyd K. Pack-er, the new hymnal entitled “Hymns” was published. I compared the hymns in this new hymnal with those of its predecessor which had been published in 1948, and found, as I had expected, a significant shift in

² *The LDS Soundworld and Global Mormonism* in “Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought” 2001, Vol. 34, 3/4

³ *Ibid.*, 82

favour of a feminization of both the music and the hymn texts. The following diagram summarizes these findings:

HYMNS DROPPED FROM THE 1948 HYMNAL TOTAL=70		
Masculine	Feminine	Ambiguous
26 (41%)	18 (29%)	19 (30%)
HYMNS NEW TO THE 1985 HYMNAL (TOTAL=92)		
Masculine	Feminine	Ambiguous
13 (14%)	59 (64%)	20 (22%)

Table 1 Hymns Dropped from the 1948 & 1985 Hymnal

Historically speaking, the first evidences for an LDS Church musical feminization appeared not long after the Second World War. It was manifest as a reaction to the dramatic and relatively sudden revolution in youth culture. Perhaps significantly the Rock/Pop explosion was a phenomenon, at its outset at least, chiefly in countries and populations where the Church was present. The magnitude of this socially revolutionizing event cannot be underestimated. It was perceived as threatening the values upon which western civilization was built and continues to undermine the LDS Church’s code of morality. The following table will, I think, show the trends in music culture to which I refer. I have chosen to use a metaphor that is both contextually apt and apposite - that of a Tsunami.

MUSICAL TIMELINE FOR MORMONISM IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY					
METAPHOR	PEOPLE	GENRE	YEAR	EVENT	EFFECT
Tremors	American Black	Jazz	Pre-1st to 2 nd World War		Mainly American Adults
	American Whites and blacks	Blues	1 st half 20 th century		
Earthquake	Mainly American	Blues and Rock	1952/3	Elvis's first recordings	American Teenagers and Adults
			1957	"Jailhouse Rock"	
			1960	Movie: "G.I. Blues"	American and some British Youth
Tsunami	Teenager Youth Culture	Rock	1962	"Love Me Do" by the Beatles	All British Youth
			1963	Cliff Richard: Movie "Summer Holiday"	British Youth
			1964	Beatles Hit America	American Youth
			1965	Rock music temporarily banned on BYU Campus	LDS Young Adults in Utah

		Rhythm and Blues. Rock and Roll.	1965	Rolling Stones “I Can’t Get No Satisfaction”	First “wild boys” band hits UK No.1. Then No.1 in US
		Pop Musical	1968	“Joseph And His Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat” gets first performance in England	All ages, but especially youth
			Oct 1971 & Dec 71 Ensign	LDS Church President Benson speaks: “Satan’s Thrust – Youth”	
After-Shocks	A Religious Rock Music Culture		12 Oct 1971	“Jesus Christ Superstar” hits New York	All ages but especially Youth
	An LDS Soft Rock Musical		1973	“Open Any Door”	LDS Young Adults in America
	An LDS Rock band		1973	The Osmonds’ “The Plan”	A Best-selling Album in America and Britain
			1974	“Saturday’s Warrior”	Popular with American and British LDS

Table 2 Musical Timeline for Mormonism in the Twentieth Century

The effect upon Latter-day Saints of this musical and cultural tsunami with its after-shocks was swift and pervasive. In contrast, the reactions of Church leaders were considered, cautious and, with hindsight, surprisingly slow.

As my chart indicates LDS musicians were swift to bring out an LDS version of the Pop religious musical. In doing so they created a new LDS musical sub-genre we might call the LDS Ballad. Many LDS composers in the 1970's and 80's such as Newell Daley, Lex D. Azevedo and later Janice Kapp Perry, to name just three, composed Ballads that were, after some initial scepticism, acceptable to the LDS hierarchy, and were permitted, for several years, to be sung in Church services. LDS composers softened the Rock style of the world – shall we say feminized it – by slowing the pulse, reducing the volume, and softening the instrumentation - amplified instruments were not allowed in Church services. In effect, feminizing the Rock Ballad.

Following two decades of relative silence on the subject – the 1950s and 60s, the Church's leadership at last began to speak out against what were perceived as raucous and objectionable elements of the emergent youth culture. One or two articles in the *British Millennial Star* from the 1960s tended to condone the more acceptable elements of blues and rock music, but protested against excessive loudness, heavy rhythm and licentious lyrics. Then, in the LDS October General Conference of 1971, for the first time, an LDS leader respected as a Prophet spoke out against these things. Around the same time as the launch in New York of the musical "Jesus Christ, Superstar" Church President Ezra Taft Benson spoke out against the whole spectrum of standards and ethics embodied in the new Pop culture that were repugnant to LDS values, including the use of tobacco, coffee, alcohol, obscenity in music and the arts and even the miniskirt.

His sermon was entitled: "Satan's Thrust – Youth". In particular he commented upon the new phenomenon of the Religious Rock Musical:

And now a music scholar points to "a new direction in the rock-drug culture [which is] hailed by many ministers and the music industry as

a silver lining in the clouds of gold. Religious rock is climbing up the “Top Ten” charts. The growing resistance to the rock-drug scene is being diverted by this wholesome-appearing retreat from the new morality. But a review of religious rock materials unmasks an insidiously disguised anti-Christ. By reducing revealed religion to mythology, rock assumes the mantle of righteousness while rejecting the reality of sin....By reversing the roles of Jesus and Judas, one fast-selling album fits perfectly the warning of Isaiah - ‘Woe to them that call evil good and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness’.⁴

In 1974 Apostle Boyd K. Packer said: “In our day music itself has been corrupted. Music can, by its tempo, by its beat, by its intensity, dull the spiritual sensitivity of men.”⁵ And from a more recent publication produced especially for LDS young people entitled *For The Strength of Youth* we can read:

Whatever you read, listen to, or watch makes an impression on you....You cannot afford to fill your minds with unworthy music. Music is an important and powerful part of life. ...You should be willing to control your listening habits and shun music that is spiritually harmful. Don’t listen to music that contains ideas that contradict principles of the gospel...Use careful judgement and maturity to choose the music you listen to and the level of its volume.

All the direction the leaders were giving throughout the 70s and 80s gave legitimacy to the efforts of the LDS composers in providing many examples of a soft and practicable musical option for LDS youth. The young women of the Church took up the new genre with fervent zeal and performed the ballads of Janice Kapp Perry and others regularly in LDS Church meetings. Whereas, in general, the Young Men eschewed this soft and gentle genre. The Young Women of the Church now had an alternative, feminized, collection of music from which they could derive spirituality as well as enjoyment. The Young men were, to all intents and purposes, musically disenfranchised. That

⁴ Ensign, December 1971, 53

⁵ Ensign, January 1974, 25: Inspiring Music - Worthy Thoughts

status quo remains, I believe, to this day. You will search in vain to find a musical composition in LDS Sheet music stores specifically written for 12-17 year old young men, whereas there are countless such items both written for and attractive to young women.

To paint the full picture of this era, the musical disenfranchisement of young men has also to be seen in the light of a contemporaneous movement within the LDS institution. In the early 1970s the Church began an all-encompassing operation called **“reduce and simplify”**. The reason for this is graphically in this picture:

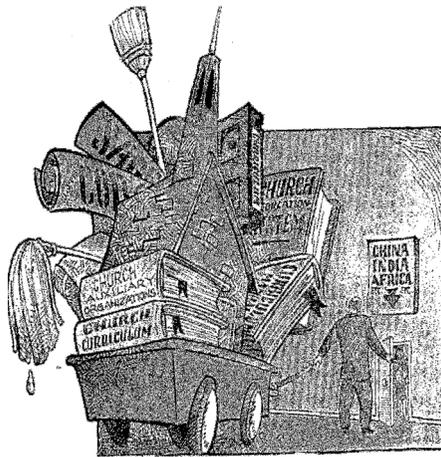


Figure 1 "Reduce and Simplify"

To put it in simple terms, the LDS leadership in the early 1970s felt that the Church could not and should not take the relatively luxurious trappings of an affluent Utah culture into poorer nations. Speaking at a satellite broadcast on the new and related budget programme, Elder Boyd K. Packer, one of the Church's leading Apostles, quoted from a letter of the First Presidency, that said: "We are very anxious that the cost of participation in Church activities not become unduly burdensome to our members....Particularly the youth pro-

grammes of the Church should be so managed that all of our young people may enjoy full participation.”⁶

The ultimate and most overt manifestation in all of this movement, apart from the radical slimming down of curriculum materials, was the inauguration of the Sunday 3-hour block in 1980 that reduced two main sessions of meetings per Sunday down to just one block of three hours. The family was then free to enjoy the rest of the Sabbath Day at home. Additionally all official Church music publications were reduced down to the Hymn Book and the Primary Song Book. Families were encouraged to use these books as the musical basis of their family life. Youth and Young Adult songbooks, that included many camp-fire type songs appealing to young men in the past, were discontinued, along with the practice of a Sunday School song practice. In contrast the composition of increasingly feminized music moved on apace with a proliferation of LDS ballad collections and Cantatas that are now available as CDs, DVDs and MP3 downloads on the Internet.

In the last few years there have been some indications of a slight redress in favour of compositions that might appeal equally to young men. The collection of ballads for the 2004 and 2005 “Especially For Youth” conventions⁷ contain one or two such numbers from a total of 25 compositions. Notably, from the 2004 collection the song “These Are The Days” and from the 2005 collection “I Will Be Ready”, both by Tyler Castleton and Staci Peters. But these are two drops in a very dry and empty desert.

I referred earlier to some recent personal experience that has refocused my attention on this matter. I must get a little personal for a moment in order to explain.

My wife and fellow musician has produced for us four wonderful children - a daughter, followed by three boys. The boys grew up as typical LDS boys in a typical LDS ward in the Bristol area. All three boys went through adolescence displaying the usual “effervescence” of

⁶ Boyd K. Packer, Satellite Broadcast on the new Budget Programme, Feb 18, 1990.

⁷ Stand In The Light - EFY 2004; A More Excellent Way - EFY 2005

hormones. Around the age of 13 they each rejected piano lessons from their parents in favour of football or tennis, and have each regretted that action in later years. They were subjected to a great variety of musical styles in the home and all chose mostly the music of the world for their personal listening. All the boys later served a 2-year mission for the Church and were all married within three years of returning from their missions. All three are now experiencing the joys and challenges of family life. However, our third son, upon his return, was immediately employed as a teacher at the Missionary Training Centre (MTC) in Chorley, England adjacent to the Preston England LDS Temple. Two years later he became the MTC Supervisor and served in this capacity for three years. As such, he was in a perfect position to observe the musical predilections of today's LDS young men as they entered missionary service. During those 3 years approximately 1,500 would-be missionaries passed under his watchful eyes.

From his observations to me I noted the following. Only about 20% had had some experience with music beyond Church services, usually playing the piano or another instrument. They tended to find the transition to listening exclusively to the Mormon Tabernacle Choir easy. The vast majority of new recruits found the sudden withdrawal of their favourite method of relaxation, i.e. listening to worldly music, somewhat disturbing and often frustrating. He observed that female missionary recruits had no problems adjusting to the new musically ascetic environment. Also, to use his own words, "Missionaries had little appreciation or understanding of the powerful role music, particularly the LDS hymns, could play in inviting a spirit of reverence and spirituality into their teaching and meetings."

I also took the liberty, recently, of interviewing two young men who were serving a full time mission in my own LDS congregation in Surrey. One was English and the other an American from Idaho. Their remarks bore out John's observations. Both missionaries had listened avidly to Rock music before going to the MTC just prior to their mission, and both confessed they did not choose to listen to any LDS music outside of Church services before coming on their mission. Nei-

ther elder had ever participated in the group-singing of any LDS music in Church other than congregational hymns on Sunday, and, unsurprisingly, both spoke spontaneously of their struggles at the MTC with the sudden and required withdrawal of their favourite music, finding it difficult at first to unwind and relax, having used rock music to do so before.

In conclusion I would say this. The above comments concerning musical feminization and disenfranchisement of young men give rise to some profound concerns. My apprehensions are over the possible reduction of readiness of our young male missionaries before they enter the MTC and of their overall effectiveness whilst performing their missionary labours. Perhaps LDS leaders and composers can do more to recapture the musical hearts of the pre-missionary young men. Phenomenologically speaking, such observations and concerns for individual purity and power also connect with the LDS Church’s use of silence. The following chart points out gravitation towards the non-use of music as LDS functions become more sanctified.⁸

DIFFERENTIAL VALUES FOR THE USE OF MUSIC			
FUNCTION	ACCESSIBILITY	USE OF MUSIC	SANCTITY
Auxiliary Organisation	Very open to visitors	Vitally important	Low
Sacrament Meeting	Open to investigators	Important	Reverential
Conference	Generally for the member	Desirable	Impressive
Solemn Assembly	Usually by invitation	Not important	Deeply solemn
Temple Ceremonies	Restricted Access	Unnecessary	Supremely worshipful

Table 3 Differential Values for the Use of Music

⁸ Warrick N. Kear PhD Thesis 1979 *Music In Latter-day Saint Culture* 88, 89.

When we connect these observations with Apostle Packer's point, made earlier - "Music can, by its tempo, by its beat, by its intensity, dull the spiritual sensitivity of men" raises concerns over the challenge to LDS young men as they prepare for missionary service is brought into even sharper focus.

The six years between 12 and 18, for the LDS male, are a period of intense preparation for missionary service. Ideally this ought to include exposure to and participation in the best of LDS music. The culmination of their teenage years, prior to going on a mission, is to attend the Temple. Within the LDS temples a sacred silence prevails as the noise of the world is shut out. To put the matter straightforwardly, the young men have probably been listening with their personal MP3 players to worldly music since they were about 12 years old with very little, if any, spiritually uplifting music making throughout that time. So it is not surprising to learn that they often find the sanctified and ascetic atmospheres of the temple and the MTC somewhat difficult to adjust to.

A musical feminization has served LDS young women well but has disenfranchised the young men from what could and should be a musically attractive and spiritually rewarding part of their preparation for a mission. Consequently, they go to the temple with the music of the world loudly ringing in their ears, rather than the songs of Zion urging them on!