

tradition

I see the influence of two traditions on my project. The first clear tradition is that of the Hymnody of the Church. Throughout the centuries, the church has sung its theology and when one examines any period in history, its hymns tell much of the story of the theology of that same day. I grew up singing from the hymnal and came to know and love many hymns that span from the 6th century to modern day. Hymns have served various liturgical functions and have a lot to offer to the needs of contemporary liturgy. In a world where individual experience is seemingly more and more important within the context of worship, these ancient texts have the capability of showing worshippers how these things have been expressed through history. Their timelessness is striking and their contribution to our sense of the Church historic is much-needed.

The second major influence I see is that of Western Music and especially the lieder of Schumann and Schubert. As a singer, lieder is the height of German art song and as a pianist, lieder is the best of collaborative works for piano and voice. What is most striking to me in looking back on my experience of playing and singing these pieces is how many of them are strophic rather than through-composed. Each verse goes back to the same music, or at least to the same melody, but each verse takes on a texture and style of its own based on the text of that particular verse. As I play more and more hymns, and attempt to write tunes of my own, it has become more and more important to me that I both sing and play these strophic pieces with integrity to the text.

experience

The experience of setting these texts has been phenomenal. I have been amassing a file of texts that I would like to use in worship settings for quite awhile. This course has allowed me the time and space to spend some time with these texts and to create settings for a few, while also trying my hand at setting some basic liturgical texts. For the first time, I can see that this might be able to be shaped and honed into an arts thesis project AND I am thrilled to think that my project might be of use to the Church.

Writing music is a difficult task, especially when one is seeking to write things that will be easy enough for congregations to sing them well, AND interesting enough that they might want to sing them. This balance is difficult. In the process of writing a tune for the Anne Steele text, I realized that it was speaking about praising God, but that perhaps inserting the “Alleluias” at the end of each verse would give time and space for the congregation to do that of which it had just spoken.

Most often, when setting an old hymn text, I choose to re-introduce one that is no longer in use, or at least not often. There is one exception in my project, and that is Isaac Watt’s Joy to the World. I heard a message this term during which the curse and its reversal was one of the themes. I left that day wondering why none of our hymns and songs seem to address this idea. And then, suddenly I realized that every Christmas we churn out this classic, and because of its musical setting, the text is somewhat lost. (And heav’n and nature sing, and heav’n and nature sing...) It is a classic Christmas hymn and yet the text

is not only about Christmas, but offers a macro-level commentary on the ruling, reigning and incarnate Christ. Singing this setting any other time would possibly be more distracting than productive, but it started me wondering about how I could shed new light on a text known by believers and pagans alike.