
THE POWER OF MUSIC

BY MICHAEL CARD

Socrates once said, "when the soul hears music, it drops its' best guard." That, for me, is one of the best descriptions of the power that music has. With music it is possible to open a door in the heart of the listener. Once inside, the musician can either beautify the interior of that soul, or desecrate that most holy of places. Often if you can get someone to sing something, you can get them to believe it. This has been used both for good as well evil throughout history. All this is to say that music is a powerful key.

Today I asked my son, Will, what he was feeling as he listened to a piece of music. "It feels like I'm flying on wings," he said with his eyes clamped shut. His description points to another power music has; the power to transport us. Once again this power can be used for good or evil. How many times, in the midst of worry or grief, has a song lifted you out of that dark place and left you in another better place, a place with more light and air. Conversely, how many times have you witnessed the grimaced faces of young and sometimes not so young people as they listened to the often torturous music variously described as heavy metal or death rock? These poor people seem not to be in their own skins as they experience the cacophonies. And indeed many have chosen suicide on the advice of the lyrics of this dark music, or simply perhaps as a way of ending the despair and pain in their souls which the music so gruesomely magnifies.

Often, while I'm on the road, parents ask me about the effects of rock music on their children. Usually they themselves are a product of the generation, the era of rock, so I sometimes get the feeling that they are asking as much for themselves as their children. After giving the matter a lot of thought over the years, I have concluded that the greatest long-term danger of rock/metal music is not the worldly value system it represents, or even the often dark associations it has that affects its' listener. The worst lasting effect it has is that it teaches kids not to listen at all. It conditions them to tune out the words in favor of the overpowering music. That can have a devastating effect on the soul.

Music can cause us to drop our best guard; it can unlock a door into our soul and it can transport us to another place; it can rob of us the ability to listen to the words. Music also has the power of shaping our lives and value systems. By this I mean music can be so powerful and

consuming a force that we can give our lives to it. This I've seen too many times in my experience as a musician. A person's language, dress, style of living and values, all dictated by a style of music. Once, while I was paying for some gasoline, the teller asked, "You're a musician aren't you?"

To which I replied in horror, "How did you know?"

"You just looked like one," he said with a smile not knowing he had just ruined my whole day!

So what are we to do with this power, this dynamite that can be used both to destroy lives as well as blast away stubborn mountains that may stand in our way? Once again, as with any important question, we turn to the life of Jesus for the answer. The Word tells us that everything must be brought under submission to Christ, and this especially applies to the power of music.

But what does it mean to say that we are to bring the power of music into submission to Christ? Essentially it means that we are determining to make music, like every other area of our lives, subservient to Him. That we will not allow this area of our lives to detract or in any other way take away from the purpose of the gospel. At the same time we are also committing to the notion that music can be, indeed must be, made to serve Christ, His kingdom and His people.

This translates into the world of homeschooling as we seek to use music to enrich the lives of our children, to teach them that the beauty of music can speak as well of the beauty of God, that they must be aware of the power music holds but at the same time, they need not fear it as long as it keeps its' proper place.

Finally, the greatest power inherent in music is its' ability to facilitate worship. Again, this power is often mishandled, even sadly by Christians, and used to focus worshipful attention towards the musician and away from Christ. This we must maintain is betrayal of the darkest and most severe kind. A betrayal of the beauty of God, an act of idolatry.

Therefore, we must pass on to our children a biblical value system which is shaped by an awareness of the power and true purpose of music. We must listen along with them to the music of their generation and help them make responsible choices in terms of what they will listen to and why. Above all, we must, by the witness of our own lives, demonstrate to them how music can be used to serve Christ and worship Him in Spirit and truth. ✍

