

The Salvation Army College for Officer Training

History of Salvation Army Music

Research Paper

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As a Church the Salvation Army exists in one hundred and twelve countries world wide. With so many nationalities, cultures, and languages what unites us all when gathering for International events? Music! The Salvation Army has been known for its music since its early beginnings in the East End of London, and continues to be known today for its high calibre instrumentalists in the music world. I would suggest that there is a relationship between the success of Salvation Army music and the culture(s) that it has experienced. I will be attempting to show that The Salvation Army has adapted musically to its surrounding culture and time throughout its history. This paper will be broken into two major sections, firstly we will examine the early development of Salvation Army music in the 1800's, and secondly we will examine the musical adaptation that has taken place.

A: Early Development of Salvation Army Music

Anyone who is affiliated with the Army knows from experience how important and vital music is to our worship, but what did the beginning of our union with music look like? Who was the pioneer of such a development? Where did this importance come from? How has this tradition lasted for so many years? These are some of the questions that I will be examining throughout this section.

In today's society church instruments are somewhat formal – proper would perhaps be the better word. In Booth's time instruments such as hand organs, piano accordions, triangles, dustman's bell, bugles and a huntsman's horn were all used.¹ The individuals who played these instruments were not chosen because they had terrific talent, but rather simply because they could coax the instrument to make a noise. George Scott

¹ Sandall, Robert. "The Army's Music and Musicians." *The History of the Salvation Army. Voll II 1878-1886* 1950, 103.

Railton was also known to have used bones to liven up his meetings at times! The Army also made use of an instrument called the tambourine. This first happened in April 1881 by Mrs. Rothwell, and eventually led to Marianne Parkyn (the future Mrs. George Railton) becoming the tambourine sergeant.² In an October 1882 edition of the War Cry, Railton announced that 1600 tambourines had been sold in six weeks, and told women that they should be singing and playing their tambourines simultaneously.³ Regardless of the ability of these instrumentalists and vocalists to attract the large crowds, Booth was hesitant about the use of Choirs because it was too difficult to understand the words they were singing.⁴

Booth's opinion changed however when he realized that choirs were attracting large crowds. Amongst the large crowds that the choirs attracted one day was the Fry family. The Fry family consisted of Charles and his three sons, Fred, Ernest and Bert. This family had an interest for instruments, and the first instruments that they ministered with were defective, needing to be tied and plugged in various areas to allow air to travel through them.⁵ Nevertheless the crowds that gathered in the open air had started singing down the Salvationists in meetings, so when Captain Watts found out about the music of the Fry family they began to go along with him to help drain out the interruption.⁶ Following this development the Fry's were invited to some special meetings that were being held, in order to "test" them, and to their excitement the brass

² Watson, Bernard. *Soldier Saint*, pp. 71-73.

³ London War Cry, October 07, 1882.

⁴ Ibid., 106.

⁵ The Genearl. *The Salvation Army: It's Origin and Development*. (London: Great Britain: Salvationists Publishing and Supplies Limited, 1956), 52.

⁶ Sandall, Robert. "The Army's Music and Musicians." (*The History of the Salvation Army. Voll II 1878-1886*, 1950): 113.

band was added to the methods of The Salvation Army.⁷ By 1879 the Corps in Consett, County Durham had their first band.⁸ In an 1880 edition of the War Cry General Booth declared that as many officers, soldiers, males and females should learn to play instruments!⁹ Of course, with William Booth's autocratic leadership, he saw the need to formulate rules, discipline and training for the bands and in the February 24, 1881 edition of The War Cry the first set of band rules were presented from Headquarters.¹⁰

Before the development of the instrumental music of the Army there had been glorious singing to God, and of course this continued on with the brass banding. The Army's desire to not make anything "churchy" continued on in its legacy in the musical department as well. Therefore in 1879 they had replaced the language of the church referring to "hymns", to the Church referring to "songs".¹¹ Salvationists began to write their own lyrics and in 1895 The War Cry was featuring a new song every week!¹² Within this time of writing songs The Salvation Army also began to write Christian lyrics to the familiar tunes that people already knew. The first recorded example we have of this is "Bless his name he sets me free" to the tune of "Champagne Charlie."¹³

I consider this to be an amazing idea! To use the tunes of songs that drunks would know from memory allowed the Army's Christian message to spread. Although there were tensions that surrounded this type of ministry the Army crowds eventually embraced this method with enthusiasm. Another song that was discovered using this

⁷ Ibid., 113.

⁸ The Genearl. *The Salvation Army: It's Origin and Development*. (London: Great Britain: Salvationists Publishing and Supplies Limited, 1956), 52.

⁹ London War Cry, March 27, 1880.

¹⁰ Ibid., 53.

¹¹ Sandall, Robert. "The Army's Music and Musicians." (*The History of the Salvation Army. Voll II 1878-1886* 1950), 107.

¹² Ibid., 108.

¹³ Ibid., 109.

method is “The Blood of Jesus cleanses me white as snow” (J.C. Bateman) to the tune of “I traced her little footsteps in the snow” (Gypsy Smith). Another song which is still very well known “I’ve found a friend...He’s the Lilly of the Valley” (Charles Fry) to the tune of “The Old Log Cabin in the lane.”¹⁴

From 1886-1904 the music library of The Salvation Army experienced exponential growth. The outcome of such interest and success led to the development of the Musical Department on October 22, 1883 at Clapton Training Home under the leadership of Herbert Booth.¹⁵ One has to wonder what William Booth thought of all of this after all, he was not an avid supporter from the beginning. At a council for officers Booth said: “They are to work for the good of the corps and for the salvation of souls, and for nothing else. We are not going to stick them up on a platform, nor march them through the streets for them to perform, and to be admired...all the beating and blowing is to get the people first into the barracks [hall] and then to the penitent-form.”¹⁶ Regardless of the exponential growth that resulted in the need for a music department, Booth’s priority was still very clear.

Let us now change our focus from the 1800s to the early 1930s. In January of 1928 Lieutenant-Colonel Richard Slater wrote an article which highlights the sources of Salvation Army music and song. I would like to take a few moments to unpack some of what he writes as a means to referencing the accuracy of primary sources. Slater writes of five sources that speak of the music of the Army, and suggests that four of them come from outside sources. These sources are national anthems and songs, secular

¹⁴ Ibid., 121.

¹⁵ Sandall, Robert. “The Army’s Music and Musicians.” (*The History of the Salvation Army*. Voll III 1886-1905), 176-182.

songs of the nations, tunes/words in the hymnbooks of other churches, and lastly famous composers.¹⁷ Slater refers to many of these sources in the same way in which they have previously been discussed. The source that sparked my interest the most was famous composers. The music of Bach, Handel, Mozart, Beethoven, and Chopin has all been drawn upon in Salvation Army composition. However the Army is not reliant on the musical masterpieces of the famous because we have inside sources that are also very talented. Slater suggests that with 41 annual volumes of “The Musical Salvationist” and approximately 1000 published Band Journals, that the Army is doing quite well on its own!¹⁸

B: Musical Adaptation in The Salvation Army

As previously mentioned, The Salvation Army has a presence in one hundred and twelve countries. Some of the cultures represented are naturally influenced by music, thinking of Africa in particular. In areas such as East Africa, Zambia and Zaire musical groups form very naturally amongst the people. As Brindley Boon suggests, their energy and passion are shown freely. “The African Salvationist comes into his own when he sings – and this he will do at any time, and for any length of time, given the least opportunity. His melodies are his own; his harmonies his own; his abandon his own.”¹⁹ In this type of culture I would conclude that a community’s attention would be quickly drawn to the Army, and overall the Army would be quickly accepted.

¹⁶ Sandall, Robert. “The Army’s Music and Musicians.” (*The History of the Salvation Army. Voll II 1878-1886 1950*), 119-120.

¹⁷ Richard Slater, “The Salvation Army Music and Song. Their Sources and Effects.” (*The Staff Review*, Volume VIII., no 1. 1928), 58.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹⁹ Brindley Boon, *Sing the Happy Song!* (London: Salvationist Publishing and Supplies, 1978). 55.

Quite opposite to Africa the Army is also present in India. India is not naturally a land of elaborate music and song, and is better known for its simple melodies. This served as a challenge for Salvationists who were accustomed to using four-part harmony. The decision was made to begin teaching the children two-part harmony while using their native guitar as accompaniment.²⁰ This met the needs of both parties and led to a very unique Salvation Army sound.

The last country I would like to highlight is Finland. The sound of the Salvation Army in Finland consists of vocal music that is set in a low key (which adds spiritual depth) and a string, rather than brass band.²¹ Once again the Army has adapted their regular musical routine of four-part harmonies and brass bands, to allow the music of one's culture influence the heart and soul.

Allowing ones culture to influence the heart and soul is not something that can only be done in the setting of that particular culture. The International Congress and the Centenary Year Celebration (1965, 1978, 1990) have both been in-gatherings allowing the musical expression of Salvationists from around the world to be experienced.²² During these in-gatherings diverse methods of ideas and musical media have been shared. Songster brigades with varying styles and cultural expressions have participated, as well as Gospel choirs, worship bands, folk dancers, steel bands, and even bamboo bands. Throughout the most recent in-gathering in 2000 a music leadership training seminar was offered for the first time. This allowed leaders from various cultures to speak about the leadership techniques, compositions and writings of

²⁰ Ibid., 64-65.

²¹ Ibid., 32.

²² Christopher Priest. "Play the Music, Play, Sing the Happy Song." (*The United States of America War Cry*, 120, no. 5, 2000), 14

other leaders.²³ This suggests to me that not only does the Army support its music and gospel arts department, but also it longs for the richness of worship that comes from cross-cultural expression.

Allowing music to be adapted to different cultures is not the only way in which the Army's music has been so successful. The Army's musical connections have also been involved in technology, pop bands, and musicals. According to the March 4, 2000 edition of the *American War Cry*, American bands were on the cutting edge of technology! It was American bands that pioneered radio broadcasting in 78-rpm recordings.²⁴ Again this supports why the Army's music has been so successful – it was readily available! If you did not hear it from an open-air meeting while walking down the street, or from the exciting singing coming from the hall on a Sunday evening, you were bound to hear it on the radio.

The music of the Salvation Army was everywhere! It even found itself on the billboard charts through the music of the Joystings. In 1963 the Army had just elected Frederick Coutts as their new General. In his press release he made a comment that the Army needs to keep in touch with the people – after word got around and conversations took place, a phone call was made to the College for Officer Training explaining that they were required to fill this need. Captain Joy Webb was instructed to take leadership of this initiative, and thus the Joystings were born.²⁵

²³ Ibid., 15.

²⁴ Dr. Ronald W. Holz. "Music and the Army's Mission." (*The United States of America War Cry*, 120, no. 5, 2000), 4.

²⁵ Alfred J Gillard. *Joy and the Joystings, The Salvation Army's "Pop Group."* (London, Great Britain: Lutherworth Press, 1967), 23-24.

The Joystings had very humble beginnings with Joy, Peter, and Bill on guitar and Thelma, Brenda and Lillian as backup singers.²⁶ In some cases this young group literally dusted off their guitars and began to use the talents God had given them to reach out to young people who were not interested in Church.²⁷ Through their sincere attitudes and performances young people listened when they spoke about God in music and language that was of interest to them, which eventually landed the Joystings with an appearance on the BBC and CBC.²⁸

No longer were the masses in London interested in gathering out in the street to hear a brass band play, as they had other things to do with their time (radio and television were rising in popularity). The masses were calling for a new type of music to grab their attention – the music of the Joystings. Joy Webb eventually began writing her own songs and stepped outside of the traditional 4/4 time of the Salvation Army. This was the perfect measure in which to march, however it was no longer relating to the people. Therefore Joy changed the measure to $\frac{3}{4}$ or “waltz time” which the people could relate to.²⁹ This once again peaked the attention of the public and gave Salvation Army music a heightened appreciation throughout the community.

Not only did the Joystings write their music in a more socially acceptable measure, but they also performed their music in places where the unchurched would hear it. The “Blue Angel” was a night club in London that the band was invited by the manager, because he wanted to hear what Salvation Army club music was like!³⁰ In Joy’s personal reflection on the two nights that the band spent at the Blue Angel she

²⁶ Ibid., 29.

²⁷ Ibid., 35.

²⁸ Ibid., 35.

²⁹ Ibid., 40.

attributes all their success to the prayers of their network of supporters. She recollects that it was 3 o'clock in the morning and they were about to take the stage (in front of the largest media crowd they had ever seen) when they were uplifted with courage. Joy thanks the Cadets back at the College for setting their clocks for 2:50 AM to get up and pray for them before they took the stage!³¹ Through the acceptance the band gained through those two nights of performing they were able to have many effective conversations which lasted into the wee hours of the morning with some of the customers.

The young people of the late 1960s were very much interested in Pop Culture, and the Joystings were able to fulfil that need. This band eventually gained so much success that they earned a contract with E.M.I. Records, appeared on live television³², and travelled to Amsterdam, Holland, Paris, Sweden, and Belgium along with many other places.³³ The Joystings may not have been parading down the streets like a marching band, but they were still successfully fulfilling the role that William Booth had envisioned for musicians. Joy says herself, "We are doing a preevangelism job. Our business is to arrest attention, to get a hearing from a public which has no reason to want to listen to religious songs which mean nothing to them. ...we must offer ideas which meet something the listeners already know about."³⁴

Another idea that listeners already knew about it is the theatre. This is yet another way in which the Salvation Army has continued to adapt to its surroundings.

³⁰ Ibid., 48.

³¹ Joy Webb. *"And this is Joy"* (London: Great Britain, © 1969 The Salvation Army), 37.

³² Alfred J Gillard. *Joy and the Joystings, The Salvation Army's "Pop Group."* (London, Great Britain: Lutherworth Press, 1967), 50-54.

³³ Joy Webb. *"And this is Joy"* (London: Great Britain, © 1969 The Salvation Army), 65-72.

³⁴ Alfred J Gillard. *Joy and the Joystings, The Salvation Army's "Pop Group."* (London, Great Britain: Lutherworth Press, 1967), 89.

The first musical initiative began in 1966 with John Gowans and John Larsson, and resulted in the musical “Take over bid.”³⁵ Gowans focused on the script and lyrics while Larsson focused on the music. When both elements were put together they had created a lively, colourful and happy musical which would be influential to both Salvationists and Non-Salvationists.³⁶ Once a successful performance of this musical was complete it was discovered that this was yet another way in reaching the masses for Jesus Christ. In the following years the Army has produced, “Hosea”, “Jesus Folk”, “Spirit”, “Glory”, and “The blood of the Lamb.”³⁷ These musicals provide a non-threatening environment and grasp the attention of people who do, and do not profess their faith.

Before The Salvation Army received its name the method of grabbing people’s attention with music was already well under way. It is only natural that as a method of ministry is successful in converting people to the Christ, that you would continue to use that method. From the humble beginnings of the taped and tied up brass band, we have experienced the majestic sounds of Staff Bands. From the humble beginnings of the dusty guitars of the Joystings, a generation experienced the message of God’s salvation being proclaimed through the media. But is this method of ministry still adapting to its surrounding culture? Of course we are no longer allowed to simply rewrite popular music due to copyright laws – but wouldn’t William Booth be encouraging us to find another way? The music of the Army still has the capability of being a strong method of ministry however I suggest that more creative energy needs to be fostered. What musical ministry needs to begin in the year 2007 with a humble beginning?

³⁵ Brindley Boon, *Sing the Happy Song!* (London: Salvationist Publishing and Supplies, 1978), 166.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 166.

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³⁷ Ibid., 167.