

## A LETTER TO THE SACRED MUSICIAN

Dear Sacred Musician,

I call you "Sacred" because I wish to speak of the time you spend in Holy Places working as a musician. Here your work is different than in the concert hall or in a recital venue. In Holy Space it is easy for conflicts to erupt, for egos to get bruised, for people to feel that their concept of worshipping God is not being honored, for liturgical leaders to distrust each other and to pander to what they think the Congregation wants. Your vocation, if you wish to take it seriously, is to help lift worship onto a different plane. Unfortunately, if you try to do this well, you can count on being attacked by those elemental spirits that are always trying to thwart these precious transformational experiences.

It is not possible to do what you do without your ego. Your ego gives you the courage to stand in front of a room full of people and conduct a choir of professional singers or volunteers of varying abilities, to play complex preludes and postludes with joy and reverence, to speak passionately about your music program to the staff, budget and music committees, and to accompany and lead everyone in singing the hymns throughout all the mood changes from funerals and weddings, to Holy Week, Easter and High Holy Days. The constant demand for repertoire appropriate to the season, as well as to your particular musical resources, abilities, worship space and instruments means that you tend to work many more hours than any non-musician could ever imagine.

Therefore it is very easy to never take a break, never take regular time off to rest, regroup, heal and be open to new possibilities. However, like any cell phone, you need to recharge your battery before you run down so you won't get ill and be overly sensitive to what other people think, unable to hear what they are really suggesting or asking. A cell phone on a low battery cannot perform all of its normal functions.

Please take good care of yourself. We need you. We need your creativity, your joy, your talent and your leadership. Make sure that you are taking at least one whole day off a week (or two half days). This Sabbath time is critical. You need to balance your work and worship with rest, exercise and play. It is so easy for the joy to drain out of worship.

Here's the thing: if the performance is truly inspired, the Holy One is actually speaking through us. This is a heady experience. When we are younger, it is easy to slip into the notion that these divine energies are ours. This is an understandable, but still costly mistake. As soon as we claim it as our own special gift, we lose the connection. The inspiration is gone. The musical offering now feels forced and ingenuine. There are strings attached. It is as if we are telling people to worship the conductor, the organist, the musician--not God.

So we learn to bracket our ego, to set it aside whenever we step into Sacred Space so that what we take in and what we send out are given as an offering to God with no strings attached. This is the hardest aspect of being a Sacred Musician. Like the priest, rabbi, pastor, minister or worship leader, we too have to work on a certain kind of holiness of life. Our ability to be transparent to the Spirit will make all the difference in the depth to which our musical offerings can resound. The best musicians not only have natural gifts and talents, but also work hard to keep that divine channel open so that they can receive new revelation and be bearers of eternal truths.

May you take your vocation seriously, and may you be blessed in your ministry of music.

The Rev. Canon Dr. Victoria R. Sirota

14 April 2015