

The right approach to Lyrics in Music

Written by W.J.Pais

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Lyrics and Music go hand in hand. A study of folk songs shows how the musical sounds and the syllables are matched. This is the underlying fact, that gives us the different musical durations. In early music, the durations as in Indian music, were single and double. In order words, Long and Short. The poetic rhythm too is in this form.



Note how each sing syllable is given one note (wuarter note), and the double : "lamb" takes double or half note.

In the above example note, how the Clef, determines, where the Do has to come. Actually this is the Sol Clef which determines, that Sol comes on the second line, which moves through its stomach. Accordingly, the other notes are placed on spaces and lines above and below it.

Note also the 4/4 tells us that this music is written in Common rhythm, which has four beats to a measure. In the Common measure, the first beat is heavily accented, and the third beat is lightly accented. The lyric accents should also fall in place. If they do not, it is considered a poor understanding of the music rhythm. When some one tries to fit lyrics in an existing tune, he faces these challenges. If one composes his tune, according to the rhythm, then he can avoid it. But composers do not grow on trees. This is an exceptional gift which needs nurturing. In the classical period, the musicians depended on lyricists, as these are two distinct gifts, which might not be found in the same person. If the poetic rhythm is irregular, the music notation too has to go along with it.

One finds strict observance of this marriage of tune and rhythm in old Church Music. Modern day composers, having abandoned the traditional music, due to various factors, have been borrowing melodies, and fitting words into them, with poor compositional quality, but as the average Church goer is not musically gifted, it goes well with them. It is said, one eyed

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Alexander was a King among the blind.

We find the word Glory, which has a long and short syllable, being given a short and long in music, because the composer was more interested in the tune, than in communicating the meaning of the text.



This applies to lyrics in **any language**. Composers like Naushad, always used appropriate lyrics. Modern day composers can not be used as a standard as they are also synthetic as their synthesizers and there are others who use their synthesizers to produce good music !

In Church Music at least, the composers should aim at giving to God the best they have. The first thing they should do is take the study of music seriously, so that their compositions stand tall as those of their ancestors before the Vatican II.

One should use music as the **hand-maiden of Scriptural Text**. Always give the latter a higher place, and choose music which suits the meaning of the sacred texts. Anything less than this is a disgrace, and an expression of lack of respect to the faith they seem to profess.

The mood of music too should be appropriate to the context of the sacred texts. A music accompanying the text of the penitential rite, should appear to give the impression, that the singer is sorry, and wants to be pardoned for his sins. Just watch the singers in your parish, and what they seem to portray. Why then should there be a hue and cry, if unbelievers accuse the Church in public media. First let us examine, whether we take our faith seriously. Are we going to a place of social gathering or a place of worship.

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I therefore call upon the Church musicians who read this to take their art seriously and change the situation. It is God who will assist them if they show Him that they want to try.