



Fa La La La La!

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Last weekend, I had the pleasure of hearing the Bel Canto Chorus perform a Christmas concert in the St. Josaphat Basilica. Everything about the event was festive, and concertgoers of all ages delighted in the opening procession. Early into the program, the choral director announced a piece to be sung in honor of the Polish community who had built the basilica, at great personal sacrifice. As the chorus began singing *Lulajze, Jezuniu*, a traditional Polish carol, an elderly woman behind me joined in, singing sweetly and quietly the Polish words she knew from heart.

*Lulajze, Jezuniu, moja perelko
Lulajze, Jezuniu, me piescidelko*

*Sleep, sweet Jesus, angels surround you,
Sleep, sweet Jesus, shepherds have found you.*

Music touches us and rests in special places in our memory. Alzheimer's patients have extraordinary responses to music from their past. Because we store music in the part of our brain connected to long-term memory, music can trigger memory, emotion, and mood. Even for otherwise non-verbal patients with dementia, music can tap deep emotional recall, triggering both a recitation of lyrics and the original experience connected to the music. Music takes us back to places and events that we might remember only in passing.

When I receive my daily lectionary readings by email (presbyterianmission.org/devotion/daily/), I confess that I often skip the Psalms. To me, they feel repetitive. To others, they are filled with musical richness. Originally set to music with historic instruments like the lyre and cymbals, the Psalms would have touched early hearers in a deep way. The repetition I dislike in the written words is part of the lyricism and poetry that drew people into its meaning, when accompanied by music. Since then, composers have reset the Psalms to the music of their times, and our hymnals are replete with examples. For example, "As Deer Long for the Stream" (Presbyterian Hymnal #189) draws on imagery from Psalm 42, while "God is Our Refuge and Our Strength" (Presbyterian Hymnal #191) follows Psalm 46. Psalm 23 has been set to music many different times. When we read a printed Psalm, the words often resonate because of the music we've come to associate with those words. Reading Psalm 51 will cause some people to hum "Create in Me a Clean Heart" (Glory To God #422); for me, I hear a contemporary version by Jennifer Knapp, entitled "Trinity." The music takes us places that the words alone might not have done.

In this Christmas season, carols and favorite hymns might evoke memories of long-past holiday celebrations or meaningful times in worship. Savor each verse. Belt out the tune, or at least hum along. Like the Polish woman at St. Josaphat's, you are creating deep memories and emotions that will last your lifetime.