



Touch

In this series of articles we have looked at nine music elements — rhythm, melody, dynamics, harmony, tempo, tonality, form, soundwaves and timbre.

We have seen how each element reveals much about its Creator, God. As well as touching on some music theory and history, we are also discovering deeper spiritual aspects which go beyond what the average musician learns when studying music. We continue with the next element — touch.

Cause and effect

Touch is the direct link between the musician and the music. It is about cause and effect.

Cause — how a musician approaches the instrument or uses the voice to affect the soundwaves.

Effect — how the soundwaves are changed to produce music.

Definition

Touch can be defined as *how we sensitively contact instruments to make a beautiful sound*. Obviously singing is done naturally within the voice box and not by touching with the skin. When I use the word ‘instruments’, the voice is automatically included. Another word for touch, particularly with the voice, is *articulation* which refers to the way words are sung clearly and distinctly. Likewise, when playing an instrument, there are many terms and signs to indicate articulation and how the notes are produced. We will look at some of these later in the article. Touch and articulation mean the same thing.

The word *contact* means ‘with touch’ and comes from the Latin *tactus* meaning ‘the sense of touch’. Touch has several meanings. ‘Keeping in touch’ means communication. ‘Physical touch’ can be gentle or rough, sensitive or hurtful. Emotions can be ‘touchy’. Hearts can be ‘touched’ spiritually. All of these meanings can be applied to music. Musicians communicate a musical message by physically touching (playing) their instruments in particular ways. Music can be played beautifully and from a sensitive heart and it can affect the emotions and hearts of the listener. A well-known Biblical example is how David played his harp and brought relief to King Saul in 1 Samuel 16:23.

God-message

God can touch us even deeper inside our spirits because He designed us deliberately

in His image so we can keep in touch with Him. This touch is even closer than the closest relationship between humans. Deuteronomy 30:14 tells us, 'But the Word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart that thou mayst do it.' Jeremiah 31:33 says, 'I will put my law in their inward parts [the mind] and write it in the hearts and I will be their God and they shall be my people.' When Jesus came He physically touched people's hands and eyes to heal them. Parents would bring their children to Him so He could touch and bless them. God wants us to be intimately connected with Him in the closest relationship possible. This is the God message of the music element of touch — *God touches us from the inside of our hearts and wants us to keep in touch with Him.*

Rest and communication

Let's look at a few music examples. Two basic ways of playing the piano are staccato and legato. *Staccato* means that there is a very short break between notes, a microsecond of silence. This can make a huge difference to the music. We learned in the article of rhythm that silences are very important because they represent rest and refreshment. They bring extra life and energy to the sounds in the same way the Sabbath was God-designed so we could be refreshed and energised. He said we are to keep this day holy to Him. Why? So we can be closer in our relationship with Him. The element of touch is also connected with the Sabbath because they are both about communicating and keeping in touch with

God. In turn, we are refreshed emotionally, mentally and spiritually and ready to face whatever is to come.

Legato is the opposite of staccato. There is no break between the notes, so they flow on in the same way that we speak. We don't breathe until we sense a pause. Try this short experiment. Read this sentence taking a breath between each word. It is not normal and natural to speak this way. In the earlier article on melody we learned that melody is all about language and communication because melody is high and low notes following each other like words. Touch is about communication, about conveying a musical message to the listener. Music is an extremely powerful medium for communicating messages and touch is a part of this.

Exposing the heart

Musical tone, hearts and attitudes are all intricately interwoven in the element of touch. The way people play an instrument or use the voice box reflects much of their state of heart and character. The quality of the soundwaves is directly affected and flows into the listeners' hearts. One can tell straight away with students whether they are just rushing to get to the end of a piece or if they are really enjoying and putting their heart and expression into their playing. A singer's voice exposes whether ego dominates with forced, exaggerated tones or whether the voice is more humble and worshipful through gentler, sweeter, more natural sounds. We can see how the

spirit affects the soul which affects the body which affects the music. A musician is personally exposed the moment he touches his instrument or vibrates his voice box.

The heart of a composer and musician is vital in determining the musical message. The message is different when a believer in God produces it. One only has to see the way so many instruments are abused in much of today's music. In rock concerts, guitars are thrown onto the floor and smashed. Keyboards and pianos are pounded and strings broken. Voice boxes shout and scream and irreparable damage is then done to the vocal cords. Words are not articulated clearly but slurred. Even classical music is not exempt. Many virtuosos break strings on their violin or piano and opera singing can be full of forced tones, excessive vibrato and dominating egos. Such performances may be impressive and entertaining but is this type of musical touch acceptable to God?

Contrast such look-at-me renditions with a composer or musician who has an intimate relationship with God, is in regular contact with Him and is more aware of His desires and expectations for music and man. This person is more likely to have gentler, sweeter, unaggressive, egoless, loving, worshipful sounds as they sing or play their instrument.

Heavenly music vs worldly music

A complication occurs when humanistic and worldly philosophies, attitudes and habits flow through into Christian music. Then the message can be confusing because

the music elements, especially touch, can reveal if a God-honouring state of heart and worship are present or not. Discernment with the help of the Holy Spirit is necessary to decide whether we should hear, play or sing this music. A good test may be to think of heavenly music. Can we imagine the angels in heaven throwing down their harps and smashing them in frenzied excitement of worship? When the saved reach heaven and are given their golden harps made by divine hands, will these precious instruments be played aggressively as they are on earth? How will we use our own voices in heaven? I think the answer is obvious but decide for yourself.

It is often said that someone has 'a nice touch' for the instrument, meaning they play it very well. It is often flippantly and commonly used because the person doesn't really know what to say. Hopefully this article will help you understand in more depth what touch really means. It's all about communication, expressing a message through the way an instrument is played or a voice articulates. It's about touching God and someone else emotionally, mentally and spiritually.

Touch is how we sensitively contact instruments or use the voice to make beautiful sounds. The essence of this music element is in God's message to us, that God touches us on the inside of our hearts and wants us to keep in touch with Him. ■

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