



Philosophy and
Music

BY WENDY HILL

We don't usually associate music with philosophy. However our philosophy of life directly affects our thoughts on music. Our world view determines the type of music we like.

To assess the link between music and philosophy we ask two questions:

1. What is philosophy?
2. How do we teach our children a Biblical worldview through music?

WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY?

The word *philosophy* means 'love of wisdom.' The Greek *philo* means 'love' and *sophia* means 'wisdom'. A philosopher is often thought of as someone highly educated, well-read, good with words, very intelligent and knowledgeable.

What is this wisdom we desire and what does it mean to be wise? Wisdom is the ability to discern what is right and wrong. We constantly judge our actions and those of others in terms of whether they are right or wrong. It is obvious that we must have a standard for right and wrong and for Christians that standard is the Bible.

The first three chapters of Proverbs tell that wisdom was in the beginning with God. God's wisdom was passed on to man in Adam, but when man fell and sinned he embraced another type of wisdom—man's wisdom. Tragically, Adam and Eve's human wisdom clashed

with God's wisdom. This deficient wisdom of man has effected every part of our lives and also affects the music elements and the way a composer/musician manipulates them.

The word 'philosophy' only occurs once in the Bible and then as a warning. Colossians 2:8 says:

See to it that no-one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

Paul is warning us of the danger of embracing a humanistic philosophy.

In order to understand the many philosophies and music styles of the Twentieth Century and today, we need to examine the Ancient Classical period with its humanistic philosophy. This ancient philosophy saw its rebirth in the Renaissance (1450–1600). This philosophy continues to our day—to the extent that if someone wants to appear highly intelligent and wise they quote from the ancient Greek philosophers such as Plato or Socrates.

A brief study of history reveals that man's wisdom is based on the thinking of living or dead humans of the last 2000 years.

By contrast a biblical study of history begins with the Creation. God's people have had access to the living God's divine wisdom for over 6000 years (Proverbs 8:22–3, 3:19, Deuteronomy 30:14, Jeremiah 31:33, Isaiah 51:6).

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It is no coincidence that God sent His Son, Jesus, to earth at the time of the Greeks and Romans when humanism was flourishing. Since then there has been a war between Christianity and humanism. Into this conflict of ideas come parents and teachers who are confused by these conflicting philosophies which force them to ask:

- How should I go about teaching?
- How do I avoid humanistic, godless philosophies?
- What sort of music will honour God?
- Where do I find a Biblically-based music curriculum?

HOW DO WE TEACH OUR CHILDREN A BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW THROUGH MUSIC?

Volumes Two to Four of *The Elements of Music* (EM2–4) contain a history course from Creation to the Twentieth Century contrasting humanism (man's wisdom) and Christianity (God's wisdom), focusing on an appreciation of music styles. They present music theory and the fourteen music elements in a way that reveals their Creator.

In EM2 a wholistic approach is introduced in the study of the Ancient Times, Middle Ages, Renaissance and Baroque Periods. In EM3 a 'Wisdom Poem' is learned. The poem is mixed with rhythm, melody and harmony then sung and played on the keyboard. Students learn simple basics about philosophy in an easy, enjoyable and memorable way. These form a solid foundation for understanding why certain events happened in history and also how and why so many music styles developed. Humanist philosophers such as Locke, Voltaire, Rousseau, Kant and Hegel are offset against God's workers in the Two Great Awakenings in the 1700s and early 1800s—the Wesleys, Whitefield and the beginnings of the Missionary Movement. Students meet famous hymnwriters who wrote for God's glory as well as other classical composers who wrote for man's entertainment.

In EM3 music theory continues as students learn to compose by putting scriptures to music. Four new music elements are learned (body, touch, dynamics and tempo). The last element,

spirit, is left till EM4 along with a study of the last two historical periods—Late Nineteenth Century (1850–1900) and Twentieth Century (1900–2000). The *Keyboard Arrangements* book provides a practical application of teaching points from lessons and worksheets. Students learn to play and analyse hymns. Two CDs contain hundreds of examples for ear training and listening to music of different periods.

Volumes 2, 3 and 4 each contain a *Teacher's Resource Kit* with lessons, answers and 2 CDs, a *Student Workbook* with worksheets, a *Keyboard Arrangements* book and a *Test Booklet*. Following on from Volume 1, Volumes 2 to 4 can be used by upper primary levels

and older. Parents and teachers benefit enormously from working through the course with the children.

This course aims to provide a truly Biblical and comprehensive music course encompassing music areas such as theory, composition, history, keyboard skills as well as related areas such as general world history and philosophy. Music is put into a Biblical perspective along with the rest of God's creation with the main goal of learning more about God.

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made so that men are without excuse.

Romans 1:20



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