

Q & A WITH MARK HAYES

Biographical Information

- 1. How did you begin in music? What instruments did you study growing up? What is your primary instrument or instruments and with whom did you study?**

My parents were not particularly musical, but they encouraged my siblings and me in our musical pursuits. My mother was especially affirming in this area. When I was 10 years old, our local public school system offered instruction on band instruments. My parents offered to pay for piano or band instrument lessons. My younger sister, Lisa, and I chose to study piano and my older brother chose to study the trombone. At the time we lived in a trailer with very little room for a family of six. I remember very vividly our first piano. It was a beat-up old upright with just a partial keyboard...only 66 keys, but just the right size for our very small living room.

I studied piano with Hazel Burke, my first teacher, for only a year-and-a-half and then our family moved from Normal, Illinois to Gurnee, Illinois, a town just north of Chicago. There I studied with Virginia Cline for the rest of my pre-college years. Both teachers were quite good and held my interest. One interesting fact is that Hazel Burke taught me the beginnings of improvisation and how to apply that to hymns within my first year of lessons. I took it in with great interest. My early lessons in improvisation were an important part of the musical foundation that led to my arranging and composition in later years.

When I was 13 years old, I started accompanying the choir and congregation at my local church in Waukegan, IL. Throughout my high school years I remember being intrigued with any new choral music that used non-traditional harmonies. I particularly liked the piano arrangements of Kurt Kaiser, Fred Bock, and Gloria Roe. At that time, I never dreamed I would be writing my own piano arrangement books some day.

During junior high school, I wanted to play piano in the jazz band, but the director said I needed to also be in the concert band. He suggested that I learn to play the bassoon. I suspect that was because his bassoonist was graduating and he needed a replacement. So I studied bassoon and played that in high school and during my freshman year in college. I was never very motivated to learn this instrument. I never excelled at it as I did the piano. Piano was always my primary instrument. I have not studied any other instrument, except the organ, and that was just for a brief year in high school.

When I was in high school, I studied classical literature, but also enjoyed playing popular music on the side. In addition, I continued to immerse myself in evangelical church music. I was raised Southern Baptist, so my church tradition was more gospel than highly liturgical. I never heard good organ music or the

sound of a good organ until I went to college. Worship music centered on the piano in my church, so I tried to learn everything I could from all the new piano books and choir cantatas that came out. I relished each John W. Peterson cantata that was published because Peterson wrote “outside the box” at the time.

In the late 1960s youth musicals such as “Tell It Like It Is” by Ralph Carmichael and Kurt Kaiser and “Good News” by Bob Oldenberg were popular in churches. These were the first musical works in the evangelical church to incorporate folk idioms, rock beats, and mildly jazz harmonies. After hearing some of these, I decided I could write my own musical and that was the beginning of my compositional career. With limited theory knowledge, no writing experience, and no compositional training, what I wrote was a disaster and I discovered a newfound respect for these writers. I soon gave up the idea of writing and decided to concentrate on being a good pianist.

When it came time to go to college, I did not have a burning desire to be a music major. I was a good student in high school and had excellent grades. I seriously considered being an English teacher. However I did decide to at least audition at one conservatory in Wisconsin and see if I had what it took to be a piano major. My mother and I drove up to Appleton, WI to Lawrence University for my audition on a cold and snowy February day. Not many miles into the trip, our car skidded on the highway due to icy roads and we never made it to the audition. I often wonder how different my life might be if I had made it to the audition and gone to that school instead of Baylor University in Waco, TX.

2. What years did you attend Baylor, and what did you study besides piano? What other formal music study have you had? Any composition?

Believe it or not, Baylor University was ground zero for contemporary Christian music in the 70s because Word Music was headquartered in Waco. I attended Baylor University from 1971-1975 and graduated in 1975 magna cum laude with a Bachelor’s degree in piano performance. I studied with two principal instructors, Dr. Michael Ard and Jane Abbott-Kirk. Both were incredibly patient with me. During my four and a half years of study, my vision of being a concert pianist waned and was replaced with the dream of being either a performer or arranger of contemporary Christian music. I think many music majors that attend church-related schools go through this phase. I became so attached to this dream that my desire to practice classical literature suffered. In fact, I flunked the jury before my senior recital because I had not sufficiently prepared. Luckily for me, the recital committee gave me another chance. I practiced nearly nine hours a day until it was performance ready and finally gave my senior recital in the summer of 1975 and graduated that December. Bassoon was my secondary instrument for one year and then I switched to voice as my secondary instrument. Unfortunately I did not have a great vocal teacher and I didn’t apply myself. I learned far more while accompanying voice performance majors in other vocal studios than I did during my formal lessons.

I studied the full range of classes that a music major does – two years of theory, two years of music history, form and analysis, orchestration, and piano

pedagogy classes to name a few. I did have one year of composition, but I did not learn much from the teacher I had. I was not a composition major, had no tolerance for avant-garde and experimental music at the time, and thought I would never need anything this man was teaching. Ah, the folly of youth! Little did I know that I would make my living as a composer. In retrospect, there are several classes to which I should have paid more attention.

Probably the most significant thing that happened outside of the classroom at Baylor was my involvement with a choir called the BRH Choir and a small ensemble named "Spirit of Love." I sang in the BRH Choir, which performed new contemporary Christian music and well-arranged sacred choral settings. This was the first choir I ever heard that sang sacred non-classical music with artistry and style, and through it, my passion for choral music was birthed. Spirit of Love was a seven-voice mixed ensemble for which I played piano and arranged music. We were together for about three years and I wrote scores of hymn and contemporary Christian song arrangements for this group. The group was very versatile and I wrote to their strengths. In 1977 Word Music offered us a recording contract and I was asked to arrange the entire album, including the orchestration. I felt like such a novice, but plunged into the project with abandon and learned so much through the process. Although the group did not stay together very long, a choral book called "Spirit of Love," my first publication, was released and got my name out in the marketplace. I'm especially indebted to Charlie Brown, Word's director of choral publications at the time, for taking a chance on me and working with me throughout the production of the album.

3. What have you done since Baylor – places of residence, positions held, including dates?

After graduating from Baylor, I stayed in Waco until September 1977. I did not feel the need to do graduate work until I figured out what my career path would be. During this time I survived by accompanying for voice teachers, writing for Spirit of Love, and playing the piano at First Baptist Church, Waco. In addition, I did some free-lance editorial work at Word Music, such as proofing manuscripts, reviewing new manuscripts, and transcribing leadsheets – skills that would serve me well in my next job.

After traveling with the Continental Singers for two summers (1974 & 1976) I attended the Christian Artists Camp of the Rockies in Estes Park, Colorado in August 1977. While there, I was offered a job by Dr. Jesse Peterson to work for him as a music editor for his new publishing company and record label, Tempo Music in Kansas City, Missouri.

I moved to Kansas City in September 1977 and have lived there ever since. My tenure with Tempo Music Publications was just three years. My responsibilities were reviewing manuscripts that had been submitted for publication and taking them through each step of the process to final publication. Editorial positions require knowledge of music theory and a keen eye, but it is not particularly creative work. While at Tempo, I continued to arrange music on the side. During this time I connected with Lew Kirby at Shawnee Press and was able to publish

my first collection of sacred piano arrangements with them. This had been a dream of mine for many years, ever since I started playing the piano in my local church at the age of 13.

During my time at Tempo, I met and connected with several other publishers in the evangelical church music industry through various conferences and reading sessions across the country. This would prove fortuitous for me in the future. In addition, Jesse Peterson allowed me to go to Los Angeles for recording sessions with various Tempo artists where I got to observe the recording process. I copied parts for other arrangers and even had a chance to arrange instrumental parts for some artists' albums. During this time I also arranged and orchestrated the first in a long series of albums for the Celebrant Singers, an international Christian singing group based in Visalia, California, directed by Jon Stemkoski. Each time I was given an opportunity like this, it helped me move beyond my comfort zone and helped me develop my craft as an orchestrator and arranger. I still had no intention and sense of being a composer. I enjoyed arranging and felt like this was my calling or ministry.

While working at Tempo from 1977-1980 I also served as a music assistant at Leawood Baptist Church, in Leawood, Kansas, a suburb of Kansas City. My responsibilities included playing the piano for congregational worship, accompanying the adult choir, and working with the youth choir. During my years at Leawood Baptist, I met a man who became an important mentor to me for years to come. One Sunday evening, the concert choir from Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar, Missouri was performing a concert at our church. Dr. Duncan Couch was the director and chair of the choral department. As part of their program they sang several selections from my first and only publication at that time, "Spirit of Love." I had never heard any other group but Spirit of Love sing these songs. Dr. Couch did not know me or know that I was in the audience. Afterwards I introduced myself and he told me how much he liked what I had written. Over the next few years he commissioned me to write several hymn arrangements for his concert choir who performed them throughout the area, including regional ACDA conventions. Dr. Couch challenged me to try my hand at composition, and he held the bar high. He encouraged me when I had written masterfully and pointed out where I could improve. He truly helped me believe in myself and affirmed me by commissioning pieces on a regular basis. When he moved to the University of Missouri-Columbia, he continued to take interest in my writing and he commissioned non-sacred works.

In the summer of 1980, Tempo Music Publications closed its doors because of financial difficulty and I lost my job. I decided to stay in Kansas City and try my hand at being a free-lance arranger. By this time, I had developed relationships with many other publishers across the country and did free-lance work for them, such as leadsheet transcription, piano accompaniment writing for choral anthems, part extraction for orchestrations, and proofreading. My intent was just to work on a free-lance basis for a year or so until I got a "real" job. That "year or so" stretched into 23 years and I have been free-lancing ever since.

In 1988 I was contacted by Integrity's Hosanna! Music to develop a new line of worship products for them similar to the very popular Hosanna! Music tapes. I worked with them for about a year, and produced and arranged two recordings in their instrumental series of praise and worship music. I also contributed arrangements to one of their Hosanna recordings. I left their employ in August 1989.

I was regularly commissioned by churches to write seasonal pageant music. Tallowood Baptist Church in Houston, TX commissioned me to write original music for their sanctuary choir and orchestra, which was a part of an Easter pageant called "Celebration of Life" in 1989.

In the fall of 1989 I had the opportunity to write for the contemporary Christian group, Glad. They contracted me to arrange two hymns, "Christ, the Lord Is Risen Today" and "Rejoice the Lord Is King" for their Acapella II recording.

First Calvary Baptist Church in Kansas City, Missouri commissioned me to write an extended dramatic work for choir and orchestra called "Crossroads" which was premiered in 1990 at the Music Hall in downtown Kansas City. This work was a collaborative effort with Deborah Craig, noted lyricist and writer.

In 1991 I was contacted by Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri to teach one of their composition majors. This student was pursuing a double major in composition and organ, and asked specifically to study with me. From 1991-1993 I worked exclusively with her as an adjunct professor of composition, in order for her to graduate from the seminary. I do not enjoy regular classroom teaching, but love teaching workshops on a weekend basis and do that frequently throughout the United States and in some foreign countries.

I currently spend most of my time composing and arranging choral, piano, solo vocal and instrumental music. I do this regularly on an "assignment" basis for approximately 6-7 publishers. It is rare that I have time to just sit down and write a piece for fun. My editors pitch me ideas and I accept or decline based on my interest and the busyness of my schedule. I accept commissions from churches, universities, schools, community choruses, seminaries and individuals based on my interest and my available writing time. Writing consumes approximately 70% of my job. I usually have projects or assignments scheduled for 6-7 months in advance. I work most days from 9:00 AM – 4:00 PM, depending on my travel schedule. Some of this time is involved in maintaining my website, answering emails, phone calls and the general business of being self-employed. The other 30% of my job involves the following activities:

1. Performing solo piano concerts
2. Serving as a clinician at church music conferences
3. Working with choirs at weekend composer festivals
4. Teaching seminars on piano improvisation, composition, orchestration, arranging, blended worship or other aspects of worship preparation or planning

5. Representing various publishers at choral reading sessions, which are sponsored by music dealers throughout the country
6. Occasional concerts with a four-piano team called Festival of Keyboards
7. Private teaching at my studio for advanced students in piano improvisation, composition and arranging
8. Producing custom recordings for individuals and choirs and demonstration recordings for my publishers of my new choral pieces
9. Recording solo piano albums
10. Critiquing manuscripts for aspiring composers and arrangers

4. What year did you receive the Dove Award? What was it for?

In 1985 I was contracted by the Gaither Music Company to arrange, orchestrate and produce a choral collection and companion recording entitled "I've Just Seen Jesus." It contained 10 well-known inspirational Christian songs of the day, including the title song, which was popularized by Sandi Patty and Larnelle Harris. I co-produced this recording with Randy Vader, who was the director of choral publications at Gaither Music at the time. Bill Gaither was the executive producer. This recording won a Dove award in 1986 for best Praise and Worship album.

5. Other than the Dove Award, are there other significant, defining moments in your career (awards, important performances of your music) or other achievements?

I've had the privilege to hear my music performed in many countries across the world such as England, France, Austria, Germany, Singapore, Taiwan, Australia, New Zealand, Brazil, and Canada. Here are a few of the highlights:

- May 1983 – London, England
I had the opportunity to arrange, orchestrate and record a choral collection entitled "Sing the Mighty Power of God" for the Benson Music Company with players from the London Philharmonic. It was one of my first major choral/orchestral albums and it was a tremendous learning experience.
- April 1986 – San Diego, California
My original work "Jubilate", a worship musical, was premiered by the Azusa Pacific University Chorus under the direction of Dr. Gary Bonner at MusiCalifornia.
- August 1990 – Myerson Hall, Dallas, Texas
The First Baptist Church of Dallas Sanctuary Choir and Orchestra premiered my commissioned work entitled, "Holy Is the Lord."
- June 14, 1997 – Coventry Cathedral, Coventry, England
The combined choirs of Coventry Cathedral and special guest choir from the West End United Methodist Church of Nashville, Tennessee presented "A Choral Explosion" under the direction of Paul Leddington Wright, featuring my arrangement of "Swingin' With the Saints" as the finale number in the historic cathedral.

- July 25 – August 1, 1999, Universidade de Brasília, Brasília, Brazil
I was a presenter and speaker at the first national Brazilian Choral Directors Association convention. I spoke on "The Choral Music of Mark Hayes."
- September 14, 2001 – National Cathedral, Washington D.C.
The Navy Band Sea Chanters on national television performed my setting of "Grace" at the National Prayer Service as the nation struggled with the tragedy of September 11.
- March 23-24, 2002 – Folly Theater, Kansas City, Missouri
"Two Flutes Playing" a song cycle for TTBB voices, 2 flutes, piano, percussion, soprano, tenor, and baritone soloists, narrator and 2 dancers was premiered by the Heartland Men's Chorus of Kansas City, Joseph Nadeau, director.
- May 28, 2002 – Carnegie Hall, New York City
Under the direction of Dr. Timothy Seelig, Turtle Creek Chorale, The Women's Chorus of Dallas, Tampa Bay Gay Men's Chorus, Tampa Bay Women's Chorus and the New England Symphonic Ensemble performed my original song, "One World" as part of the New York premiere of "Sing for the Cure."
- April 24, 2003 - My original work "Te Deum" will be premiered by the Music Department of Wayland Baptist University and the Plainview Symphony Orchestra in Plainview, Texas.

Religious Life

1. Describe your religious background and church involvement.

I was raised by devoutly Christian parents. Consequently church involvement has always been a regular and important part of my life. I attended a Southern Baptist church most of my adult life until 1999. I said "yes" to Christ in a personal salvation experience when I was 16 years old at a youth evangelism conference. Throughout my high school years, leadership in my church youth group and my participation as church pianist helped me grow spiritually and set in place lifelong habits of attending church and using my gifts to further the kingdom. Because I attended a Baptist university, there was a wealth of opportunities to grow spiritually and learn from fellow students. I attended a progressive Baptist church during my freshman and sophomore years at Baylor, which helped me think outside the box about my rather immature theology. Ultimately that helped me be a spiritual seeker and made me realize that I am responsible for my growth as a Christian, not the church. Since that time I've learned and grown much from a myriad of sources, including the many different denominations I've visited in my job, friends whose spiritual paths are different from mine, Bible study, spiritual retreats, personal journaling, mentoring relationships, small group life, and books that have challenged my theology. Probably the biggest teacher in my spiritual life has been failure – how I've chosen to react when I've been disobedient, disappointed or discouraged and how I've relied or not relied on God to see me through.

Because I was a musician, I had ample ministry opportunities to use my gifts in local worship services, revivals and choir tours. Early on I saw the power of music in ministry and had a sense that God could use the gifts He had given me to bless others. I played the piano at First Baptist Church in Waco, TX from 1973-1977. It was a double blessing because it helped me hone my pianistic skills and at the same time allowed me to be a blessing to others in worship. I became a student of worship and focused on how instrumental music helped or hindered worship environments. I continued this when I moved to Kansas City, Missouri in 1980. I served as volunteer pianist for Broadway Baptist Church from 1981-1999. Because our church had a progressive and creative approach to worship, I thoroughly enjoyed serving on the worship team, helping to plan weekly worship services, producing Christmas and Easter programs, composing praise and worship music for my church, arranging charts for our worship band, and accompanying the choir. All of these activities helped me learn about the importance of living in a vibrant, committed faith community and the value of using your spiritual gifts to build up the body of Christ. In addition to my contributions to the worship life of our church, I was a member of a small group, which met weekly for over 15 years. My group served as a place where I could share the joys and trials of my spiritual life, receive prayer, and support my brothers and sisters. An older Christian brother also mentored me for about 10 years who taught me the importance of accountability.

2. What is significant about your religious/spiritual life that has influenced you to compose religious music?

I don't remember the exact moment when I began to consider my career as a ministry or felt "called" to my life as a composer of sacred music. It seemed to flow out of my experience as a church pianist of 13 years directly into my experiences in college and on into adult life. I've had many people who have affirmed me along the way. I remember the joy in hearing for the first time how my piano playing had helped people connect with God in worship in a way that was beyond sheer talent. They were helping me name my spiritual gift of creative ability, which is different from a talent in that it leads the listener directly to God, not to the performer. I knew that I wanted to use this gift...that I **had** to use this gift for God. As I compose or arrange sacred music I pray that whatever I create will release the Holy Spirit when it is performed, wherever that may be. During high school and college I had a few chances to play secular music in a club or restaurant. Although those experiences helped my keyboard skills and expanded my limited musical world, I got little satisfaction playing in those venues. I wanted my musical contributions to count for something more, so I concentrated on what I could contribute to the sacred music world.

The older I get, the more expansive I've become about my mission statement, which is "to create beautiful music for the world." Whether or not the music I write is intentionally sacred, I believe that the inherent beauty in it has the power to heal and inspire the world. The power of God can work through it no matter who is singing it or who is listening to it.

Since I am not married and have no biological children, my compositions are my “children” in one sense of the word. Once I’ve created them, they are no longer under my control. I share them literally with the whole world once they are published. I hope they are performed excellently and with a sense of artistry, but more than that, I hope that the spiritual quality that is infused in them is released each time they are performed. My sense about what is spiritual is continually expanding. God is limitless and beyond our comprehension. People experience the Divine in all kinds of music and expression of the arts, even when it may not seem sacred to us. I hope my perception of the Divine keeps growing and changing as I mature. The more I recognize God in all things, the more I will be able to reflect God in my life and in my music.

Compositional Output and Style

1. List the genres in which you have composed and your most significant works other than solo song literature.

I have published compositions and arrangements in the following vocal genres:

SATB Choral Octavos, Accompanied and Unaccompanied
 SAB Choral Octavos Accompanied and Unaccompanied
 SSA/A Choral Octavos Accompanied and Unaccompanied
 TTBB Choral Octavos Accompanied and Unaccompanied
 Two-part Treble Choral Octavos
 Two-part Mixed Choral Octavos
 Mixed Voice Cantatas and Dramatic Musicals
 TTBB Song Cycle
 Solo Voice and Piano

I have published compositions and arrangements in the following instrumental genres:

Solo Piano
 One Piano – Four Hands
 Two Pianos
 Four Pianos
 Piano/Organ
 Flute/Piano
 Brass Ensemble
 Full Symphonic Orchestra
 Woodwind Ensemble
 Brass Ensemble
 Brass Ensemble and Rhythm Section

Significant Compositions:

All Glory Be to God, Lindsborg Press, SATB with orchestra
 And the Father Will Dance, Hinshaw Music, SATB with orchestra
 Everlasting Light, Word Music, SATB and solos, with orchestra

Far Above All, Lindsborg Press, SATB with orchestra
 Four Tickets to Christmas, (with Deborah Craig-Claar) Allegis Publications, SATB and solos, with orchestra
 Glad Tidings of Joy, Alfred, SATB with saxes, brass, and rhythm
 Gloria in Excelsis Deo, Exaltation, SSAATTBB with orchestra
 Gold and Silver, Shawnee Press, SSAA, unaccompanied
 God Is In Our Midst, Hinshaw Music, SATB with orchestra
 He Lifted Me, GlorySound, SATB with soprano solo and organ
 Holy Is the Lord, Shawnee Press, SSATBB with orchestra
 I Forgive You, Genevox, SATB with piano
 I'll Be Home for Christmas, (with Deborah Craig-Claar) Lillenas Music Publishing, SATB with solos and orchestra
 In Perfect Harmony, Hinshaw Music, SATB with piano
 Jubilant Praise, Hinshaw Music, SSAATTBB, unaccompanied
 Lenten Song, Hinshaw Music, SATB with piano and oboe
 Let Hope Spring Forth, Shawnee Press, SATB with symphonic band
 Love, Lindsborg Press, SSAATTBB voices with solos and orchestra
 One World, Shawnee Press, SATB voices with orchestra
 Prayer of Being, Fred Bock Music, SATB unaccompanied
 Psalm 150, Hinshaw Music, SATB with piano, brass, and percussion
 Rejoice and Sing Out His Praises, Hinshaw Music, Inc., SATB & TTBB with piano
 Singing Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs to God, Lindsborg Press, SSAATTBB with orchestra
 Surely He Has Borne Our Grief, Brookfield Press, SATB with piano and cello
 The Mighty Power of God, Beckenhorst Press, SATB and SSAA with piano, brass, and percussion
 The Mind of Christ, Lindsborg Press, SSAATTBB with orchestra
 This Is the Day the Lord Has Made, Beckenhorst Press, SATB with piano
 To Love Our God, Hinshaw Music, Inc., SATB with piano, woodwinds, brass, and percussion
 Walkin' Down that Glory Road, Hinshaw Music, SATB with piano
 Walking in the Spirit, Hinshaw Music, SATB unaccompanied
 We've Come This Far By Faith, Alfred, SATB with saxes, brass, and rhythm
 Well-Tempered Jazz, GlorySound, solo piano with rhythm section

2. How would you describe your compositional style? What have been the primary influences on your style?

My compositional style contains many quintessential popular American elements such as jazz harmonies, singable melodies, and syncopated rhythms. Because I did not have much formal compositional training, my technique grew out of my abilities as an arranger and my strong improvisational skills at the piano. In fact, my piano accompaniments are extremely integral to compositions, much like the melody and piano accompaniment are of equal value and interest in art songs. When writing contemporary or popular sounding choral music, I

sometimes use a verse/chorus form. This form is a direct influence from popular music today.

When creating a through-composed or more traditional piece, I always start with the text and look for the natural sections or changes of mood within the text. I then try to put into music what the text says section-by-section, allowing for contrast in moods, modulations, development sections and paying attention to where the climax of the piece might be. One element that I purposely included in my arrangements when I first started writing was the element of surprise. This might be something as simple as a change to the melody line, an interesting chord substitution or new rhythm. The purpose of this was to “hook” the listener and keep them interested...to model creativity and to delight the ears with the unexpected. To this day in my arrangements or compositions I still try to include something surprising in the best sense of the word.

I once had the chance to talk about composition with John Rutter, whom I greatly admire. Much like the old adage about the three most important factors in selling real estate being location, location, location, he said the three most important elements in composition were form, form and form. Since that time I’ve paid special attention to the form of my pieces. How do I use repetition in my pieces? This is crucial because people like to hear a familiar theme return within a song. How do I engage the listener within the first few measures? How does each section of the piece flow into the next and how are they related tonally? Does the piece make sense melodically and tonally to the listener? Can he or she follow it and anticipate where you are going and yet still be delighted and surprised? Does the music serve the text well in regard to the form of the text? That is to say, what phrases if any should be repeated textually and how are the most important parts of the text highlighted musically?

Because I consider myself a commercial composer, I am very aware of what the market needs and wants. It has always been a challenge to write something that is accessible and popular with the market and yet remains true to the integrity of my artistic expression. One can’t simply write what one wants to all the time and expect it to be published or sell. I take suggestions from my editors about what they need. I listen to choir directors and members and pay attention when I’m conducting choirs to see how certain pieces are received. When I’ve been commissioned to write a major work, I write up to the expectations and abilities of the performing group, but at the same time, I’m keenly aware of how the piece will be received in the larger market if it is eventually published. I never intentionally write “down” to the public just to sell more music. It’s actually harder to write a good “easy” piece of music that has longevity and musical integrity. All choirs, whether 200+ or eight members, deserve good literature.

Important influences in my compositional style have been:

1. Romantic composers such as Chopin, Rachmaninov, Tchaikovsky, and Scriabin
2. Impressionistic composers such as Debussy and Ravel

3. 20th century composers such as Aaron Copland, Samuel Barber, Ralph Vaughn Williams, George Gershwin, and John Rutter
4. Film composers such as John Williams, Dave Grusin, and Danny Elfman
5. Contemporary jazz performers and arrangers such as David Benoit, Yellow Jackets, T-Square, Singers Unlimited, Gene Puerling, David Foster, Bill Camplin, and Ivan Lins
6. Christian composer/arrangers Paul Johnson, Ken Medema, Kurt Kaiser, Fred Bock, David Maddux, Ed Nalle, and Bob Kauflin
7. Musical Theater composers Stephen Sondheim and Andrew Lloyd Webber

Song Style

1. How would you describe your song style?

My song style has been heavily influenced by American popular music. I often use a verse, chorus form, as opposed to a strophic form or through-composed form. My solo songs tend to be more personal and emotive. First and foremost I want my solo songs to have a beautiful melody, one that is singable and easily listened to by the untrained ear. That is not to say that these melodies would be formulaic or that I write “down” to the lowest common denominator. I try to enhance the text and let the shape and the rhythm of the melody flow from the text.

Because I have extensive improvisational skills at the piano, I always make the accompaniment as important as the vocal line, supporting it through interesting harmonic changes, counterpoint, rhythmic interest, and modulations. I rarely play the vocal line in the accompaniment unless it serves a purpose at that point.

When I’m trying to write something that is less popular sounding and more traditional, then I limit syncopation and the use of jazz harmonies and often approach the form in a more through-composed style.

2. What inspired you to write sacred songs for the soloist?

The recent Mark Hayes Vocal Solo Collection series, published by Alfred Publishing, was an assignment by my editor, Jean Anne Shafferman. Throughout college, I enjoyed accompanying soloists at my church. We would often improvise a hymn arrangement at the last moment for special music in a worship service. Sometimes what the soloist and I would create was magical; sometimes not. I jumped at the chance to arrange a series that would utilize my improvisational skills and my love of a good vocal melody. The church music market has moved in the direction of pre-recorded tracks and I wanted to offer an option for those singers who like to sing with live accompaniment.

3. What do you look for in a text?

I look for freshness, honesty and clarity. I tend to avoid texts that tell personal stories or testimonies, because not every singer or listener can relate to those.

Biblically-based texts that are not stilted appeal to me. I like poetic texts that express vibrant new metaphors. I avoid lyrics with clichés and rhymes that have been used too much.

4. Most of your published pieces for solo voice are arrangements. Do you have plans to publish any original compositions for solo voice?

The reason I write arrangements for solo voice is that they are easier to write. Also, arrangements of well-known spirituals or hymns have a greater appeal than original songs. They are inherently better known. I slave over the texts of original songs because I want to say something that is important. It takes time for those ideas to germinate within me. I hear many popular vocal songs that do not move me and I want to make sure that mine touch the listener and not just take up space in a book. As I create more original music, I hope to publish those in solo voice format.

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