

There has to Be a Song

“If you want to find the secrets of the Universe, think in terms of energy, frequency and vibration” -- Nikola Tesla

“What we have called matter is energy, whose vibration has been lowered as to be perceptible to the senses. There is no matter.” -- Albert Einstein

Tesla said it. Einstein agreed. Science proved it. It is a known fact that everything, including our own bodies – is made up of energy vibrating at different frequencies.

We are made of sound. Even the scriptures tell us, “....in the beginning was the Word”, a sound uttered by God that began all of creation.

With so much sound bouncing around inside of us, of course it has to come out. There had to be a song. And sharing those songs with each other makes for a grand night indeed.

It's a Grand Night for Singing

If song is the expression of the sound within us, few, if any, were more prolific at that expression than Irving Berlin. When he was 5, his family immigrated to America at the turn of the century to escape escalating religious persecution in Russia. Berlin had no memory of the country of his birth, except this: “lying on a blanket by the side of a road, watching my house burn to the ground.” His family of 8 struggled in their new home on the lower East Side of Manhattan, but as an adult Berlin said he was unaware of being raised in abject poverty since knew no other life.

By the age of 8, to help support his family, he was hawking new papers. The son of a cantor, young Irving discovered that if he sang while selling papers people would toss him pennies. He eventually joined other youngsters who frequented saloons on the Bowery to entertain customers in exchange for a few coins. From this experience, he learned what kind of songs appealed to audiences. He taught himself to play the piano after the bars closed at night and soon began writing and plugging his own songs. Eventually Berlin got noticed and rose in prominence as a songwriter. His first hit “Alexander’s Ragtime Band” was followed by another, and another, and another. All together Berlin wrote over 1,500 songs, including “Blue Skies”, “Easter Parade”, “Cheek to Cheek” and “God Bless America”. He wrote scores for 20 original Broadway shows and 15 original Hollywood films earning him 8 Academy Award nominations and actually snagging a win for his 1942 song, “White Christmas.”

According to Mr. Berlin, “Music is so important. It changes thinking, it influences everybody, whether they know it or not.” He wrote this song, “Say it With Music” for a 1921 production of the same name. It was the first revue staged at The Music Box, his own Broadway Music Theatre.

There's a tender message deep down in my heart
Something you should know, but how am I to start?
Sentimental speeches never could impart
Just exactly what I want to tell you

Say it with music
Beautiful music

Somehow they'd rather be kissed
To the strains of Chopin or Liszt
A melody mellow
Played on a cello
Helps mister Cupid along
So say it with a beautiful song

Say it with Music

From “The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe” by C.S. Lewis:

The Lion was pacing to and fro about that empty land and singing his new song. It was softer and more lilting than the song by which he had called up the stars and the sun; a gentle, rippling music. And as he walked and sang the valley grew green with grass. It spread out from the Lion like a pool. It ran up the sides of the little hills like a wave. Soon there were other things besides grass. The higher slopes grew dark with heather. Patches of rougher and more bristling green appeared in the valley. They stood on cool, green grass, sprinkled with daisies and buttercups. A little way off, along the river bank, willows were growing. On the other side tangles of flowering currant, lilac, wild rose, and rhododendron closed them in.

All this time the Lion's song was going on. When a line of dark spruce sprang up on a ridge they were connected with a series of deep, prolonged notes which the Lion had sung a second before. And when he burst into a rapid series of lighter notes primroses suddenly appeared in every direction. When you listened to his song you heard the things he was making up.

Colors of the Wind

“Ah, music,” he said, wiping his eyes. “A magic beyond all we do here!” – J.K. Rowling, Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone.

The Wizard of Oz

Music has always been a matter of Energy to me, a question of Fuel. Sentimental people call it Inspiration, but what they really mean is Fuel. I have always needed Fuel. I am a serious consumer. On some night's I still believe that a car with the gas needle on empty can run about fifty more miles if you have the right music very loud on the radio. – Hunter S. Thompson

I Hear America Singing

If song is the first natural outpouring of the sound within us, dance is a very close second. After all, we can't hear a tune without tapping our feet. The ancient Greeks incorporated dance into many of their plays, and while it's style was far from the show stopping numbers we see on Broadway today, dance still captivated those early theatre goers.

Over the years Broadway dance has evolved from ballet like movements that were a separate entity from the plot itself to being a fully integrated and vital part of the story telling process. Great choreographers such as Agnes De Mill, Robert Alton, and Bob Fosse have infused the dance of Broadway into our culture. Just hearing the first strains of a well know happy Broadway tune can make you want to stand up and...turn, kick, kick, turn!

But considering our space limitations here tonight, we ask that you just keep it to tapping your feet.

Broadway Blockbusters

“Music expresses that which cannot be put into words and that which cannot remain silent” – Victor Hugo

Bring Him Home

Many of the songs you have, and will hear tonight, “Grand Night for Singing”, “Say it with Music”, “Somewhere Over the Rainbow”, “The Rhythm of Life” have come to us through either first, or second-generation immigrants. Indeed, the American music vernacular would simply not be what it is today were it not for the songs these newcomers carried in their hearts.

On the first day of January, 1862
They opened Ellis Island, and they let the people through
And the first to cross the threshold of that isle of hope and tears
Was Annie Moore from Ireland who was all of 15 years.

In a little bag, she carried all her past and history
And her dreams for the future in the land of liberty
And Courage is the passport, when your old world disappears
But there's no future in the past when you're 15 years.

When they closed down Ellis Island in 1943
17 million people had come there for sanctuary
And in springtime when I came here and I stepped onto its piers
I thought of how it must have been when you're 15 years

Isle of hope, isle of tears
Isle of freedom, isle of fears
But it's not the isle you left behind
That isle of hunger, isle of pain,
Isle you'll never see again
But the isle of home is always on your mind.

Isle of Hope, Isle of Tears

When Grateful Dead drummer Mickey Hart's grandmother descended into the depths of dementia, she stopped speaking. When she was on the verge of entering hospice, he played drums for her. Although she had not uttered a word for nearly a year, she smiled when she heard the insistent beat. A tear came to her eye and she said “Mickey” very clearly, over and over again. Rhythm was reconnecting her to the world that was fading away.

“That showed me the power of what rhythm can do.” observed Hart.

Research continues to find restorative power in rhythm when treating brain disorders such as dementia, Parkinson's, Alzheimer's and even attention disorders. Music can ease anxiety and depression associated with life threatening illnesses such as cancer, and remarkably patients recover from surgery faster when played music than when given prescribed medication.

Our lives deeply depend on rhythm. Said Hart, “That’s what really makes me, me. It’s also what makes us, us. Its’ rhythm central. It is life itself.

The Rhythm of Life

From the beginning, music -- specifically drums -- have been an integral part of military life. Drums ordered the daily lives of the soldiers, calling them to meals, drill exercises, other meetings, and even telling them when to wake up, and when to go to bed. Their rhythmic beat provided cadences for marching. In the hazy fog of battle, when visual cues were often impossible to see above the chaos and gun smoke, drums were vital in communicating orders. Even the act of enlisting is often referred to as ‘following the drums’

Tonight, we’d like to salute those of you who “Followed the Drums” and enlisted in one our military branches to serve our country. During the Armed Forces Salute we invite you to stand up when the theme for your military branch is played. Anyone with family members who have served is welcomed to stand in honor of them as well. We also invite you to join in the pledge of allegiance when prompted.

Armed Forces Salute

From a Railway Carriage by Robert Lewis Stevenson

Faster than fairies, faster than witches,
Bridges and houses, hedges and ditches;
And charging along like troops in a battle,
All through the meadows the horses and cattle:
All of the sights of the hill and the plain
Fly as thick as driving rain;
And ever again, in the wink of an eye,
Painted stations whistle by.

Here is a child who clammers and scrambles,
All by himself and gathering brambles;
Here is a tramp who stands and gazes;
And there is the green for stringing the daisies!
Here is a cart run away in the road
Lumping along with man and load;
And here is a mill and there is a river:
Each a glimpse and gone forever!

All Aboard

On July 12, 2016 the streets of Buenos Aires, Argentina, was filled with hundreds of protestors. Only these protestors didn’t carry signs or chant. Instead, they danced...the Tango.

Their concern? Energy. The 400 percent rise in energy bills was jeopardizing the future of the city’s famed Milonga, or tango dance halls. Said one protestor, “This isn’t just for the people of Buenos Aires, but everyone in Argentina. Tango is very important to us. It is important to protect and defend it.”

For these people Tango is about more than delicate footwork and grace. Although this dance is a blend of many cultures including African, South American and European – it is the national identity and pride of *Argentina* -- its very soul.

The President of Argentina agreed to cap the rise in prices, hopefully protecting the institution that is so beloved. Tango isn't just a dance. For those protestors, it's a feeling, it's life, a journey. It is energy itself.

El Choclo

The writer of “Home on the Range”, Brewster Martin Higley VI was tired of city life in the busy metropolis that was Pomeroy, Ohio in 1823. So he packed up his bags and headed for the western frontier of Smith County Kansas. There he found the open plains where animals of all kinds could cavort uninhibited much more to his liking. Also, an important factor for Mr. Higley, the lack of discouraging words.

The concepts of energy, frequency, and vibration for Higley were probably as foreign to him as the moon, yet this man, who was a student of medicine, was on to something. There is agreement among science, medicine and metaphysics that all things vibrate, and the frequencies of those vibrations have a direct effect on us.

Low frequencies create a denser energy that can lead to discomfort and even pain. Despair and desperation due to challenges will consume those vibrating at a lower frequency.

High frequencies, on the other hand, make you feel lighter, emotionally and mentally. You feel greater power, clarity and joy.

The question is, how do we vibrate higher? For Mr. Higley the answer was fresh air, time with nature and a view twinkling stars. For you and me? An evening of listening to beautiful live music, with rather charming narration I might add, is sure to set you on a higher plane.

Home on the Range

The close harmony of Barbershop is especially thrilling. The tones clearly define a tonal center and imply major and minor chords as well dominant and secondary dominant seventh chords that resolve primarily around the circle of fifths, while making--.

Ahhh, nobody really cares about all that. We just know it's fun to listen to. Forget about all the complex harmony, those melodies get stuck in our head for days. And without so much as one single instrument, except the one each and every one of us are born with.

When those chords ring it there's not denying – We really are made of music.

Won't You Come Home Bill Bailey

Humans love predictability – except for when we don't.

The syncopated sound of Ragtime Music offers a “ragged-rhythm” that is ever so slightly off-beat. You feel it right in your heart. The long companion of the silent movie era, it could by happy and flirtatious, dramatic and sorrowful, or downright malevolent when the villain appeared on screen.

But regardless what Carlie Chaplin, Lillian Gish, or Steamboat Willie was doing that off beat rhythm pulled you in.

When The Jazz Singer was release and the Golden Era of Hollywood began, so began the decline of the silent movie and with it the popularity of the ragged rhythm. Still, ragtime has retained a number of fans around the world and many more are rediscovering its variety, beauty and grace. Some have even called it “syncopated classical music”

Ragtime conjures images of smoky cafes and raucous outdoor carnivals or Sunday afternoons in the park and ice-cream socials, but always people are talking and laughing having the time of their lives. It's a treat to listen to that lifts your spirits like nothing else.

It's impossible to hold still when you hear it. Some part of your body will always be moved with a good ole rag, even if it's only your heart.

The Twelfth Street Rag

I found this lovely story on the blog “Music2theWorld”, written by Roger Thomasen

There are too many dark nights

Too many troublesome days

Too many wearisome miles

There had to be a song

To make our burden bearable,

To transform our successes into praise,

To release the chains of past defeats,

Somewhere—down deep in a forgotten corner of each man's heart –

There has to be a song.

Like a cool, clear drink of water,

Like the gentle warmth of sunshine,

Like the tender love of a child,

There has to be a song.

“There has to be a Song” is one of the many pieces my dad collected and used in his sermons, devotionals, radio broadcasts, or writings. If anyone had a song in his heart, it was dad. He sang all the time. He probably forgot more songs than I have learned....and I know quite a few!

Dad sang his whole life. When he got to the point he could not speak, except for a few words, he could still sing. We live in another state from dad, so I spent a lot of time on the phone with him even though I knew he could not talk. He could only “jabber.” I would talk to him and he would try to respond....but only “gibberish” would come out. It had to be frustrating for him to want to express what he was thinking. The effects of the strokes and the Parkinson's hindered his communication.

But....then I would say, “Dad, do you remember this song?” And I would start singing any one of countless hymns....and he would sing along, clearly enunciating every word! Whether it was “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me” or “To God be the glory great things He has done...” or any other one I started, he would sing along. In fact, I could quit singing and he would keep on going. Even when his body was weak and his voice was weak, his spirit was strong and his song came through!

Now, dad no longer has a weak voice. I am sure that in heaven right now he is boldly and loudly singing.

There Has to Be a Song

An arranger was once defined as “someone who prays for a great song.” The better crafted the song, the easier it will be to turn it into a compelling arrangement. Douglas E. Wagner prayer was certainly answered with these four songs: The Star-Spangled Banner, America, the Beautiful, My Country, Tis of Thee, and the Battle Hymn of the Republic.

It is not entirely unusual for an arranger to change the lyrics of a song, especially when creating a medley, and so Mr. Wagner has here. Wanting to maintain the theme that the spirit of freedom is integral to America and continues to unite us, Mr. Wagner re-arranged the lyrics of The Battle Hymn of the Republic. It’s interesting to note that the lyrics to the song Julia Howe wrote are actually based on a popular song among the union troops, “John Brown’s Body”.

It seems very much as Nicola Tesla said, “Every living being is an engine geared to the wheelwork of the universe. Through seemingly affected only by its immediate surrounding, the sphere of external influence extends to infinite distance.” We never know where the energy that make us, us might travel someday. Who knows what song they might inspire as they join with other frequencies.

Einstein once said the most beautiful music experience we can have is the mysterious. Well, if he couldn’t understand, it is unlikely the rest of will. We only know that with all the frequencies and vibrations that make up our very cells, it is part of who we are and that long as we are -- there has to be a song.

Thank you all for coming our tonight. After our final selection our closing prayer will be given by.....

Finale: America, the Spirit Lives On

Closing Prayer

©2018 Kelly Ladd
www.aboutkellyladd.com