THE SONG REMAINS THE SAME

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Category: Church: UK

My first experience with Church was forty years ago at St John's Methodist in Sunderland (pictured). For most of the time I was in Sunday School, but we also went into 'big' services from time to time. Our songs all came from the red-bound Methodist Hymnal. Despite the fact that we only sang out of the same book, we seemed to have a huge number of songs to sing and rarely repeated anything. But despite the fact that we had a huge variety of songs, no one ever needed to teach us new songs - there was something about the hymn tunes that made them easy to pick up.

My experience today is more or less exactly the opposite. We are living in an age where good (and it has to be said not-so-good) Christian songs are being written in unparalleled numbers. We no longer have a fixed canon of songs, defined by a hymn book, but we dip into the bottomless treasure trove that is songs-on-PowerPoint. Why then, do we seem to sing far fewer songs now than we used to in my youth? The same old new-songs keep coming round again and again (and singing some songs three or four times over makes it feel like they come round even more often). Not only that, but when a new song is introduced, someone has to teach it to us, it seems that Christian songs these days are so complex that a congregation can no longer just pick them up as they go along.

Now, I grew up in the Seventies; my musical influences are Led Zeppelin, Free and Pink Floyd - organ music and old hymn tunes are not my music of choice. But, the variety, profundity and simplicity of the Christian hymns I grew up does make a lot of current Christian songs seem shallow by comparison.

A thought as I close this post: is modern music (so much of which is designed to be sung by one person, not a choir or individual) actually not a good vehicle for corporate worship? Is there anyone better qualified in these areas than me who might care to comment?