

**Behold the Glories of the Lamb***Isaac Watts (1674–1748)*

Behold the glories of the Lamb  
 amidst His Father's throne!  
 amidst His Father's throne!  
 Prepare new honors for His name,  
 and songs before unknown,  
 and songs before unknown.

Let elders worship at His feet,  
 the church adore around,  
 the church adore around,  
 with vials full of odors sweet,  
 and harps of sweeter sound,  
 and harps of sweeter sound.

Now to the Lamb that once was slain  
 be endless blessings paid;  
 be endless blessings paid;  
 salvation, glory, joy, remain  
 forever on Thy head,  
 forever on Thy head.

Thou hast redeemed our souls with blood,  
 hast set the pris'ners free,  
 hast set the pris'ners free,  
 hast made us kings and priests to God,  
 and we shall reign with Thee,  
 and we shall reign with Thee.



*In the Nick of Time* is published by Central Baptist Theological Seminary.

Permission is granted to duplicate for personal and church use.

www.centralseminary.edu | info@centralseminary.edu  
 900 Forestview Lane N, Plymouth, MN 55441 | 800.827.1043

**ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ***In the Nick of Time***Two Conversations at Once***Kevin T. Bauder*

I did not listen to much classical music while I was growing up. I can remember hearing Tchaikovsky's *Overture Solonelle* (the *1812 Overture*) when I was in about eighth grade. I was fascinated by it. When at seventeen I was able to buy my own stereo, the first recording I purchased was of Ormandy's Philadelphia Orchestra performing that piece.

On the flip side of the platter (those were the days of LPs) was a recording of Borodin's *In the Steppes of Central Asia*. Like the *1812 Overture*, this composition fascinated me. Both pieces were symphonic poems; both were programme music. Borodin was telling the story of a band of crusaders meeting and passing a caravan somewhere in central Asia. One hears the simple majesty of the crusader hymn. It is followed by the eastern music of the caravan with all its mystery. The two themes contend with each other, and then Borodin weaves them into a beautiful counterpoint. Listening to this music was the first time I realized that two melodies could be played simultaneously in such a way as to reinforce each other.

I loved listening to Borodin's composition. I still love it. Since then, I've discovered plenty of other serious music. I tend to gravitate toward the Baroque (especially J. S. Bach) rather than to the Romantic, but something in the transparency and beauty of Borodin's work continues to reach my soul. I can't feature ever getting tired of it.

Some years after discovering Borodin, I came across another composer, a contemporary evangelical. I will not name him here, though you may recognize him from my description. He is a skilled pianist who has mastered enough technique to be able to play classical music competently. He is also a composer who arranges hymn tunes. What captured my attention was that he had done something similar—or so I thought—to Borodin's piece. He had combined two themes into a single composition.

In this case, the themes both fell under the broad label of "sacred music." One was J. S. Bach's *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring*. The other was the tune (written by Phoebe Knapp) of Fanny Crosby's *Blessed Assurance*. The composer exhibited musical competence in bringing these two themes together. I heard him perform this composition while I was in my early twenties. At the

time, I had hardly begun listening to serious music, and I was as intrigued by this composition as I was with Borodin's.

As I grew more familiar with serious music, however, a strange thing happened. The more I listened to good music, the better I liked the Borodin, while the less I liked the combination of sacred themes. At first, this apparent incongruity puzzled me. At one level, both pieces were interesting, and yet the one grew on me while the other's appeal decreased. Was this simply a personal oddity, or was there something in the music itself that could account for the opposite ways in which these compositions seemed to be affecting me?

Listening to the "sacred combination" one day, it occurred to me that it was like trying to hear two different conversations at once. In fact, it was like trying to hear two entirely different *kinds* of conversation, or perhaps conversations being conducted in two different languages. What was bothering me was the incongruity between the two. Bach was talking about one thing in one idiom; Crosby was talking about a different thing in an entirely different idiom.

By this time I knew Bach's *Jesu* pretty well. I had not only listened to it but also performed it. I thought I knew what Bach was saying and doing. As a fundamentalist, I had grown up listening to Crosby (or Knapp). I knew what she was trying to say and do. When I heard the Crosby and the Bach being done together, it was like being pulled in two different directions. Even if each direction was perfectly legitimate, they were still different. The attempt to combine them was a contrivance—cute, but unsuccessful as musical communication.

This realization created a problem for me because I still liked the Borodin. Indeed, I liked it better than ever. Yet what could be more different than a crusader hymn and a caravan tune? Shouldn't I have the same difficulty with the Borodin that I was experiencing with the sacred piece?

As I thought about this question, I realized that Borodin's combination and the sacred combination were trying to do different things *with the combination*. Borodin's work is a study in contrasts. The two themes are meant to stand out against each other. Each represents a different mood. The themes are played against each other first. When they combine, the effect is a bit of delightful but momentary serendipity. Then the tunes separate again as each goes its own way.

In the sacred combination, however, two contrasting moods and two contrasting musical languages are unequally yoked together. The composer tries to make them pull in the same direction, in spite of their individual inclinations. But they do *not* pull together. They keep pulling in different directions, the more so as the composer tries to submit the musically excellent *Jesu* to the popular and rather pedestrian *Blessed Assurance*.

It was a clever musical trick, to be sure. But that is really all it was. Crosby had something to say. Bach had something to say. By bringing these two voices into one conversation, however, neither message can be heard for itself. The sacred combination itself has nothing to say.

What attracted me to it in the first place was that it was a skillful bit of musical juggling. Watching juggling can be fun for a while. Eventually it gets boring, and then the juggler has to start doing new tricks. He'll juggle a bowling ball with a raw egg. He'll juggle chain saws. That's how it is with musical juggling as well. This particular composer went from combining sacred classical (Bach) and sacred popular (Crosby/Knapp) music to combining secular classical with sacred popular music. Then he went to combining secular classical music with secular popular music. The last I heard, he was combining Chopin with the movie theme from *The Godfather*. I admit: it was amusing, but it was also vapid.

I am not denying that some combinations of sacred tunes might be useful and effective. To find those combinations, however, one must possess more than technical compositional skills. One must possess both aesthetic judgment and spiritual sensibility. This need is increasingly urgent as the classical music repertoire is being ransacked to find themes to combine with virtually every hymn and gospel song. Too often the result is simply mongrelized music.



---

This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

---