

Another Look at Ellen White on Music

by Chuck and Marianne Scriven

Ellen White's statements on music fall into three main groups, one dealing with the music of Bible times, the second with the music she experienced in visions of heaven and the new earth, and the third with the music of her own time and place.¹ Although what she said about music of the past and of the future is considerable, the present study focuses on her attitude toward the music of her own time. Accordingly, her statements about music in Bible times and the music of heaven and the hereafter will be referred to only when they throw light on her view of music in America during her lifetime.

To begin with, we may take a brief look at the history of American music as a background for what is to come. In his book *Music in the United States: A Historical Introduction*, H. Wiley Hitchcock divided the music of American history into two broad categories which he designated the "culti-

vated" and the "vernacular" traditions, defining them thus:

I mean by the term "cultivated tradition" a body of music that America had to cultivate consciously, music faintly exotic to be approached with some effort, and to be appreciated for its edification, its moral, spiritual or aesthetic values. By the "vernacular tradition" I mean a body of music more plebeian, native, not approached self-consciously, but simply grown into as one grows into one's vernacular tongue; music understood and appreciated simply for its utilitarian or entertainment value.²

Each of these musical traditions divides into sacred and secular branches, and it will probably surprise no one that of these four branches, sacred music in the vernacular idiom was the music Ellen White found most congenial. It may be recalled that her conversion took place at a Methodist camp meeting in Buxton, Maine, in 1840. Camp meetings, a prominent feature of nineteenth-century American revivalism, had begun in Kentucky in 1800, and from there spread rapidly up and down the eastern seaboard. While the Wesley brothers were able to establish an authorized liturgical hymnody for English Methodism, American Methodists favored a freer, more spontaneous music for their worship, described by the noted hymnologist Louis Benson as a "rude type of popular

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song.”³ He attributed this preference in large part to the widespread use of revivalism in gaining adherents to Methodism in this country, saying that “it is of the very nature of revival enthusiasm to develop its own song, and of all religious agencies it is the least amenable to church authority.”⁴ Concerning the revival song, or “camp-meeting hymn,” as it came to be called, Benson said:

It is individualistic, and deals with the rescue of a sinner: sometimes in direct appeal to “sinners,” “backsliders,” or “mourners”; sometimes by reciting the terms of salvation, sometimes as a narrative of personal experience for his warning or encouragement.⁵

The camp-meeting hymn’s characteristic feature was its refrain or chorus, often ejaculatory, and not necessarily connected with the subject matter of the hymn itself. The words were typically adapted to currently popular melodies, to the tunes of well-liked songs from the past, or, occasionally, to music composed on the spot. The hymnody of early Adventism was largely of the camp-meeting type, complete with popular tunes and ejaculatory choruses.

Successor to the camp-meeting hymn was the gospel song, associated initially with the Moody and Sankey revivals of the 1870s. Like its predecessor, the gospel song made use of the the style of popular secular music. Explaining this carry-over from “secular” to “sacred” music, Benson said:

The same streak in human nature that delights in the strains of the music hall demands the “spiritual song” of a kindred type. And possibly an element that conscientiously flees the associations of the music hall is the most insistent upon a compensatory light music in the Sunday school and the church.⁶

This does not mean that the only songs heard in American Methodist or Adventist meetings in the middle and late nineteenth century were of the musically light camp-meeting or gospel song type, for both the Methodists and the Adventists also sang such sober, well-loved psalm tunes as Old Hundredth and Wells. It does mean that most of the songs arising out of the culture that nurtured early Seventh-day Adventism were of the

type that mated popular musical idiom with words on spiritual topics. Thus, in addition to psalm and hymn tunes from the Anglo-French Protestant tradition, the music most familiar to Ellen White included rollicking Advent and camp-meeting songs complete with hallelujah refrains, and gospel songs dealing with the spiritual experiences common to evangelical Christians.

We may now turn to specific references to music. Her first stipulation for acceptable sacred song was that of simplicity. Speaking to a camp-meeting audience in 1902, she said:

Learn to sing the simplest of songs.

These will help you in house-to-house labor, and hearts will be touched by the influence of the Holy Spirit. . . .⁷

That simplicity of style was not to be limited to evangelistic music, nor to be considered merely her own preference, is indicated in the following statement from one year later:

They [the angels] delight to hear the simple songs of praise sung in a natural tone. The songs in which every word is uttered clearly, in a musical tone, are the songs that they join us in singing. . . .⁸

Ellen White did not favor the modal gravity characteristic of some old American psalm tunes. Music for divine services should be chosen to fit the occasion, “not funeral notes, but cheerful, yet solemn melodies.”⁹ The first edition of *Ministry of Healing*, published in 1909, six years before her death, includes six songs, five complete with music, and two lines from “Rock of Ages.” The songs reprinted there were “Revive Us Again,” “Blessed Assurance,” “O, Could I Find From Day to Day,” “My Faith Looks Up to Thee,” “Holy, Holy, Holy” and “The Ninety and Nine.” The gospel song “Almost Persuaded” is another to which she made favorable reference in a letter (No. 137) written in 1904, making a total of eight specific songs of which she apparently approved. Of the eight, two (“Revive Us Again” and “Holy, Holy, Holy”) are hymns of praise directed to God; three (“O, Could I Find From Day to Day,” “My Faith Looks Up to Thee” and “Rock of Ages”) are songs of appeal directed to Christ; and three (“Blessed

Assurance,” “The Ninety and Nine” and “Almost Persuaded”) are gospel songs with primary reference to the human experience. From a musical point of view, the finest of these is undoubtedly “Holy, Holy, Holy,” by John Bacchus Dykes, with its rhythmic and harmonic variety and a well-defined melodic climax. Although the melody to “Blessed Assurance” (by Mrs. Joseph Knapp) is vigorous and catchy, its rhythmic monotony is a major defect. But with its melodic monotony, “O, Could I Find From Day to Day,” is musically the weakest of the eight. Even though varied in musical worth,

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however, all of these songs meet Mrs. White’s criterion of simplicity graced by cheerfulness and solemnity; all are in major keys, and not even the liveliest (probably “Revive Us Again,” with a hallelujah chorus) invites levity.

Ellen White believed that the performance of sacred music was an act of personal devotion and that it could be pleasing to God only if the performer was familiar with the music. That this view extended to congregational singing is indicated in the following statement from an 1883 *Review* article:

A minister should not give out hymns to be sung, until it has been ascertained that they are familiar to those who sing. A proper person should be appointed to take charge of this exercise, and it should be his duty to see that such hymns are selected as can be sung with the spirit and the understanding also. . . .¹⁰

Her view of music-making as devotional exercise did not allow for musical anarchy or bedlam, and she roundly condemned the musical excesses of the “holy flesh” move-

ment in Indiana in 1900, which involved shouting, drums and dancing, commenting that “a bedlam of noise shocks the senses and perverts that which if conducted aright might be a blessing.”¹¹ It should be noted that she objected to the performance, not to the music involved. Her concern for orderly, creditable performances of sacred music used in religious services also emerges in the following passage:

Singing is a part of the worship of God, but in the bungling manner in which it is often conducted, it is no credit to the truth, and no honor to God. There should be system and order in this as well as every other part of the Lord’s work. Organize a company of the best singers, whose voices can lead the congregation, and then let all who will, unite with them. Those who sing should make an effort to sing in harmony; they should devote some time to practice, that they may employ this talent to the glory of God.¹²

Her concept of a choir’s proper function is set forth here as well: it should play a supportive role for congregational singing. This concept accords with the sentiments expressed by A. J. Rowland, a Baptist minister, when in 1883, he decried the operatic adaptations, the anthems and the organ voluntaries to be heard in fashionable churches, asserting that “God is not to be praised by proxy. . . . The only office that a choir can serve is to lead the congregation in the singing.”¹³ Although she did make allowance for some solo or small group singing at the health and temperance meetings held for nonbelieving patrons of Seventh-day Adventist restaurants in 1902, she indicated that even there congregational singing should be the rule, not the exception:

There should be in the meetings nothing of a theatrical nature. The singing should not be done by a few only. All present should be encouraged to join in the song service. There are those who have a special gift of song, and there are times when a special message is borne by one singing alone or by several uniting in song. But the singing is seldom to be done by a few. . . .¹⁴ Nor, in her mind, should the singing in Adventist services be done by musicians whose

presence there might be for reasons other than personal devotion:

How can God be glorified when you depend for your singing on a worldly choir that sings for money? My brother, when you see those things in a right light, you will have in your meetings only sweet, simple singing, and you will ask the whole congregation to join the song, what if among those present there are some whose voices are not so musical as the voices of others. When the singing is such that angels can unite with the singers, an impression is made on minds that singing from unsanctified lips cannot make.¹⁵

Ellen White's philosophy on the subject of instrumental music is best summed up in the following statement, written in 1876:

Music should have beauty, pathos, and power. Let the voices be lifted in songs of praise and devotion. Call to your aid, if practicable, instrumental music, and let the glorious harmony ascend to God, an acceptable offering.¹⁶

Her view was simply this: that instruments, like choirs, were desirable but not essential aids to congregational singing. When, in 1901 and at other times, she made such statements as "we are not to oppose the use of instrumental music in our church,"¹⁷ she was not, as some have thought, opening the door to Bach, Brahms, Mendelssohn, Franck and others, but she was addressing those in the church who persisted in advocating the old Calvinist-Puritan-Presbyterian exclusion of all musical instruments from divine services.¹⁸

An agent in the gradual introduction of choirs and musical instruments into churches in the Reformed tradition, and an institution to which Ellen White made occasional reference, was the singing school. Although now largely forgotten, the singing school was a vital part of the musical life of nearly every American community when Mrs. White was a girl, and throughout most of her life. Since the singing school curriculum was restricted to sacred music, one might expect her to have looked on the institution with favor, but such

was not the case. The following statement represents her opinion:

It is one of the greatest temptations of the present age to carry the practice of music to extremes, to make a great deal more of music than of prayer. Many souls have been ruined here. When the Spirit of God is arousing the conscience and convicting of sin, Satan suggests a singing exercise or a singing school, which being conducted in a light and trifling manner, results in banishing seriousness and quenching all desire for the Spirit of God By the temptations attending these singing exercises, many who were once really converted to the truth have been led to separate themselves from God. They have chosen singing before prayer, attending singing-schools in preference to religious meetings, until the truth no longer exerts its sanctifying power upon their souls. Such singing is an offense to God.¹⁹

Singing schools met in the evening, conflicting on occasion with prayer meetings. Although the sexes were generally kept separate while the school was in session, there was always a recess midway through the evening, a time for courting, practical jokes, flirting and general gaiety. Mrs. White objected to the fact that singing schools brought Adventist young people into close association with nonbelievers.

I was shown you, my brother, taking the young with you to scenes of amusement at the time of a religious interest, and also engaging in singing schools with worldlings who are all darkness, and who have evil angels all around them.²⁰ Similar sessions of singing exercises were held at the homes of believers, but they also were a cause of Mrs. White's concern, as the following two statements indicate:

I was taken into some of your singing exercises, and was made to read the feelings that existed in the company, you being the prominent one. There were petty jealousies, envy, evil surmisings, and evil speaking. . . . The heart service is what God requires; the forms and lip service are as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. Your singing is for display, not to praise God with the spirit and understanding.

The state of the heart reveals the quality of the religion of the professor of godliness.²¹

There are more gatherings for singing than for prayer among our people; but even these gatherings can be conducted in so reverential yet cheerful a manner that they may exert a good influence. There is, however, too much jesting, idle conversation, and gossiping to make these seasons beneficial to elevate the thoughts and refine the manners.²²

Thus far we have discussed Ellen White's relation to sacred music in the vernacular tradition only. Her early years saw the cultivated tradition in Protestant church music, as represented by the florid English cathedral style of William Croft, Charles Burney, Martin Madan and others. Such men as Andrew Law, Samuel Holyoke and Hans Gram championed this tradition in the United States, but later it gave way to the more subdued Germanic style favored by the Handel and Haydn Society in Boston. Such proponents of this latter style as Thomas Hastings, Lowell Mason and George Webb made use of German chorale tunes, Gregorian chants and excerpts, fitted out with sacred words, from composers like Beethoven, Haydn, Mozart and Gluck. By the final quarter of the nineteenth century, however, fashionable Protestant churches on both coasts were treating their patrons to much more elaborate fare, including lengthy and intricate organ voluntaries, sacred vocal solos and ensembles by composers like Rossini and Cherubini, as well as imposing anthems and cantatas by native Americans, Dudley Buck, John Knowles Paine and Horatio Parker. To those who would look to the Seventh-day Adventist church service for the aesthetic refinement of the cultivated tradition, Mrs. White gave no license, let alone encouragement. In 1899, she wrote:

Gorgeous apparel, fine singing, and instrumental music in the church do not call forth the songs of the angel choir. In the sight of God these things are like the branches of the unfruitful fig tree which bore nothing but pretentious leaves. . . . A congregation may be the poorest in the land, without music or outward show, but if it possesses these principles [goodness,

sympathy, love], the members can sing, for the joy of Christ is in their souls, and this they can offer as a sweet oblation to God.²³

The clearest exposition of Ellen White's attitude toward the cultivated tradition in the worship of God is the following:

Many Protestants suppose that the Catholic religion is unattractive and that its worship is a dull, meaningless round of ceremony. Here they mistake. While Romanism is based upon deception, it is not a coarse and clumsy imposture. The religious service of the Roman Church is a most impressive ceremonial. Its gorgeous display and solemn rites fascinate the senses of the people and silence the voice of reason and of conscience. The eye is charmed. Magnificent churches, imposing processions, golden altars, jeweled shrines, choice paintings, and exquisite sculpture appeal to the love of beauty. The ear also is captivated. The music is unsurpassed. The rich notes of the deep-toned organ, blending with the melody of many voices as it swells through the lofty domes and pillared aisles of her grand cathedrals, cannot fail to impress the mind with awe and reverence.

*This outward splendor, pomp, and ceremony, that only mocks the longings of the sick soul, is an evidence of inward corruption. The religion of Christ needs not such attractions to recommend it. In the light shining from the cross, true Christianity appears so pure and lovely that no external decorations can enhance its true worth. It is the beauty of holiness, a meek and quiet spirit, which is of value with God.*²⁴ (italics supplied)

Note that her burden here was not to decry the prostitution of a supposedly good thing (aesthetic excellence in painting, sculpture, music, architecture, etc.) to a "bad cause" (Catholicism), but to assert that high art has no place in the worship of God, and that its presence must be taken as evidence of inward corruption. In his thoughtful little book, *Music and Worship*, Harold Hannum quotes the above passage, and states that although beauty can be associated with false systems of

worship, the beauty of high art is not thereby indicated as an adjunct to worship. In support of this view, he makes reference to the element of beauty in the worship of God in Solomon's temple. In fact, however, Ellen White took an unfavorable attitude toward the elaborate and artistic Jewish temple service. Speaking of the services in connection with the Feast of Tabernacles at the time of Christ, she said:

They [the people] had been engaged in a continued scene of pomp and festivity, their eyes had been dazzled with light and color, and their ears regaled with the rich-

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est music; but there had been nothing in this round of ceremonies to meet the wants of the spirit, nothing to satisfy the thirst of the soul for that which perishes not. Jesus invited them to come and drink of the fountain of life, of that which would be in them a well of water springing up unto everlasting life.²⁵

From this it seems clear that he who would advocate the use of sacred music from the cultivated tradition in Seventh-day Adventist church services must be prepared to make his stand apart from Ellen White, for he will not find support of his position in her writings or personal example.

Although one can easily discover Mrs. White's ideas regarding proper music for religious services, it is more difficult to document precisely her attitude toward such a thing as an oratorio, for example. In 1903, she attended a Saturday night program of sacred music in the Healdsburg (now Pacific Union College) church, presented by Professor Beardslee and his students, commenting afterwards, “I am glad that Brother

Beardslee is training the students, so that they can be singing evangelists”; but there is no indication of what was performed. It is highly doubtful that anything approaching the complexity of Handel's *Messiah* would have elicited her approval. Although made in reference to worship services, the following statement, from 1903, seems to indicate fundamental disapproval of elements of musical style inherent not only to opera, but also to oratorio:

In some of our churches I have heard solos that were altogether unsuitable for the service of the Lord's house. The long-drawn-out notes and the peculiar sounds common in operatic singing are not pleasing to the angels. They delight to hear the simple songs of praise sung in a natural tone.²⁷

The possibility is strong that the Saturday night concert at Healdsburg consisted largely of gospel songs, for it is clear that she considered such music worthy of a place in an Adventist college curriculum. Less than three months after attending Professor Beardslee's concert, she wrote:

I am glad that a musical element has been brought into the Healdsburg school. In every school, instruction in singing is greatly needed. There should be much more interest in voice culture than is now generally manifested. Students who have learned to sing sweet gospel songs with melody and distinctness can do much good as singing evangelists. They will find many opportunities to use the talent that God has given them, to carry the melody and sunshine into many lonely places darkened by sin and sorrow and affliction, singing to those who seldom have church privileges.²⁸

Ellen White touched on the subject of sacred music as early as 1855 (in her first testimony to the church), but she did not take up the question of secular musical entertainment until her twelfth testimony, written in 1867. In its first part, entitled “Address to the Young,” she dealt at some length with the musical activities in Adventist homes. Since it is the primary source of quotations used by Adventist music educators in articles against popular music, rock, jazz, etc., all its perti-

ment portions will be given below in their original order and context.

They [young Sabbathkeepers] have a keen ear for music, and Satan knows what organs to excite to animate, engross, and charm the mind so that Christ is not desired. . . .

The introduction of music into their homes, instead of inciting to holiness and spirituality, has been the means of diverting their minds from the truth. Frivolous songs and the popular sheet music of the day seem congenial to their taste. The instruments of music have taken time which should have been devoted to prayer. Music, when not abused, is a great blessing; but when put to a wrong use, it is a terrible curse. . . .

Angels are hovering around yonder dwelling. The young are there assembled; there is the sound of vocal and instrumental music. Christians are gathered there, but what is it that you hear? It is a song, a frivolous ditty, fit for the dance hall. . . . This I saw repeated a number of times all through the ranks of Sabbathkeepers, and especially in _____ . Music has occupied the hours which should have been devoted to prayer. Music is the idol which many professed Sabbathkeeping Christians worship. Satan has no objection to music if he can make that a channel through which to gain access to the minds of the youth. Anything will suit his purpose that will divert the mind from God and engage the time which should be devoted to His service. . . .

When turned to good account, music is a blessing; but it is often made one of Satan's most attractive agencies to ensnare souls. When abused, it leads the unconsecrated to pride, vanity, and folly. When allowed to take the place of devotion and prayer, it is a terrible curse. Young persons assemble to sing, and, although professed Christians, frequently dishonor God and their faith by their frivolous conversation and their choice of music. *Sacred music is not congenial to their taste. . . .* (italics supplied)

God is glorified by songs of praise from a pure heart filled with love and devotion to Him. . . .

No one who has an indwelling Saviour will dishonor Him before others by producing strains from a musical instrument which call the mind from God and heaven to light and trifling things. . . .

How can you tell how many souls you might save from ruin if, instead of studying your own pleasure, you were seeking what work you could do in the vineyard of your Master? How many souls have these gatherings for conversation and the practice of music been the means of saving? If you cannot point to one soul thus saved, turn, oh turn to a new course of action. . . .

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Pray more than you sing. Do you not stand in greater need of prayer than in singing? Young men and women, God calls upon you to work, work for Him. Make an entire change in your course of action. You can do work that those who minister in word and doctrine cannot do. You can reach a class whom the minister cannot affect. . . . (italics original)²⁹

Her fourteenth and sixteenth testimonies, written the following year, returned to the subject of instrumental music in connection with the Battle Creek church's neglect of an elderly missionary lady, Hannah More. The incident elicited the following anguished comment:

How can I endure the thought that most of the youth in this age will come short of everlasting life! Oh, that the sound of instrumental music might cease and they no more while away so much precious time in pleasing their own fancy. Oh, that they would devote less time to dress and vain conversation, and send forth their earnest, agonizing prayers to God for a sound experience.³⁰

Some, reading the passages quoted thus far, might argue that Mrs. White was not condemning secular musical entertainment in itself, rather, its intemperate use, which would lead to the neglect of more important things such as private devotions, care for the needy, and attendance at religious services. However, such an argument cannot be based on her own statements. It is true that, as Paul Hamel states in *Ellen White and Music: Background and Principles*, Ellen White did on certain occasions listen to secular music and comment favorably upon it.³¹ When she gave advice or admonition, however, such favorable comments cannot be found. In the twelfth testimony referred to previously, she answered any objections to her position:

Some still urge that they must have something to interest the mind when business ceases, some mental occupation or amusement to which the mind can turn for relief and refreshment amid cares and wearing labor. The Christian's hope is just what is needed. Religion will prove to the believer a comforter, a sure guide to the Fountain of true happiness. The young should study the word of God and give themselves to meditation and prayer, and they will find that their spare moments cannot be better employed.³²

Although she gave no specific titles in her statements against secular music, it is possible to discover what music was popular when she wrote the passages quoted. Following is a list of some of the most popular sheet music published in the United States between 1850 and 1866:

“Arkansas Traveler”
 “Aura Lee”
 “Battle Cry of Freedom”
 “Battle Hymn of the Republic”
 “Beautiful Dreamer”
 “Darling Nellie Gray”
 “Dixie”
 “Jeannie With the Light Brown Hair”
 “Jingle Bells”
 “Just Before the Battle, Mother”
 “Listen to the Mockingbird”
 “Little Brown Church in the Vale”
 “Marching Through Georgia”
 “Maryland, My Maryland”

“My Old Kentucky Home”
 “Old Black Joe”
 “Old Folks at Home”
 “Pop Goes the Weasel”
 “Rock Me to Sleep, Mother”
 “Star of the Evening”
 “Sweet Evelina”
 “Tenting on the Old Camp Ground”
 “Wait for the Wagon”
 “When Johnnie Comes Marching Home”
 “When You and I Were Young, Maggie”
 “Yellow Rose of Texas”³³

Dances current at the time included the quadrille, quick step, schottisch and waltz. Although the lists above have their share of “frivolous ditties,” “dance songs” and “war songs,” to use her expressions, they do not include any which could be considered “low, vile songs.” Such music was not published in this country in the 1860s, but some answering to that description might be heard in vaudeville, and at theatrical productions like *The Black Crook*, a prototype of Broadway musicals, which opened at Niblo's Garden in New York in 1866 to widespread notoriety and resounding success.

Three decades later, in 1897, Ellen White again addressed the subject of secular music. Writing to the teachers at Battle Creek College, she expressed concern over “low, common pleasure parties, gatherings for eating and drinking, singing and playing on instruments,” saying that students by engaging in such activities were “following the example of the ungodly authors of some of the books that are placed in their hands for study.”³⁴ It is highly significant that Mrs. White's statements about secular entertainment music in 1897 differed in no essential way from her statements of three decades earlier. Although much of the music to which she had objected formerly was still popular, a major stylistic revolution in entertainment music was well under way in the 1890s, a revolution of which current rock music is merely the latest manifestation. At the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, Scott Joplin and other black musicians introduced the country and the world to black music through the medium of ragtime, the highly syncopated instrumental predecessor to jazz, and it quickly became a national craze. By the

turn of the century, the socially adept young lady was expected to have mastered Joplin's "Maple Leaf Rag" in addition to such favorites as "After the Ball" (the number one hit song of the Gay Nineties) and "A Bicycle Built for Two." If the quick, rhythmic ragtime supplied the instrumental ingredient for jazz, the slow, improvisatory, highly ornate blues, also a black creation, was to provide its primary vocal ingredient. The blues reached the public somewhat later than ragtime, but before World War I, blues singers Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith had toured the country and become famous. Thus, the two prime ingredients which by the 1920s had coalesced into jazz, had, before Ellen White's death, reached a very wide public without calling forth from her any censure more specific than she had meted out to the vastly simpler music popular in the 1850s and 1860s.

A careful examination of all her statements about secular music must lead to the conclusion that her rejection of it was radical, based entirely on principle, and not at all on musical style or content. Considering her acceptance and even advocacy of sacred songs in a vernacular, popular musical idiom, and the fact that God entrusted her with no new message for the church concerning the evils supposedly inherent to highly rhythmic "beat" music, it would seem that the time has arrived to lay to rest any arguments advanced in Ellen White's name against music in the vernacular idiom, sacred or secular, on the basis of its musical style.

What of secular music in the cultivated tradition? The year of Mrs. White's birth, 1827, was also the year of Beethoven's death; when she was born, Schubert was still alive, Schumann was a teenager and Brahms's parents had not met. When she died in 1915, Brahms had been dead for nearly two decades, two years had passed since the premiere of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, Charles Ives's musical output (including some quarter-tone music) was essentially complete and John Cage was three years old. When she was a baby, music in the Viennese classical style of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven held almost undisputed sway on the concert stage and in

private recitals. In her old age, the classicists faced the competition not only of modernists like Scriabin, Debussy and Schoenberg, but of the full course of the Romantic Period, from Mendelssohn and Berlioz through Mahler and Richard Strauss, and including Wagner, Dvorak, Tchaikovsky, Verdi and Puccini. What was her attitude toward the world of music represented by such composers? Perhaps this statement, written in 1899, best sums it up: "We have no time now to

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spend in seeking those things that only please the senses."³⁵ As far as it is possible to ascertain, Ellen White never attended a public concert or a private recital. Nowhere does she refer to a composer by name; nowhere is there a reference to an orchestra, a symphony, a string quartet, a cantata, an oratorio. The one manifestation of secular art music which drew her attention, however, was opera, and its place in her estimation was set forth with complete clarity:

Many of the amusements popular in the world today, even with those who claim to be Christians, tend to the same end as did those of the heathen. There are indeed few among them that Satan does not turn to account in destroying souls. Through the drama he has worked for ages to excite passion and glorify vice. The opera, with its fascinating display and bewildering music, the masquerade, the dance, the card table, Satan employs to break down the barriers of principle and open the door to sensual indulgence. In every gathering for pleasure where pride is fostered or appetite indulged, where one is led to forget God and lose sight of eternal interests, there

Satan is binding his chains about the soul.³⁶

The discussion thus far has shown that Mrs. White favored simple, hymnlike sacred song, performed as a part of devotional exercise. Choirs, like musical instruments, had one legitimate purpose — to support congregational singing. She never encouraged participation in secular entertainment music, for it was designed solely to provide sensual pleasure for performers and audience. When sacred music was employed for the same purpose, it too became a stumbling block. Her rejection of sensual pleasure as a legitimate object of human pursuit ruled out not only the secular music of the vernacular tradition, but also the entire world of the cultivated tradition in music, in both its sacred and secular branches. Although a dramatic change in musical style, from Stephen Foster to Scott Joplin, took place between her first and last messages on the subject of popular music, her objections continued to be based entirely on nonmusical grounds.

On this basis, then, it is clear that a conflict exists between Ellen White's view of music and the observable practice within the church today. It requires little acuteness to perceive that Ellen White's view of music, if accurately presented in this study, is more honored among Adventists in its breach than in its observance. Furthermore, many Adventist educators continue to call upon her authority to enforce their opinions on musical matters. It is undoubtedly true that Ellen White would condemn the rock festivals of our day, just as she condemned the frivolous musical parties of her own. Yet it is unwise for musicians steeped in the cultivated tradition, for which she had no use, to wrap themselves in her mantle when attacking the music for which they have no use. Musicians skate on even thinner ice when they presume to attack music in a currently popular idiom set to sacred words, for Ellen White's own precedent suggests that she might approve of it, if directed toward spiritual ends.

It may be useful to search out a basic reason for the gap between Ellen White's philosophy of music and current Adventist practice. Her difficult statements with regard to

music, and her radical rejection of what men and women through centuries have found pleasant and worthwhile are comprehensible only in an eschatological context. Her attitude toward music is eminently sensible for a church on the threshold of the millennium, and the eschatological urgency of her writings is inescapable. In her statements about music in Bible times and the hereafter, two points emerge which also contribute toward the understanding of her attitude toward the music of her own time: from the great anthem, composed spontaneously by Moses, and performed, without rehearsal, by the hosts of Israel upon their deliverance at the Red Sea, up through the experiences of David as a composer, and beyond, to the schools of the prophets, direct inspiration by God, in Ellen White's view, played the major role in the creation and performance of divinely sanctioned music. The creation of music acceptable to God was much more heavily dependent on the elements of prayer and contemplation than on an acquaintance with a wide range of musical literature and extensive technical training. Second, whatever technical skills might be required to perform heaven's music, music far surpassing in quality any to be heard on earth would be granted instantaneously to the redeemed upon translation, as the following statement makes clear:

Upon the heads of the overcomers, Jesus with His own right hand places the crown of glory. For each there is a crown, bearing his own "new name" (Revelation 2:17), and the inscription, "Holiness to the Lord." In every hand are placed the victor's palm and the shining harp. Then, as the commanding angels strike the note, *every hand sweeps the harp strings with skillful touch*, awaking sweet music in rich, melodious strains. . . ³⁷(italics supplied). Thus, to Mrs. White's mind, time spent with the musical works of mortal men might be better employed in contemplating the mighty themes of salvation. Given the shortness of time until Christ's return, and the incomparable musical experience awaiting the redeemed in heaven, the music lover who chose prayer meeting over a concert, Bible reading over a singing exercise, chose wisely.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The task of the researcher into Mrs. White's view of music has been lightened by the efforts of three Adventist music teachers, George Greer, Margaret Stone and Minnie Iverson-Wood, who assembled a great number of her statements from the *Testimonies*, the Conflict of the Ages series, 15 other books and compilations, articles in four periodicals and numerous unpublished manuscripts and letters. The result of their work, "Excerpts on Voice Culture and Music from the Writings of Mrs. E. G. White," is a mimeographed volume of some 60 pages (including index).
2. H. Wiley Hitchcock, *Music in the United States: A Historical Introduction* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969), pp. 43-44.
3. Louis Benson, *The English Hymn: Its Development and Use in Worship* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1915), p. 285.
4. Benson, *The English Hymn*, p. 284.
5. Benson, *The English Hymn*, p. 293.
6. Benson, *The English Hymn*, p. 298.
7. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (November 11, 1902).
8. White, Manuscript 91, 1903, published in *Evangelism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association 1946), p. 510.
9. White, *Signs of the Times* (June 22, 1882).
10. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (July 24, 1883).
11. White, *Selected Messages*, book two, p. 36.
12. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (July 24, 1883).
13. Robert Stevenson, *Protestant Church Music in America* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966), p. 109.
14. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1948), VII, 115.
15. White, Letter 190, 1902, published in *Evangelism*, p. 509.
16. White, *Testimonies*, IV, 71.
17. White, *Testimonies*, IX, 144.
18. Even within Presbyterian circles the opposition to musical instruments was by 1900 largely in the past; a vigorous attack had come as early as 1763, when the following announcement was published in the *Providence Gazette* of July 2:
Just published, and to be sold by William Goddard, At his Shop and Printing Office, in Providence.
The Lawfulness, Excellency, and Advantage of Instrumental Musick in the Publick Worship of God, urg'd and enforced from Scripture, and the far greater Part of Christians in all Ages. — Addressed to all (particularly the Presbyterians and Baptists) who have been hitherto taught to look upon the Use of Instrumental Musick in the Worship of God as unlawful. — By a Presbyterian.
19. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (July 24, 1883).
20. White, *Testimonies*, III, 91.
21. White, Letter 1a, 1890, mimeographed in "Excerpts," compiled by Greer, Stone and Iverson-Wood, p. 45.
22. White, *Testimonies*, IV, 73.
23. White, Manuscript 123, 1899, published in *Evangelism*, pp. 511-12.
24. White, *Great Controversy* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1950), pp. 566-67.
25. White, *Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1940), p. 436.
26. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association), 1923, p. 487.
27. White, Manuscript 91, 1903, published in *Evangelism*, p. 510.
28. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (August 27, 1903).
29. White, *Testimonies*, I, 497, 506, 509-10, 513.
30. White, *Testimonies*, II, 144.
31. Hamel, *Ellen White and Music* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1977), pp. 63, 64.
32. White, *Testimonies*, I, 503.
33. Dichter and Shapiro, *Early American Sheet Music: Its Lure and Lore, 1768-1889* (New York: R. R. Bowker, 1941).
34. White, *Counsels to Teachers, Parents, and Students* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1913), pp. 367-68.
35. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (November 14, 1899).
36. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), pp. 457, 460.
37. White, *Great Controversy*, p. 646.