

Special Music Guidelines

Thank you for your desire to serve God with special music! We appreciate the fact that, over the years, the Church has been richly blessed with talented singers and musicians, and that continues today. Because special music represents such an important part of our Sabbath services, we wanted to pass on to you some general guidelines to keep in mind when you prepare special music.

These guidelines are meant to give direction on why we're doing special music and how we can be unified in our approach. Special music is a very visible means of serving God's people, and as such, these guidelines are important and help us set the best godly example we can as we serve God and help direct His people to Him.

Music has been part of worshiping God for thousands of years, and it is a special honor to serve in this way. From a "big picture" perspective, it is essential to understand and remember that special music should not be focused on being "a performance." It is not a display or show of one's talents and abilities. Rather, it is using one's talents and abilities as an offering of praise and worship to God. It is also using one's talents and abilities to direct God's people to Him in a more thoughtful or profound way. This focus should guide how we view what selections to use and how to prepare them.

With that in mind, here are several questions to ask yourself as you prepare special music selections:

1. Do the words glorify God?

Always make sure that the words are scripturally accurate and doctrinally correct. The focus of any lyrics should be honoring and praising God and should not highlight the singer or songwriter.

2. Is the genre appropriate for Church services?

It's good to have a mix of traditional and contemporary genres for special music. Even so, try to stay out of the extremes when it comes to appropriateness, within each genre. For example, some classical pieces may be technically impressive but not inspiring to the congregation, because they are really focusing more on the expertise of the singer or musician than giving glory to God. Often times for a general audience and worship of God, simple is better.

In regard to contemporary music, some songs may essentially be "love songs for Jesus." These types of songs might evoke sentimental feelings for Him, but they can trivialize the deep awe and respect we should have for God and Christ. Whether traditional or contemporary music is involved, also be sensitive to the fact that some in the audience may be troubled by music that they associate with their past experience in a mainstream Protestant or Catholic church. Use wisdom and judgment, and if in doubt, ask your pastor for guidance.

3. Is the style consistent with our Church traditions?

When you play or sing music, remember to maintain a level of formality, dignity, and self-restraint. Many well-meaning “contemporary Christian” singers and musicians come across as being “theatrical” in their overuse of emotions. They “emote” for effect. That is, they make the focus of the piece more about the emotional experience they are having, than the message of the song. We want there to be power and passion in our music! However, we must remember to keep the focus on honoring God and inspiring the congregation. Many “contemporary Christian” pieces sound like run-of-the-mill rock or R&B songs. The style of some songs may be fine for a Church fun show, but their sound may be inappropriate for Sabbath worship services. It is important to distinguish the difference.

4. Does the performer’s dress reflect standards upheld by God’s word and His Church?

Just as the Church has specific dress guidelines for men involved in speaking, song leading and leading in opening and closing prayers, we also need guidelines for those giving special music in front of the congregation. In most western-culture settings, the appropriate clothing for men is coat and tie; for ladies, a dress or skirt and blouse that are modest and conservative. (Other formal-setting attire is appropriate in other cultures in international areas—check with your Regional Office if you have questions).

Ladies should avoid the trendy and immodest apparel that is commonplace for many female performers in our society today: short, tight, form-fitting dresses, necklines displaying cleavage, bare shoulders, backless dresses, etc. Because being on an elevated platform or stage makes hemlines appear higher than they actually are, a good rule of thumb when bringing special music is for a dress or skirt to at least reach the knees, including when seated. Be careful with high slits in a dress or skirt. If dress attracts undue attention, it will draw the minds of those in the congregation away from their focus on the music and worship of God.

Everything about the special music we give should help direct God’s people to Him. And even when we’re not on stage our attire is important, because of our example. Accordingly, those chosen to be on the special music list should dress modestly, based on these guidelines above, at all times, even when not bringing special music.

Again, thank you for your hard work in preparing selections for special music and serving God’s people in this special way. It is a tremendous privilege for all of us to come before the great King each and every Sabbath, to worship Him. Using your talents and providing special music is a profound opportunity to glorify Him and inspire and uplift your brethren! We very much appreciate your dedicated and loving service to God’s people.