

## **A Real Eye-Opener**

**by Lynn DeShazo**

Our church had a “Blast from the Past” service recently, in which we sang nearly all of the early praise choruses and scripture songs of the Charismatic Renewal. It was led by one of the founding couples in our church, Margie and Ferrell Maughan. Margie is a gifted pianist and has weathered all of the musical style transitions our church has lived through. She is the resident repository of our complete musical history as a church. Ferrell is one of our elders and actually used to lead worship when the church first began over thirty years ago. Ferrell has one all-purpose hand signal which Margie learned to interpret one of three ways: 1) go to the next song, 2) go to the next verse in the same song, and 3) guess where I’m going next! He is a much better tax accountant, let me assure you!

I wasn’t a part of the church in those early days, but I had almost no difficulty playing along on guitar for the service. I had a list of songs and their keys, and the knowledge that most of them could be superimposed over one other, as far as the chord progressions went. They are what I call “grassroots” songs - simply composed songs that ordinary people wrote as they lifted up their voice to the Lord in a new song, or set a Scripture verse to music. There is nothing extraordinary about them from a musical standpoint. They pale in comparison to some of the songs being written for worship today. While it was fun to sing a few of them again, I personally don’t miss them. Apparently, however, there are plenty of folks who do.

Now, I knew that a lot of our people would enjoy the service, but I had no idea how big of a hit this night would be. As I looked out on the congregation, I was almost shocked at what I saw. Some of our seniors who normally sit way in the back were now up front. They were singing with all their hearts, and obviously engaged in worshipping the Lord. One couple looked so refreshed, you would have thought they were soaking their feet right there in the pew. Another lady brought her tambourine out of retirement, and played it with all her heart, mostly in the right places. When Ferrell tried to bring the hour-long service to a close, they didn’t want to stop singing. The requests began to fly. At the end, many were out in the aisles dancing, and someone started a Jericho march around the sanctuary. Honestly, I can’t remember the last time I’ve seen that kind of participation from our congregation in worship. I have to admit, this whole experience was a real eye-opener for me!

Our youth, of course, were completely underwhelmed. They were good sports about it, though, and kept their snickering to a minimum. The evening wasn't for them, and they knew it. I could see, too, that we had one visitor, although I don't think he knew anyone there. I'm sure he must have thought he'd walked into a time warp. Poor guy!

This unique opportunity to observe and learn was not lost on me, and here are a few of my conclusions:

1. Beloved worship songs are like memorial stones to people. Their significance is not found in the beauty or excellence of the stone itself. It's found in the "God encounter" that the stone, or the song in this case, represents. These simple songs will always be connected to a significant move of the Holy Spirit in the lives of these dear people. Singing these songs again that night was for them like remembering the mighty deeds of the Lord. Remembering is a biblical practice, by the way.

2. Not all older saints are in love with hymns. As one gentleman reminded us that night, "I don't miss hymns. I left the Baptist church a long time ago!" Well, you'd have to know him to appreciate his opinion!

3. Those of us who minister in music are accustomed to having to stretch ourselves regularly to learn new songs and music styles. We are therefore more open to embracing new songs, and can soon become bored and disinterested without that challenge. Most everyone else in the congregation could care less. They like what they like, and that's what they want to sing! They are happiest when you include songs they already know, find meaningful, and can sing along with.

4. It was a little scary to realize how resistant to change a lot of our people truly are. Lord, help us. Lord, help me!

5. New songs are not necessarily better than old ones. They do, however, speak better the language of a younger generation. I'd say we need both, as people are most themselves when speaking their own language, musical or otherwise.