



Singing the Blues.....or not

Music in Mid-Size UU Congregations

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	3
SECTION 1: A PERSONAL REFLECTION AND SOME PROPOSITIONS	5
SECTION 2: WHAT MUSIC DO WE SAY PEOPLE WILL HEAR FOR SUNDAY SERVICES?	18
SECTION 3: DATA AND COMMENTS FROM MUSIC DIRECTORS	25
SECTION 4: THE OBSERVATIONS OF TOURING PROFESSIONALS	41
SECTION 5: COMMENTS ON THE REPERTOIRE I'VE USED	48
SECTION 6: WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE STUDY DATA	50
POSTSCRIPT AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY	62
Appendix A -- First Parish Singers Repertoire	66

INTRODUCTION

This sabbatical study was planned around the notion of taking time to reflect on my volunteer work of thirty-plus years leading a group of instrumentalists and singers in the Needham, MA UU church, known most of the time as the First Parish Singers, occasionally as the First Parish Gospel Trio, and most recently as the First Parish Homegrown House Band. The last name is a nod to the Homegrown Coffeehouse, a highly respected folk and acoustic venue that I have helped manage as a First Parish Needham fundraiser since 1983.

The overarching goal was to be able to offer informed commentary on how music is being used in an authentic way to broaden the appeal of UU services to people who seek us out as a possible new spiritual home.

At the outset, I laid out a general set of questions for my reflection. To begin the work of testing my personal perceptions against the broader UU family of congregations, I wrote my impressions, in a way creating a set of hypotheses. I wanted to be sure that the ideas are my own (not necessarily original, but at least not influenced by the generous contributions of other musicians to this paper), so I wrote the Personal Reflection section before doing a detailed analysis of the responses received from music directors around the country, fellow UUMN members all, and before reading the responses of the talented performers I reached out to to get their impressions of playing for UU congregations.

This paper is in six sections:

- A reflection on the questions I asked myself at the outset. Think of this as my laying out a set of propositions to be tested against the data about what mid-size UU congregations actually do with their music programs and the observations of touring professional musicians and UU music directors.
- Baseline data and analysis from a review of the websites of 269 mid-size UU congregations. This will give everyone a broad picture of what is going on with musical genres across a very wide cross-section of UU congregations.

- The responses received from a sample of music directors selected based on the strength and diversity of their music programs, as described on church websites
- Comments from professional musicians with experience playing for UU Sunday services
- A comparison of First Parish Singers repertoire with the UUMN compilation by theme.
- A return to my initial reflection -- Comments on how closely my original propositions match the views of professional musicians, music directors, and the data from congregations, and how the learning from this sabbatical project might be applied.

This study is from the point of view of a volunteer music leader, one who has not had to work as paid music staff. I have had the opportunity to look at a music program from a different vantage point than the long series of professional music directors, choir directors, accompanists and organists we have seen in Needham. My work has been dedicated to broadening and deepening the music program. I have not been constrained by the weekly need to find three hymns, a prelude, anthem, offertory, meditation and postlude, and I deeply respect the work of the music directors and ministers faced with that task every Sunday for at least forty weeks a year. I am certain that there are many other music volunteers like me trying to do the same kind of work, with no reference points to decide if they are pushing too much, doing too little, or getting it about right.

My hope is that other lay music leaders and volunteer musicians in our mid-size congregations can see their own work in the broad context of mid-size congregations from all around the country, compare that to what is happening in congregations that have made a conscious effort to broaden their music programs, find inspiration for doing their own reflections on their work, and uncover ways to enhance the role of music in their congregations. Along the journey, they can be joined by the professional music directors, choir directors, music committees, and ministers who all share responsibility for the overall spiritual experience in our UU Sunday services.

The opinions expressed in this study are my own, and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Unitarian Universalist Association (which employs me), or the UU Musicians Network (of which I am a member). When I quote music leaders who responded to the survey, they are offering their own opinions, as are the professional touring musicians who contributed to this work.

SECTION 1: A PERSONAL REFLECTION AND SOME PROPOSITIONS

Who am I musically?

I want to get this out there, before someone can suggest that I'm biased against a particular musical genre, or that I'm all about one style in particular. I like pretty much everything, though I have more trouble with some genres than others, seeing how they might fit into a church service. Just because I can't wrap my head around using a grunge rock band on Sunday morning, though, doesn't mean that someone else couldn't pull it off.

I came of age in the 60's. As a kid I listened to what my parents listened to -- top 40 radio, Sinatra, some country, a little R&B, Bobby Darin, Glen Campbell, big band, anyone who appeared on The Ed Sullivan Show, Sousa marches, Flanders & Swann, Tom Lehrer, Suppé overtures, the Kingston Trio, Chad Mitchell Trio, and Les Comapgnons de La Chanson. I am indebted to my parents for having such eclectic taste.

Then came the 60's, and my timing couldn't have been better. I can (and do) look my rocker son in the eye and say, "My generation invented rock music." I liked the Beatles, and it certainly upped my cool factor being able to play "Norwegian Wood" and "Michelle". I loved Cream (still do) and Jefferson Airplane, the Grateful Dead (I still have that vinyl, featuring a "great new band from San Francisco"), the Who, and a bunch of one-and-out bands that sounded better at dorm parties than they do now. And then came the folk explosion, and my life changed forever. My parents were not going to let me join an evil rock band, but how much trouble could I get into with an acoustic guitar? Right. I learned every

song Peter, Paul & Mary ever recorded, and I can still play most of them from memory (the music, not the words -- lyrics are way slipperier), most of the Joan Baez songbook, a good chunk of Judy Collins. When I started to play Bob Dylan's stuff, my parents began to realize their mistake, but it was way too late. My mother tried to ban Pete Seeger as well, that "dirty communist", but by then I was off and running.

The music landscape, at least my personal landscape, shared by some good friends, wasn't quite as simple as folk and rock, though. Dave Brubeck had really penetrated my circle, as had Stan Getz, Thelonious Monk, the big band music of Ted Heath, Edmundo Ross and others; Frank Sinatra was still going strong, and Motown was exploding. A bunch of us went to the Newport Jazz Festival before I ever went to a folk festival, and we heard Ella Fitzgerald sing "A-Tisket, A-Tasket" backed by Duke Ellington's big band. I still get chills thinking about that.

My classical roots are a bit harder to trace. I grew up Methodist, belonging to a church in Cambridge, MA that had a choir that even a pretty uncritical 10-year old knew was terrible. They sang the Seven-Fold Amen in something like unison, and I don't think they ever got to seven. The good news was that the choir director was a really good organist, and she would play Bach chorales most Sundays, and I was mesmerized. Still am.

When I first started taking guitar lessons at sixteen, I went in thinking I wanted to be able to play Kingston Trio songs, but my teacher was a Cuban exile who was a master of classical guitar. Señor Costa played Bach cello suites, and I was hooked. I still play some classical guitar, but it's a tough discipline, so mostly I transferred those skills to folk music. After a concert in Boston's Symphony Hall, I shook hands with Andres Segovia, and I still fantasize that talent can be transmitted by touch.

Maybe it was the Bach tapping something atavistic: I am a huge fan of early music, from chant of the middle ages to Renaissance choral music. I am also a devotee of string quartets from almost any period. From time to time I sing with my church choir, because I thoroughly enjoy making music with other people. I am continually amazed by the feeling of mental expansion I get from

concentrating on my bass part while simultaneously hearing the interaction with the other voices and other parts.

My latest musical challenge takes me back to my non-classical roots, and to "roots" music quite literally, as you hear the term used most often. The music of the Beatles, of Cream, of artists like Eric Clapton, was all American blues that was shipped to England, relearned, electrified, and shipped back to us. It is an infinitely flexible genre, within a narrow set of musical rules, that has produced some of the most memorable music and artists of my generation. It has its own musical language, built on pentatonic scales and shifting major-minor transitions, that I've found to be both challenging and beautiful, now that I've made the switch from listener to player.

All of that is a long way of describing what's going on in the musical parts of my brain. There is not much that isn't playing in my head, and very little that I wouldn't pick up and explore for a church service, if there is some way I think it can deepen the spiritual experience.

My starting propositions

At a high level, why has Needham's alternative music program shown such staying power over 30 years?

My beginning premise is that most of the people who come through UU doors for Sunday services are coming from another denomination and another set of expectations about the music that goes with "church". I know that that's the case in Needham, because we have been through ministerial searches, and religious backgrounds are pretty clear. The latest survey showed that 57% of respondents came from a Protestant or Catholic background, 13% grew up UU, and 30% were "other".

Having expectations cuts both ways -- for some, hearing the music they grew up with is comforting; for others the music can be a reminder of what they hoped they would be escaping by coming to a UU church. I have had people in tears

because we were able to offer a morning (during one of our summer services) devoted to Christian hymns in their original Baptist and Methodist settings, while others deliberately avoided the service. We have people who can't get enough organ music and others who say it reminds them too much of high church. We have legacy UU's who claim Pete Seeger as their own, and people who feel that some of the folk music choices I make are too irreverent for church.

On balance, my sense is that a diverse congregation will be happy with the overall music program only if the music gives them something they can connect with, while also giving them space to tune out musical styles they don't like. Unless a congregation is homogeneous in its expectations, a heavy focus on a single genre is going to drive some people away. The diversity is just as important to engaging and retaining potential new members as it is to keeping the current members happy. In Needham, as new families have joined, having an adaptable music program has allowed us offer music that helps make an emotional connection with newcomers, not every Sunday, but often enough to let people feel that their roots are being recognized and respected. Forging that emotional bond, in my opinion, is what makes it possible to keep people connected long enough that they can get comfortable with the sometimes difficult intellectual content of our services.

There have been 9 ministers and 11 music directors, including interims, that I've worked with. What is the key to carrying the program through transitions?

There is one critical element I can identify. We're talking about music done in the context of a church service. Since the music that I've organized has been secondary to the larger music program under the direction of a choir director or music director, it's been critical for me to forge a good working relationship with the minister. I have been fortunate to have worked with five settled ministers and one interim who all saw the value of a broad music program. Having the minister on board has been especially important given that only 3 of the 11 choir/music directors had an abiding interest in going beyond the standard choral repertoire. Where having a diverse program ran into difficulty was during the tenure of three interim ministers, none of whom took a significant interest in the music program.

During each of those interim assignments, the choir/music director (three different ones) had little interest in being deliberate about the inclusiveness of the music program. During those stretches, my role was to be persuasive, holding on to personal goals of improving the music program and keeping a performing group intact during the interim assignments.

What does "a commitment to inclusiveness" in music mean?

To me, inclusiveness means, first, making deliberate choices of music from genres that fall outside the standard choral repertoire and outside classical keyboard music. My own congregation has a lot of fans of the traditional repertoire, and it also has a significant minority who refer to the standard Protestant repertoire as "dead white guy music". I will not throw DWG music under the bus, because I like so much of it, and because so much of it is important to a significant segment of the congregation. However, I do not believe that classical music should be the gold standard for music offerings. It's one of multiple musical genres that can be tapped when it's appropriate for the mood the minister is trying to create that morning or the message they are trying to impart. Inclusiveness means exploring the vast and rapidly expanding world of secular music, very little of which was written to be heard in churches. The poetry of contemporary songwriters, the raw power of rock, the deep emotional reach of country, the cerebral lure of jazz all deserve to be heard, not just for their own sake, but because the messages they bring have the power to create an overall church experience that is richer and deeper than classical music can create on its own.

The second, and closely related, part of inclusiveness is a willingness to reach into music that goes counter to the strong Humanist thread that runs through so many of our UU congregations, including my own. Visitors are likely to be coming from a tradition that embraces some part of God, Jesus, sin, redemption, heaven, hell, or good and evil. Gospel music, or Sacred Harp, or any other music with specific reference to Christian themes cannot be turned into an intellectual exercise. The music has to be approached honestly, recognizing that even if the theology is difficult going for Humanist members in the congregation, and that even if visitors

-- seekers -- have moved away from the theology that created the music, there is still a deep emotional commitment to the music itself.

How does "inclusiveness" in music relate to UU principles and sources, and how does it impact the spiritual life of the church?

Our Seven Principles and our statement about the Six Sources we look to are stressed on many, many UU church websites. Together, they are one of our principal website outreach statements to seekers, equal to our statements on social justice efforts. In our UUA Bylaws, we say of the six sources of wisdom affirmed by our congregations , "Grateful for the religious pluralism which enriches and ennobles our faith, we are inspired to deepen our understanding and expand our vision." For me, when I am working on the musical elements in a service, I try to do whatever I can to respect the feelings people hold for their faith tradition. That respect includes leaving intact all religious language -- including references to Jesus and God. Wherever seekers are in their personal journey to understand the theology they are leaving behind to come to a UU church, however they are working to build their own theology and integrate what they are leaving with what they are becoming, I do not want to disrupt their emotional connection to their traditions embodied in the music.

If the goal is to "... deepen our understanding and expand our vision", music is a wonderful tool. Particularly in a congregation with deep Humanist roots, the music can bypass reasoned analysis and go directly to an emotional reaction. Our UU statement about Humanist sources cites, "Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit." That leads in directly to one old joke about UU's and music:

Q: Why are UU's such terrible hymn singers?

A: Because they're too busy reading ahead to see if they agree with the words.

In that spirit, I see an inclusive music program upholding the *other* Sources, each in its own way inviting us to look deeply at the wisdom and teachings of other

traditions, including inviting us to tamp down thinking and directly experience "...transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life." Gospel music asks congregants to feel the transcending mystery of God and listen to "... Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves". Jazz, a lot of it, is wordless, and for people not trained in music theory, it is a genre that evokes a direct reaction to the music itself (for those who *are* trained in music theory *and* cannot turn off analysis of jazz chord structures and changes, listening to jazz can be an intellectual, not a spiritual exercise). Much of folk music deals poetically and musically with the "Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with the transforming power of love" (taken directly from the Six Sources); folk music and world music are also where we are most likely to experience, "Spiritual teachings of Earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature; and rock, blues, and country, though they carry a lot of misogynist and jingoist baggage, can cut deeply and quickly to personal experience of pain, loss, and love, which for many people can be a gateway to spiritual exploration.

Do bluegrass, blues, gospel, country, and folk music have as much validity in a worship context as classical and liturgical music? Where do you draw the line (if at all)?

Absolutely, and frequently more. I wouldn't be doing this sabbatical report, if I hadn't seen it work time after time for thirty years. If there is a trusting relationship with the minister, something I have been blessed to have for all of that time, and if, among the minister, the music director, and the person heading up the effort to integrate alternative music sources (if that's not the music director) there is a deep knowledge of at least some genres of non-liturgical, non-classical music, then there can be a dialogue about what music fits, why it fits, how it might work with a sermon, who it might offend, and how the music should be framed. Beyond that, there is no line.

"Framing", I've found, is really important, especially with music that includes Christian references. When the First Parish Singers perform music from the gospel tradition, for example, we take the time to give a little history of where the music comes from and how it is used, and we invite people to be open to the deeper message and not get stuck on Christian references. We have done the same with Shape Note singing. On the secular side, the same thinking applies. Our minister, Rev. Cattie Scudera, was careful to lay out the theological connection to her sermon of the message in "Pompeii" by the rock group Bastille, before we launched into a full-band version with electric guitar, bass, drums and sax. She made the connection to scripture before we did "Sheep Go to Heaven" by Cake. I've done it for country music, including Brad Paisley's "Country Nation". (Since *reading about* music selections is not the same as hearing them, I encourage you to listen the YouTube clips -- not only is it good music, but you can also consider how you might put those kinds of musical offerings in context, if it were up to you.)

Back to drawing a line on "appropriate" music for a moment. Although it is possible to have all of the right pieces in place -- the trusting relationships, the knowledge of alternative genres, the commitment to dialogue -- music selection can still go off the rails. The biggest failure potential lies in the "dialogue" piece; sometimes schedules are too rushed, there is too little time to vet the selections, and the Offertory has to be filled. I am writing this part of my reflection the day after Mothers Day, and each year I can look back (and laugh) at choosing the Lou and Peter Berryman song "I Don't Want to Hear You Use the F-Word with Your Mother" many years back. Check it out on YouTube, and you'll get an idea of how shortcutting dialogue can create a problem. I try not to dwell on it anymore.

What about cultural misappropriation?

This is something I think about a lot. My basic rule for performing music that has obvious religious roots has been "If you don't understand the cultural roots of the music, don't perform it." My goal is to avoid playing sacred music out of context, when I can't explain what that context is or relate to its spiritual purpose within its own tradition. My own religious background gives me the tools I need for

approaching most Christian music, though I have limits on what I feel I can present genuinely. I can perform gospel music, spirituals, and Sacred Harp; I cannot sing contemporary Christian praise music or Christian pop. I will not do music from any of the Native American traditions. I am not particularly good at performing music from the Jewish tradition; it doesn't rise to the level of cultural misappropriation for me, but it would certainly be *musical* misappropriation.

Secular music, on the other hand, is fair game. The cultural context is much easier to relate to when the themes are love, loss, celebration, hard times, pain, good and bad relationships, political activism, the labor movement, or the simple joy of making music together. That's all cross-cultural stuff, and musicians are forever borrowing from other cultures and weaving the music into their own vernacular. There would be no jazz without that kind of borrowing. There would be no "folk process". I don't feel the slightest hesitation performing a Delta blues piece, knowing full well that while the music comes from the Black tradition, the themes are universal. The music itself cannot be "misappropriated" --- it might be played poorly, but that's a separate issue. It is not restricted to one culture.

How important is "quality" of musical performance?

It's important to *me* that music be played well. I work hard at my guitar playing. I put a lot of thought into arranging in a way that works for the other instrumentalists and works for whatever group of singers are performing on any given Sunday. I spend time reading up on the history of the music; I watch YouTube clips and download music from iTunes. I have an online music subscription that allows me to legally download sheet music on the occasions when I need it. And I insist on adequate rehearsal time.

All of that is about me, though, and I suspect that I'm not much different from anyone else serving in a music leadership role. But what happens at the *congregation* level? I live in a Greater Boston suburb, a musically sophisticated part of the country, and play for a congregation that is used to hearing professional music from many genres. Their expectations for the quality of music

played in church is a complicated question. I believe it varies both by genre and by performer. When the genre is classical and the performer is the music director on keyboard, expectations are very high. The combination of "classical" and "paid staff" appears to demand excellence. The same thinking extends to paid guest classical musicians. It gets murkier when the classical players are amateurs, even very good amateurs -- the standard is lowered somewhat, and in general that standard applies to the (mostly volunteer) choir when they are performing material from the standard choral repertoire. It gets muddier still when the genre shifts to folk, gospel, bluegrass, or world music. People think they know those genres, but in reality their definition of "good" is very broad, with only the very bad or the truly outstanding drawing a significant level of comment. Jazz remains inscrutable to most, and contemporary country and alt rock are completely foreign territories. Performances by the Children's Choir and the Youth Chime Choir are judged by a whole other set of standards that include visual appeal, effort, a commitment to encouraging our children's musical development, the age-appropriateness of the musical selections, and the number of parents in attendance, in *addition to* musicality.

I believe that what the congregation's flexible definition of "quality" means in practice is that, if an alternative music group like the one I lead can rehearse adequately, can give a genuine performance of the music that shows an appreciation for the nuances of the genre, and is backed by instrumentalists who know what they are doing, then nearly all performances will be well-received. That is not to say that the performers should not aim high. They should. The music can get off track quickly without the performers' commitment to quality. However, "quality" does not mean "perfection". Perfection takes much more time and often more talent than a volunteer group can bring to the game.

That conclusion leads to the next question that I had determined at the outset would be part of this study.

What is the impact of welcoming non-singers into a musical ensemble, and how does that relate to recruiting performers?

I made the decision early on that the First Parish Singers would be open to all comers. I believed that anyone can be taught to sing in a group, if you can just get them paired with someone who really knows the part. I write most of the arrangements, so if need be, I can create a part with only one or two notes. If you combine that approach with singing softly, almost anything is possible. Going back to what I said about quality expectations, I believe that you can have people who see themselves as non-singers or marginal singers with no negative consequences for congregational reaction. Extending that thinking to recruiting new First Parish Singers members, it shifts the focus from trying to find people who excel at choral singing to finding people who want to be part of a welcoming musical group. Particularly for newer people, singing with a group that performs only once a month is an ideal level of time commitment with a high reward potential. It beats signing up for Property Committee.

I have found over the years that it is more difficult to find qualified instrumentalists than to find singers. My bias is strongly in favor of having skilled players to provide the backbone of the musical presentation. Strong instrumentalists can cover up a lot of choral sins. As a practical matter, because a lot of the arranging is done very close to the performance date, with some of the arranging done on the fly at rehearsal, weaker instrumentalists can have a tough time. The ability to find good players is part luck, but I believe that the most important determinant in a mid-size congregation (ours is approaching 300 members) is the absolute size of the congregation -- bigger pool, more possibilities.

How important are the congregation's expectations?

Very. Having time to reflect on the process of introducing an alternative music program and working to maintain it, I believe that managing expectations may be the most important piece.

In Needham, thirty years back, there was no "alternative" music. Everything was drawn from the "church music" repertoire. The Choir rehearsed every Thursday and sang every Sunday, almost without exception. Keyboard music was primarily organ and classical piano. There was no teal hymnal. There were no summer services.

The opening for folk music was created by the Homegrown Coffeehouse, which was launched in 1983 to take advantage of the second wave of the folk revival that saw the rise of the "contemporary singer-songwriter", as that broad category came to be known. People began to ask, "If we can present that kind of music on Saturday nights, why can't we do it in church." Why indeed. We had a willing minister, a willing music director, and a good starting group of singers. The rest was organization and a willingness to stick with the idea until it could take root.

There was no wholesale shift in the balance of musical programming, simply the addition of "folk" music, one, occasionally two pieces in one service a month. The Choir was supplemented, not replaced. Some Choir members joined the First Parish Singers while continuing with the Choir. There were no electric instruments. And early on, people bought into the idea that the music was actually enhancing the overall message.

What would have happened without this gradual approach? Most likely it would have met with wholesale resistance. Congregations think more in terms of what they are comfortable with for themselves, less in terms of what might appeal to newcomers. This is not new -- I have been reading an excellent book by Thomas Forrest Kelly, *Capturing Music* (W W Norton, 2015); it's an exploration of the history of musical notation. Kelly notes that in the twelfth century, when unison Gregorian chant was being gradually supplanted by more complex polyphonic music, critics were calling the move away from plainchant "detestable", "effeminate", and full of "minstrelish little notes". These were clerical critics, mind you, who were charged with carrying on the plainchant tradition, writing about the music being sung at Notre Dame, music that would change the landscape of Western music. The sentiment might be expressed differently by UU's 800 years later, but I believe it still runs very deep. Expectations matter.

How much time does it take to be deliberately inclusive?

It adds up. I like to think in terms of the total number of volunteer hours required to do a specific project. That approach keeps me focused on how much people are being asked to do in a church setting, where total available volunteer hours are limited.

For the alternative music program, there is the time needed to discuss upcoming services with the minister and the music director, time to select, learn, and arrange the music, and rehearsal and performance time. For me, as a lay music leader organizing music for, on average, one service a month, it might be a 10-15 hour per month commitment. For the other instrumentalists, you would have to add their individual rehearsal time, so with four other band members to cover (in Needham's case) guitar & mandolin, electric bass, flute & saxophone, and percussion, you might be adding another 20 - 30 hours of volunteer time. The singers will rehearse for two hours and be in church for one hour, multiplied by 6 - 8 (non-instrumentalist) singers, so that's another 18 - 24 hours per month. In total, then, our program takes up something like 50 - 70 volunteer hours each month, give or take.

How much money does it cost to be inclusive?

Because the Needham program relies on volunteers, the cost is pretty low. There is a small expense for acquiring legal copies of sheet music, primarily for the instrumentalists. The singers learn almost everything by ear, occasionally helped by recordings purchased on iTunes, played on YouTube, or played at rehearsals from my own collection. If the organizing and arranging work that I do were added to the music director position, that job would increase by 120 - 180 hours per year at an appropriate professional rate. Hiring instrumentalist would add to the cost, depending on how many were used to make up the "band"; midrange cost might be around \$400 a month. A mid-size congregation is financially better off relying on volunteers. However, the volunteer solution comes with issues of sustainability, music quality, volunteer burnout, and finding the best path to respecting the music director's need for overall music program integrity.

SECTION 2: WHAT MUSIC DO WE SAY PEOPLE WILL HEAR FOR SUNDAY SERVICES? -- BASELINE DATA FROM MID-SIZE CONGREGATIONS

What made up the original sample of congregations?

The original plan was to create a broad sample of mid-size congregations. I used the UUA definition of 150 members as the low end for "mid-size". For the upper end, I used 400 members. For a couple of reasons, I did not include the congregations from 400 - 550 members, the upper end of "mid-size": first, the UUA uses 350 members as a guidepost for the shift to a "corporate" congregation, where excellence in music programming becomes a congregational expectation; and second, because I want the findings to be useful to a broad range of mid-size congregations, a cutoff at 400 members means that a congregation with 250 members may realistically aspire to having the music budget of 400 member congregation someday, but a 500-member budget may feel way out of reach.

The sampling plan created a pool of 274 congregations. All but five (that were down for maintenance) had functioning websites at the time of the review. Using such a broad sample means that even though there were obvious differences in the sophistication of websites, and wide differences in layout, distribution of content across different categories, ease of use, and embedded audio and visual content, the themes and trend that emerged are representative of a broad cross-section of our UU congregations.

Relying on websites for information on music programs has an obvious advantage over surveying all music directors, in that the sample size and the "response" rate are both 100%. (By comparison, the response rate from the sample of music directors asked for detailed input was 60%.) The drawback of using website data is that the data is only as good as the presentation. I was careful to review everything being said about the congregation's music program by following their links, reviewing their photo galleries, checking staff listings, reading descriptions of upcoming services, checking for music-related activity in church bulletins and calendars -- anything I could find that was music-related. I am also convinced,

after looking at 269 websites, that our congregations are trying to put their best foot forward on an element of social media that is meant to be attractive to visitors. I am confident that the picture of music programs that emerges from the website detail fairly represents what is actually going on.

What music are we talking about for this project?

This sabbatical study is all about understanding how UU congregations use music, the diversity of the music, and the possibilities for broadening music programs. To do the initial data collection, I divided the music played for Sunday services into two broad categories: classical and liturgical music -- what most lay people and most visitors to a congregation would consider to be "church music", if they come from a Christian tradition, and all other musical styles -- or "alternative" music. This large category was then subdivided into specific genres, with labels that most people would agree represent a coherent style.

Distinguishing one genre from another

Our congregations' websites are both remarkably diverse, without doubt reflecting the individual personalities of the congregations who built them and the volunteers who chose what to emphasize, and remarkably similar in their presentation of UU values, the Seven Principles, the emphasis on social justice, and the clear statements on music as central to worship. I knew I was visiting UU websites.

It was relatively easy, looking at website descriptions of music programs, to distinguish "church music" from the presentation of other genres. It was as if the music descriptions were written to be broadly recognizable, without any attempt to further define "classical" or "sacred choral music" or "liturgical music" -- the categories I was using to compile data. The feedback on the genre labels that I've received has come mostly from music professionals, who have a much greater stake in being precise with labels. I would maintain that labels do not matter all that much to "Nones" who might be checking out a website. For the record, here's how I was thinking of "classical" music:

Classical music is art music produced or rooted in the traditions of Western music (both liturgical and secular). It encompasses a broad span of time from roughly the 11th century to the present day. -- Wikipedia

Serious or conventional music following long-established principles rather than a folk, jazz, or popular tradition. -- Oxford Dictionary

A loose expression for European and American music of the more serious kind, as opposed to popular or folk music. -- Dictionary.com

My working definition for the **liturgical/sacred choral music** count was that it fall in the general bucket of music that a choir is doing for anthems and offertories that does not fit any of the other genres.

I can accept the musicology criticism, reasonably secure in the belief that visitors can relate to the overall divisions, and that most will bring emotional associations with the style I've labeled "church music", even if they can't say for sure why it sounds like church music to them.

I believe that websites, when they offer details about what might be heard on a Sunday morning, emphasize classical music more often than it is actually played. I also think that too many congregations do not put enough effort into describing their music programs, which is a missed marketing opportunity to connect with seekers who are looking for reasons to try out a congregation.

I deliberately did not consider hymn selections when looking at how diverse our UU musical programming might be. In our mid-size congregations, we pretty much all sing from the same hymnals. The hymns, for better or worse, are a baseline expectation for a Protestant-flavored church service. Some people love singing them, others do not. Bottom line, my personal opinion is that the hymns cannot distinguish one congregation's music program from another, with the exception of congregations where hymns are introduced and led by a song leader, which is a worthy goal being promoted by the UUA Music Leadership Certification Program.

What music do we say we offer on Sunday mornings?

Keep in mind that congregation websites are almost always committee designs. The final product will emphasize what the committee wants to see, combined with the available writing resources, photography resources, AV production expertise, and the skill of the web designer. A website is primarily a marketing tool, so there will be a bias toward telling a story that may stretch reality some. For that reason, this study included detailed input from two dozen music directors, presented later. That said, here is a summary of how frequently mid-size congregations reference a particular musical genre. The data shows *how often a genre is mentioned on a website*, NOT how often it's played. The same genre classification is carried over into the analysis of music director responses. The data is shown for the entire sample, and is also broken down into smaller (150 - 275 member, n=195) and larger (276 - 398 member, n=74) congregations.

Reference to a Specific Genre	% of all congregations	Smaller 150 - 275	Larger 276 - 398
Classical	58%	50%	81%
Liturgical/sacred choral music	38%	37%	41%
Gospel or spirituals	20%	16%	30%
Country	2%	1%	4%
Rock	8%	6%	12%
Pop/contemporary/Broadway	19%	15%	30%
Folk/Celtic	30%	26%	43%
Jazz	24%	19%	38%
Bluegrass	3%	4%	3%
Blues	4%	4%	4%
Contemporary Christian/Praise	0%	1%	0%
World	21%	19%	26%
Drumming (not part of a band)	8%	9%	5%

It's pretty clear from these numbers that the combination of classical music and liturgical/sacred choral music is perceived as having high marketing value, with five other genres also showing a good deal of appeal. Country, bluegrass, blues, and contemporary Christian music do not get a lot of attention. I believe, based on the music director input that we'll look at a little later, that the website presentations overstate the actual use of classical and choral music, but in general the data presents a fair picture of what mix a visitor might encounter over a series of Sundays.

Note the significant gap between larger and smaller mid-size congregations. I believe that the much higher rate of references to specific alternative genres -- two to one in several cases -- reflects the greater pool of musical resources within larger congregations. Financial resources come into play as well, but as we will see later, it is the pool of available talent that makes the larger difference.

All of these percentages are probably understated somewhat, because for a significant percentage of congregations, particularly the smaller ones, it was difficult to determine the mix of genres from written descriptions. Without a clear description, I relied on photos and other media, as described in the section on how the sample was created.

What else do our websites say about music, and about music leadership?

Nearly all of the websites I reviewed had some combination (using generic examples) of an "About Us" page, a "Visitors" page, and/or a "What to Expect on Sunday" page. Those pages were where I looked first for references to music. The universal message was, "Music at [our church] is [vibrant, integral, essential, central]" with frequent references to "many sources" and "rich diversity". No real surprises there. Where congregations began to distinguish themselves was in the detail, and I dug thoroughly to see how they described their program.

As I worked through 269 websites, I found that the majority offered good detail on their programs, more in larger congregations than smaller. A significant percentage, though, had scant written detail. Here is the breakdown:

Music programming is described in enough written detail to identify genres

Congregation Size	Percent
Smaller (150 - 275)	68%
Larger (276 - 398)	81%
Total	72%

To me, this looks like a missed marketing opportunity. It's hard for a website visitor to put flesh on the concept of "vibrant" without some clear examples.

I noted whether or not a congregation had a music director or choir director, based on any reference I could find on the website. The results:

Is there a Music Director or Choir Director?

Congregation Size	Percent
Smaller (150 - 275)	88%
Larger (276 - 398)	97%
Total	91%

I then looked at whether or not the congregations with music leadership listed their leader as a member of staff. Although a count based on website detail is not 100% accurate, I believe that most congregations are clear about who is on staff and who simply advises. Here are the results:

Is the music leader listed as a member of Staff?

Congregation Size	Percent
Smaller (150 - 275)	82%
Larger (276 - 398)	94%
Total	86%

Do they have an adult choir?

Does the congregation have an adult choir?	
Congregation Size	Percent
Smaller (150 - 275)	89%
Larger (276 - 398)	96%
Total	91%

A children's choir?

Does the congregation have a children's choir?	
Congregation Size	Percent
Smaller (150 - 275)	17%
Larger (276 - 398)	46%
Total	25%

I tried to create a rough gauge of the frequency that congregations said they presented alternative music genres on Sunday mornings. I divided the web statements into two broad categories: "Most Sundays, you will hear [names of non-church music genres]", and "You might hear [name of any particular non-church music genre]." This crude measure gets refined in the survey of a sample of music directors.

Alternative music on most Sundays?	
Congregation Size	Yes
Smaller (150 - 275)	12%
Larger (276 - 398)	11%
Total	12%

You might hear [alternative music] any given Sunday	
Congregation Size	Yes
Smaller (150 - 275)	48%
Larger (276 - 398)	65%
Total	52%

SECTION 3: DATA AND COMMENTS FROM MUSIC DIRECTORS

From the 269 websites of mid-size congregations, I selected 40 whose websites described vibrant music programs with a strong alternative music component. That vibrancy could be seen in the descriptions of the music being performed, descriptions of the music groups that supported the congregation's overall music program, the music director's personal statements and their biography, listings for other music staff, such as accompanists, audio and video clips, promotions for music programming outside the Sunday service setting, photo montages --

basically anything that was designed to offer website visitors a reason to try out a congregation. I sent out a Survey Monkey invitation to all 40 music directors, explaining this sabbatical project and asking for their input. In the end, 24 music directors responded. That size sample means that caution is needed in extrapolating results, and small percentage differences in the response to any one question are not statistically significant. On the plus side, the respondents represent almost 10% of mid-size congregations, and because they represent congregations that actively promote the excellence of their programs, places where the Directors show significant agreement are instructive.

Q1 - How important is fitting the music to the sermon?	
Answer Options	Response Percent
Extremely important	58.3%
Important	41.7%
Nice when it happens	0.0%
Not important at all	0.0%
Gets in the way of music planning	0.0%

This was the strongest response in the survey. Music directors are committed to matching the music to the sermon.

Q2 - How important is it to create an overall musical feel for each service?	
Answer Options	Response Percent
Extremely important	41.7%
Important	41.7%
Nice when it happens	16.7%
Not important at all	0.0%
Gets in the way of music planning	0.0%

Another strong response, with a recognition that it can't always happen.

Q3 - How involved is the minister in music selection?

Answer Options	Response Percent
Dictates the music choices	0.0%
Consults closely on music choices	33.3%
Often shares ideas	45.8%
Occasionally shares ideas	20.8%
Leaves everything to me	0.0%

Q4 - How would you rate your minister's depth of musical knowledge?

Answer Options	Response Percent
Broad and deep	8.3%
Broad and shallow	16.7%
Deep in one or two genres	25.0%
Likes music, but not equipped to discuss music issues	33.3%
Not musical at all	4.2%
Other (please specify)	12.5%

When the "other" comments are parsed, the numbers look like this:

Q4 - How would you rate your minister's depth of musical knowledge?

Answer Options	Response Percent
Broad and deep	8.3%
Broad and shallow	23.0%
Deep in one or two genres	31.0%
Likes music, but not equipped to discuss music issues	33.3%
Not musical at all	4.2%

Reading Q3 and Q4 together, the respondents are saying that their minister is actively involved in music selections about 80% of the time, but fully a third are not really equipped to select music.

Q5 - How important is selecting music that will appeal to visitors, with a goal of attracting new members through the music program?

Answer Options	Response Percent
Extremely important	12.5%
Very important	41.7%
Important	25.0%
Somewhat important	20.8%
Not at all important	0.0%

Q6 - How important is selecting music that will appeal to the 18 - 35 demographic?

Answer Options	Response Percent
Extremely important	8.3%
Very important	37.5%
Important	29.2%
Somewhat important	20.8%
Not at all important	4.2%

Q7 - How important is the congregation's musical taste in choosing the music?

Answer Options	Response Percent
Extremely important	12.5%
Very important	37.5%
Important	25.0%
Somewhat important	25.0%
Not at all important	0.0%

The responses to Questions 5 -7 reflect the balance that music directors have to strive for. While 80% say that appealing to visitors is important, about the same percentage say that they have to pay attention to the congregation's musical taste.

Q8 - How important is it to feature music from a wide variety of cultures?

Answer Options	Response Percent
Extremely important	37.5%
Very important	37.5%
Important	12.5%
Somewhat important	12.5%
Not at all important	0.0%

Q9 - Would you consider the music in our hymnals to be the primary multicultural element in Sunday services?

Answer Options	Response Percent
Yes	25.0%
No	75.0%

Reading Q8 and Q9 together, the respondents are saying that multiculturalism is very important and that the hymnals are not their primary source for multicultural music.

Question 10 asked for an estimate of the # of Sundays in a church year that might feature a particular genre. Because the number of respondents is small, the results can't have a lot of specificity, but they are informative nonetheless. I summarized the cumulative data by genre, so that within genres, you can get an idea of the % of congregations likely to offer a particular genre over the course of the year. For example, 30.4% of the responding congregations offer classical music less than 20% of the time, and 78.3% offer classical music less than half the time.

The first look at Question 10 shows the level at which three-quarters of the congregations max out each genre.

Q10 - What percent of your Sunday mornings feature this genre?

Answer Options	Never	< 10 % of the time	< 20% of the time	< 30 % of the time	< 40% of the time	< 50% of the time
Classical	0.0%	17.4%	30.4%	52.2%	73.9%	78.3%
Liturgical/sacred choral music repertoire	4.3%	13.0%	30.4%	56.5%	73.9%	78.3%
Gospel or spirituals	0.0%	17.4%	30.4%	65.2%	87.0%	95.7%
Country	34.8%	82.6%	95.7%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Rock	26.1%	47.8%	73.9%	91.3%	95.7%	95.7%
Pop/contemporary/Broadway	4.3%	26.1%	43.5%	78.3%	82.6%	91.3%
Folk/Celtic	8.7%	39.1%	56.5%	78.3%	91.3%	91.3%
Jazz	8.7%	56.5%	73.9%	82.6%	87.0%	91.3%
Bluegrass	17.4%	78.3%	82.6%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Blues	21.7%	73.9%	91.3%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Contemporary Christian/Praise	56.5%	78.3%	91.3%	95.7%	95.7%	95.7%
World	0.0%	34.8%	60.9%	78.3%	91.3%	91.3%
Drumming (other than as part of a band)	30.4%	65.2%	73.9%	87.0%	91.3%	91.3%

Yellow highlights mark the level at which about three-quarters of congregations max out on a given genre in a church year.

The second look at Question 10 estimates a range for what a "typical" congregation might offer.

Q10 - What percent of your Sunday mornings feature this genre?

Answer Options	Never	< 10 % of the time	< 20% of the time	< 30 % of the time	< 40% of the time	< 50% of the time
Classical	0.0%	17.4%	30.4%	52.2%	73.9%	78.3%
Liturgical/sacred choral music repertoire	4.3%	13.0%	30.4%	56.5%	73.9%	78.3%
Gospel or spirituals	0.0%	17.4%	30.4%	65.2%	87.0%	95.7%
Country	34.8%	82.6%	95.7%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Rock	26.1%	47.8%	73.9%	91.3%	95.7%	95.7%
Pop/contemporary/Broadway	4.3%	26.1%	43.5%	78.3%	82.6%	91.3%
Folk/Celtic	8.7%	39.1%	56.5%	78.3%	91.3%	91.3%
Jazz	8.7%	56.5%	73.9%	82.6%	87.0%	91.3%
Bluegrass	17.4%	78.3%	82.6%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Blues	21.7%	73.9%	91.3%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Contemporary Christian/Praise	56.5%	78.3%	91.3%	95.7%	95.7%	95.7%
World	0.0%	34.8%	60.9%	78.3%	91.3%	91.3%
Drumming (other than as part of a band)	30.4%	65.2%	73.9%	87.0%	91.3%	91.3%

Green highlights estimate the range of how often a "typical" congregation might offer a genre, (i.e., a "median" or mid-point response)

Another way to look a performance frequency is to calculate a weighted average of all of the reported frequencies by genre. Here is how that data looks:

Q10 - What percent of your Sunday mornings feature this genre?	
Answer Options	% of services
Classical	32%
Liturgical/sacred choral music repertoire	29%
Gospel or spirituals	21%
Country	5%
Rock	12%
Pop/contemporary/Broadway	20%
Folk/Celtic	16%
Jazz	13%
Bluegrass	7%
Blues	6%
Contemporary Christian/Praise	5%
World	17%
Drumming (other than as part of a band)	13%

Using Classical music as an example, a typical Sunday for this group would include classical music 32% of the time and music from the liturgical / sacred repertoire 29% of the time. That means that on a typical Sunday, a visitor might have a 60/40 chance of hearing something that sounds like "church music".

Question 11 was an attempt to sort out whether Sunday services in congregations with strong alternative music programs tend to focus on a single genre, to provide a homogeneous musical experience, or tended toward offering multiple genres in a single morning.

Q11 - Not including hymns, what % of services will feature both classical/liturgical/sacred music and at least one of the other genres?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	
0%	4.3%	34.7%
10%	8.7%	
20%	8.7%	
30%	13.0%	
40%	8.7%	
50%	13.0%	34.8%
60%	4.3%	
70%	4.3%	
80%	8.7%	
90%	8.7%	
100%	17.4%	

The ranges in green have been totaled. About a third these congregations are infrequent mixers, where you would expect to hear a mix of genres 30% or less of the time. Another third are frequent mixers, where you would expect to hear multiple genres on at least 80% of Sundays, with 17% *always* offering a mix.

When you combine this data with the responses to Q1 and Q2, where respondents said that fitting the music to the sermon and creating an overall musical feel to the service are both important goals, then it's clear that there is a lot of mixing of genres happening that is still successful in maintaining continuity and feel.

Question 12 was aimed at sorting out what percent of non-hymn music comes from a specific source.

Q12 - Over the course of the year, about what percent of the non-hymn music comes from these sources (totaling 100, no need for "%")	
Answer Options	Response Average
Adult Choir	31.0%
Child and/or youth choir	5.5%
You, performing instrumental music on a keyboard or other instrument	17.7%
A paid accompanist performing instrumental music on a keyboard or other instrument	18.7%
Congregation members offering their musical gifts, solo or in small groups	17.6%
Professional musicians from the community, other than your friends	8.6%
Musicians in your personal musical circle	3.9%
Recorded music	1.1%
Other	0.7%
<i>Does not total exactly 100% due to rounding of individual responses.</i>	

The combination of the adult choir, paid accompanist, and the music director is carrying about two-thirds of the load. The 18% supplied by members of the congregation is a significant contribution, as is the 12% or so that comes from professional musicians in the community and friends of the music director. Also interesting is that if two-thirds of the music is coming from the choir / accompanist / music director, and the standard church music repertoire is only about half the music, there is a fair amount of alternative music being offered by choirs and music directors, whether through improvisations on hymns or other improvisations, original works, or performing in one of the other genres that other questions tracked.

Question 13 tries to sort out where music directors look for support for the portion of the music program that they or a paid accompanist do not provide.

Q13 - When you think about all of your music programming, other than what you or a paid accompanist play, how important is --					
Answer Options	Extremely important	Very important	Important	Somewhat important	Not at all important
The pool of available musicians in the congregation	45.5%	36.4%	4.5%	9.1%	4.5%
The pool of professional musicians in your locale	9.1%	4.5%	27.3%	45.5%	13.6%
The musicians in your personal music circle	4.8%	9.5%	28.6%	19.0%	38.1%
Having committed music leaders in the congregation to organize the non-classical music offerings	31.8%	27.3%	13.6%	18.2%	9.1%

There is solid agreement that the first place to look is the pool of available musicians in the congregation. If that pool is strong, and if there is decent lay leadership to organize the music, that is the preferred approach. Plan B is to rely on local professionals, but not only is that strategy limited by locale, it also comes with budget limitations, which in the responding congregations was a mid-point of \$800. (Q27)

Question 14 began a series of open-ended questions, a question format in which the answers always have to be taken with a grain of salt, so that inappropriate weight is not given to negative opinions.

Q14 - What do you feel contributes most to the success of your music program?

There appear to be three main themes among music directors:

First, variety, often with reference to the depth of musical talent in the congregation--

The variety of styles and the large number of people contributing to the program.

The variety of music and highly talented musicians, and especially the very non-cliquish attitude of the church regarding musicians - new musicians are welcomed "into the fold" immediately and invited to participate in services.

I feel that any genre is fair game as long as it suits the service thematically, it is performed with a high level of quality and authenticity.

Broad variety of styles. Joyful, embodied singing.

Energy. Diversity. High standards of musical excellence and, of course, highly dedicated Volunteers.

Second, the depth of musical resources as driving force--

A very high level of trained volunteer musicians, a lot of organization and high standards for quality. Quality music performed live is a spiritually moving experience.

Support of many groups, choral and contemporary led by volunteers.

Depth of musical talent and commitment within congregation, and loving support of congregational musicians from music director, minister, and worship associates.

Many passionate & committed volunteers

Third, the willingness of the music director to forge a long term, respectful working relationship with the congregation--

Their willingness to do several 5-year plans which brought the music funding up over the years

Involving members of the congregation as much as possible - listening to their desires and paying a lot of attention to what they like.

The support and vision of the congregation leaders (minister, board, worship council). The strong collaborative culture we have developed over the years.

A committed congregation. That equals a large budget.

Knowing how to identify and develop gifts and bring people together

I also ask people what they want and try to provide many short term music opportunities with minimal time required

Q15 How much do you think your music program has contributed to membership growth?

The responses cover a wide range. Aside from the "don't knows", estimates vary from "a little" to "50%". There is a strong consensus that a solid music program contributes to growth, helping to attract new members, retain new people, and draw people into the life of the congregation. It is also striking to me that there is very little hard data on why new people stay. Only two respondents made mention of any kind of new member survey data; the rest of the estimates are based on anecdotal evidence.

I have no information.

Don't know

A little.

I would like to think it has somewhat. We get many visitors to our congregation and they seem to like what we do.

The obviously strong music in our congregation is often named as something that attracted new members. We have no hard data on this.

I don't have exact numbers, but I met and spoke personally to members who joined specifically because of the music.

I am not sure of a number, but I do believe that it has contributed significantly.

From the number of people who tell me they come to church for the music, a significant amount

Our congregation has grown very quickly over the past few years due to many factors but the music is most often mentioned as a most-valued part of our worship services.

Significantly. Many attend because they enjoy the music. We're also often pulling people in through the musical groups.

I think it is important to the vast majority of new members.

A substantial amount but I can't say exactly.

Quite a lot

I think it has been a key factor for many years

A lot. Not only growth, but retaining members.

At least 50%.

Q16 - About 3 in 10 congregations in the 150-400 member size range offer two Sunday services. If you are one of those, how does covering two services impact your music choices?

The sample size is too small for drawing any serious conclusions. The overall feeling is that the music will be generally the same (most likely because the sermon and readings are likely to be the same), but the musical personnel will vary, so that volunteers are not worn out.

Most of the music will be the same, the choir/children/guest musicians will participate in only one of the two services.

I always tried to have a similar mix of music at both services, and that also helped with my planning & scheduling.

Most of the service music is the same. The anthem at the first service is by our contemporary group, at the second by the choir.

I almost always have the exact same music at both services.

I do not see this impacting my music choices. We do the same music for both services (with very little exception)

We often use an "Instant Choir" so the regular choir doesn't do both. But often program the same music due to limited professional hours to organize different programs.

I have two choirs that rehearse together and sing separately. One group is very small so I have to choose rep that will work for both. Some of the band members don't want to do both services so I end up having to make sure I can do the songs with altered instrumentation.

It doesn't.

Q17 - What kind of discussion is there in your congregation about how the music choices demonstrate a commitment to UU values represented by the Seven Principles and our statement about the six Sources of our Living Tradition?

Of 21 responses, there was only one that specifically addressed the use of the Seven Principles and the six Sources: "Worship Associates, minister, and I use the Principles and Sources as guidelines for choosing worship topics." For the rest, this comment sums it up: "We do not have overt or deliberate discussions about it - but having our music align with our values/sources is part of our DNA."

Q18 - What is your personal opinion about how music can reflect our Principles and our Sources?

There is a consensus that the music should reflect our principles, but not a lot of agreement on how to make that happen. There are three general approaches mentioned. First, those who approach the effort head-on:

I believe music is supposed to feed the souls of every worshipper. That said, we have humanists, Christians, Buddhists, and more in the congregation. I believe the music should reflect our Principles and our Sources, and I make every effort to do so.

I try very hard to tailor my music selections to the theme of the week, month, sermon, or observed holidays. I am very conscious of trying to reflect the

Principles, and of especially reinforcing commonly held ethical or moral beliefs in our music.

The second approach is say that the careful fitting of the music to the sermon and readings assures attention to the Principles and Sources.

I think there can, and should, be a strong correlation. And it happens almost by default with our music, because we are very focused on having the music tie in with and support the theme of the sermon/service. Since these reflect our Principles/Sources, the music then does as well.

Music suits the service best when it is an emotional punctuation to the ideas conveyed. It is up to the readings and the sermon and other elements flesh out the concepts and it is the job of the musicians to help people to let down their guards and open people's hearts to allow them to resonate with these ideas emotionally.

The third approach, respecting the validity of all musical forms and using the music itself to reach people, is eloquently summed up this way, by a writer who also took me to task for referencing "genres" at all:

We respect a variety of musical styles in the same way we respect each other's theology, this is basic to our principles. In my opinion musical "genres" are social constructs that impair the underlying value of music. Music is a source of personal emotional expression and each of us have particular emotional responses to the music we hear based on race, theology, background, experience, training etc. To hold up one genre over another does a disservice to the inherent worth and dignity of every person.... I enjoy and respect all "genres" of music because, at the risk of sounding cliché, good music, no matter the genre, comes from the heart.

And affirming the importance of the emotional content of the music, one person wrote:

In music, we embody the powerful texts by joining our heartbeat, breath, feet, and hands in a harmonious affirmation. Music takes us to the emotional connections underneath the texts.

Q19 - Is there anything else you would like to add?

I believe that music is a gift of being human. Although not everyone has developed music skills, we can all enter into music-making at different levels. There is something incredibly powerful about lifting up the voice of the people in a group. *Almost nothing else can open the heart and bring people together as can music.* [emphasis mine - JS] Although reflecting the theme of the sermon through lyrics can sometimes be nice, I much more often look at the energy, the mood, or some basic, universal theme that a particular service or place in the service seems to call for.

While we have many formally (and informally) trained musicians, our avoidance of any sort of hierarchy or "snootiness" in favor of a community of peer musicians who can play in various combinations, and with a casual but attentive attitude, in whatever genre is needed, is what is key at our church.

We do a lot of popular music it's true. But popular music reaches across many generations, attracts the young, and makes the times when we do heavier or Classical music resonate with more power.

In our congregation we do a lot of "upbeat" and "high energy" music but we haven't forgotten what everyone is really coming for: a community of love, openness, acceptance, and action. *The music is a means to an end, that of a spiritual experience.* [emphasis mine - JS] We have lost some members who want the old intellectual approach to services and feel they have to leave their intellect at the door, and that's their perception, but we haven't diminished the intellect, rather we've raise the emotion/spirit.

Q20-27 -- Demographic and budget data

Nineteen respondents listed their job title: 17 are Music Directors, with 1 Choir Director and 1 Music Minister.

The range of paid hours per week was 0 - 30; the average and median were both 16.

The budget for guest musicians ranged from \$0 - \$3,860. Because neither the average nor the median is particularly useful, the ranges may be more helpful:

\$0 -- 3

\$500 -- 5

\$600 - \$900 -- 3

\$1500 - \$2500 -- 6

\$3860 -- 1

There were 6 "no responses".

We also asked for the total music budget in the current fiscal year, but the responses were very inconsistent, indicating that the question phrasing was not adequate to get the right information.

SECTION 4: THE OBSERVATIONS OF TOURING PROFESSIONALS

Over the past three decades, I've had the pleasure of working with hundreds of musicians who have come through the Homegrown Coffeehouse at First Parish in Needham. Most of these touring professionals fall in the folk genre, some are bluegrass players, some Americana roots music including blues and gospel, some jazz, and an occasional pop musician. I reached out to some of the players who I know play regularly for UU Sunday services, in addition to their work playing concerts, coffeehouses like the Homegrown, house concerts, and festivals. I added a few people who have played UU services but have not been on the Homegrown stage, folks like Sarah Dan Jones, Matt Meyer, Nick Page, and Holly Near. A few of these musicians identify as UU, most do not. They are musicians first, and I wanted to hear what they have to say about the experience of playing for a UU audience in a worship setting. They were all asked the same questions (with one extra question of the performers that are also music directors), and most answered in the format they were given. Some were completely open-ended in their responses. I interviewed Rev. Robert Jones on the phone.

Greg Greenway [GG]for Brother Sun -- Greg and Brother Sun have brought their Americana roots music to General Assembly.

David Tamulevich for Mustard's Retreat [MR]-- Mustard's Retreat plays widely for UU services. Their music is a blend of traditional and contemporary folk.

Sharon Horovitch and Jim Muller for Southern Rail [SR]-- Southern Rail is a highly respected bluegrass band. In addition to playing for UU services, they regularly play bluegrass gospel services.

Holly Near [HN] -- A nationally touring performer for decades, Holly is closely aligned with UU social justice initiatives. I had the pleasure of working with her on a UUSC fundraiser and hosting her at FP Needham on the following Sunday.

Nick Page [NP]-- Nick is one of the foremost song leaders and teachers in the New England area. He is also a composer and is the Artistic Director of the Mystic Chorale.

Sarah Dan Jones [DDJ] -- Sarah Dan is a music director and song leader, well-known to many UUs for her songleading at General Assembly.

Matt Meyer [MM] -- Matt is a percussionist, song leader, worship leader and teacher, also well-known to many UUs for his regular appearances at GA.

Bob Franke [BF] -- Bob is one of the most prolific songwriters to come out of New England. He has written many songs for worship, several of which have made it into the First Parish Singers' repertoire.

Rev. Robert Jones [RJ] -- Robert is an ordained Baptist minister from Detroit. In the 1990's he served a small UU congregation in the Lansing, MI area as their contract minister.

Compilation of responses

Question 1 -- What is the most important thing about the music you bring to a church service?

That it serves the entire service. There's nothing like coordinating with the minister and music director in advance to draw tie-ins to the music throughout the service - and vice versa. (I) We've had great success with this. It makes for a moving emotional experience. [GG]

That it's participatory and engages the congregation in being a part of the service, rather than just consumers of it. [MM]

At its best it tells the truth in a heart-opening way. [BF]

Diversity. Empowering the congregation (and the choir) to participate and find their own voice among the masses is very important. [SDJ]

A sense of optimism. Inclusiveness that is independent of denomination. [SR]

I want to have a message that resonates with me....and potentially with the congregation...something that has the potential to complement the service and transcend the "words" of it, [going] to that one and one = three place that music/songs can take everyone. I want the music to make the congregation feel. [MR]

Question 2 -- Are there any differences in the music you choose for UU services versus what you might choose for another denomination?

Not at all. [GG]

I'm more careful to have a diversity of theologies and traditions represented.[MM]

No. [BF]

The biggest difference is that of language. I rarely change text, and find it a challenge to encourage UU's to sing music from a Christian perspective. We seem to have no trouble singing music from many cultures, but the attitude toward "god" and "jesus" text is difficult in a UU setting; we forget where our

sources are drawn, and I find I have to constantly remind folks that while some music/text might not resonate with them, it may resonate with the person next to them. [SDJ]

Not really. For most services we select songs to support whatever the minister's message will be. [SR]

Our songs tend to be generically spiritual...reaching for common ground. We don't tend to play for other denominations all that much, but we shoot for what is shared in that spiritual ground. [MR]

Question 3 -- How closely (if at all) do you work with the Music Director on choosing music that matches either the sermon for the day or the overall feel of the service?

Often I'll suggest songs months in advance and send mp3s and lyrics with some explanation as to why we think it would work. Since we are for the most part doing original music, we can't assume a busy music director knows what we do. So, we have to be proactive. [GG]

In most cases we work directly with the minister rather than the music director. [SR]

I love to do this, whenever we have the chance, because when we do, it tends to be one plus one = three or four...and that, to me, is what it is all about. [MR]

Question 4 -- Is there anything else you would like to say about the role of music in church services?

Having been involved with many ministers in the UU church, it seems a consensus that music is fundamental in getting the experience of our services out of our frontal lobes. Music is a magical combination of the intellect and the body. People respond physically to music in some way. [GG]

UU's have inherited a protestant tradition that is based on the "word." We have changed our content over the years to reflect a diversity of content (traditions & theologies) but we haven't done much to reflect a diversity in form. One might define UUism as people of liberal theology, who experience their religion through white protestant worship. Music is one key way that we can expand the form of services to become as inclusive as our content. The rest of the worship often *talks* about the *experience* of religion. Music, among other things, is how we *do* the experience of religion. We also speak of the gift of UUism as a place where we don't have to leave our minds and reason at the door. Instead though, we often leave our hearts and bodies at the door. Music, along with ritual, is one of the primary ways that we engage our hearts and bodies to create a religious experience for the whole person. [MM]

It can open hearts [BF]

Imagine a service without music. Even with the choir, I think that being part of the whole is important. It is not a performance, but a way for those present to connect to the community, and the Holy, through a different avenue than words alone. [SDJ]

In my services, music is central. In some congregations, the music is at least as important as the preacher. People need the emotional release that the music provides. They need to balance the intellectual with the spiritual. Music can do that. [RJ]

I have to be careful balancing my music choices with the expectations of the congregation. In a Baptist church, music that UU's would consider to be "too religious" might be considered "not religious enough". Jazz might work in UU setting, but it generally does not work in my congregation. Along the same lines, music that has enough emotion for one congregation could be perceived by another a "too emotional". [RJ]

Our music for service, just like for our concerts, is intended to be engaging and inspiring, uplifting, to have people leave with a sense of optimism.[SR]

It seems to be essential...and the more thought and planning and coordination the better. Bound to tradition, I don't think, is ever good for the general congregation. A growing tradition that keeps opening up and changing is essential, I think....the Living Tradition. [MR]

The purpose of that music [referring to gospel and praise music] is to inspire people to come to church, to create a music that moves us both physically, emotionally and spiritually, that would make us want to return to the church. In business, it's not about getting people to the business. It's about getting them to come back. A good music program is basically a customer loyalty strategy. [NP]

In worship, if the music or any liturgical element is there simply because it is a repetition of what has been and it does not move me - I say get rid of it. When we light the chalice, it needs to be exciting, fun or emotionally powerful, not the dull repetition of what has been. [NP]

When we create music together, particularly when it is acoustically pure (unhampered by digital zeros and ones), our consciousness connects. A love is felt. I don't know if that love is always there or if we create it in our music making, but I know it is there. It is a thing unseen that I believe in. [NP]

In my view there is no right or wrong to it, no reason to think a symphony is better than a folk song or a song of prayer more uplifting than a pop song. And there lies the power of music. One cannot put it in a cage nor determine what affect it will have on the listener. Whether it flies from the mouth of Pete Seeger or Marion Anderson or Buffy Sainte-Marie or Mercedes Sosa or Rage Against The Machine or Cris Williamson or Sting or Sweet Honey in the Rock or Garth Brooks or Prince or Victor Jara or Tina Turner or from the fingers of Yo-Yo Ma, we can be sure that someone's life somewhere just got changed. [HN]

Extra question for performers who function as music directors -- How would you describe the difference (s) between leading a congregation in singing (or creating a rhythmic experience) together, and having them sing a hymn with a piano accompaniment?

I think the worship and music leaders are responsible for setting expectations about participation. Normally, a hymn is introduced and the expectation is that it will be played on piano and organ and people can sing along if they'd like. The invitation, words, and body language of a worship/music leader can set the expectation that the congregation is going to make the music and the accompanist will play along. [MM]

Because I am also the accompanist, I have to balance this a great deal. I often lead music acapella, or with one of my other instruments that let me be front and center. I find it really important to have a song leader that is centrally placed for folks to connect with while singing. It is more difficult behind the piano, but can be done, especially if it is a familiar hymn. [SDJ]

My observations on what the performers had to say --

1. Musicians try to stay true to the music. While they will take care, in the context of a church service, to choose music they believe will work, they do not attempt to change the language in the songs to steer away from particular religious references.

2. Like any good music director or lay leader, they enjoy working with the service leader to get it right.

3. Rev. Robert Jones made a very clear statement about paying attention to the expectations of the congregation. Every congregation has expectations, and moving outside the norm calls for care in how the music is introduced.

4. The most important thing that these performers said over and over is that music makes a direct emotional connection, moving beyond words to a

transcendent experience. Matt Meyer said it very well, "The rest of the worship often talks about the experience of religion. Music, among other things, is how we do the experience of religion." I say Amen to that.

SECTION 5: COMMENTS ON THE REPERTOIRE I'VE USED

Here I want to talk about the music that has been played over the years by the First Parish Singers. We still have some of the original singers from the group's first incarnation, and some of the principal instrumentalists have played with us for twenty years. A lot of the group though has slowly turned over, just as any choir does. The FPS has welcomed new members into the group, and for some of them it has been their first experience with an organized musical group. For some it has also been their first volunteer work with the church.

The music we have been able to do reflects the musical backgrounds of the members. My principal performing background is folk music, and I am deeply familiar with the singer-songwriter repertoire from the last 30 years. We have an expert bluegrass player, and recently we have added a flutist, jazz saxophonist, electric bass player, and a drummer. All of the singers have opinions on what music we should do, and in the end it is slanted toward what we know well. That is not to say that we're stuck in the past, a la "A Mighty Wind". Because First Parish Needham also hosts a folk music series, I can keep the contemporary music fresh by listening to what performers are doing. The instrumentalists are committed to learning new genres as well, which over the next year will mean adding significantly more jazz, Brazilian, blues, pop-rock, and perhaps some contemporary country to the mix.

The UU Musicians Network keeps an excellent list of performance pieces on the UUMN website, in categories that capture standard Sunday morning worship themes, with notations about sources for music copy and the vocal ranges for choral arrangements. That list has a clear purpose of helping music directors find appropriate music, generally music that a choir can perform. That is both a strength and a limitation. If I were a choral director with a stable choir, it's exactly what I would want. The downside is that the very reasonable

requirement that sheet music be available with vocal parts and keyboard accompaniment precludes a lot of selections.

Because I am working with a group that cannot all commit to regular performances, some of whom do not read music, performing music that often has no usable transcriptions, the learning has to be mostly by ear, and the arrangements have to fit the available singing resources. It's no surprise, then, when I compared the FPS repertoire to the UUMN lists, there is very little overlap. Of the 140 or so unique pieces we've done, only 13 show up in the UUMN list. It's hard to say how many unique pieces are included on the UUMN list, because each piece might be listed 4 or 5 times in different categories, but it's probably around 300. The FPS repertoire and the UUMN repertoire are two different worlds of music. This points up the challenge that a music director has -- there is a lot of very good music that may fit a Sunday service better than anything in the choral repertoire, but it is not readily accessible. A music director would need a lot more time for research, transcription, and rehearsal to take on the alternative repertoire themselves. As music directors pointed out in the survey, the pool of musicians in the congregation and the lay music leadership is the only practical way, short of significantly increasing the director's hours, to get alternative music integrated into services.

The repertoire of the First Parish Singers is in **Appendix A**. My classifications of music are different from the UUMN list, to fit the themes of a mostly folk repertoire. There are no listings for SATB arrangements, because the group has to perform with the available singers. Our instrumentation is based on the musicians we have, so the reader can assume that we are playing it with some combination of acoustic and electric guitar, electric bass, mandolin, flute, saxophone and drums. A lot of this music is not easily available from publishers. However, nearly all of it can be found on the web. Words are almost universally there, though some caution is needed -- people post what they hear, and some of it is hilariously wrong. Guitarists love to post charts, mostly chords, occasionally guitar tabs. My preference is to do my own transcriptions from the recordings. Nearly all of the music is available as mp3's for purchase online, and YouTube is likely to have multiple originals and covers.

You will have to be your own conscience on copyright issues. At least one member of the group owns a copy of virtually everything we do.

SECTION 6: WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE STUDY DATA, AND HOW DO MY PRINCIPAL PROPOSITIONS STACK UP AGAINST A BROADER REALITY CHECK?

The propositions I set out at the beginning of this study were meant to focus my sabbatical time on topics I thought might yield some useful insights. That approach was largely successful, though neither the web pages nor the input from music professionals could confirm or reject all of my hypotheses. At the same time, I learned more from the websites than I expected to find, and I found how willing music directors are to share what they do and the impact it has. That part of my work should give someone the impetus to do a comprehensive survey of all mid-size congregations to focus even more clearly on the distribution of music performance practices across all of that group. Having normative data could add a refreshing dimension to Music Committee discussions, personnel discussions, worship planning, and budget preparation.

I thoroughly enjoyed hearing from performers, many of whom I have known and worked with for a long time, on how they see the impact of their work in a church setting, a bit removed from the pure performer - audience dynamic. What they had to say about the spiritual element of their work was deeply meaningful to me.

The music directors who were able to find the time to answer a lengthy questionnaire were generous with both their time and their insights. Besides that, they were generous with their *joy*. It was refreshing to see people take such pleasure in their work, as music professionals and as builders of community.

This section puts some of the insights from the study into the context of the questions I laid out at the outset. Some of the observations that came from the data and the process are grouped at the end, not pushed into any category in

particular.

And of course I encourage you to go back and look over the data analyses again. Some of it, such as the high-level breakdown of statements about music programs from 269 congregations and the more detailed input on genre frequency from music directors, can be fuel for conversations within congregations with no context other than what is important to your own review of your music program.

At a high level, why has the alternative music program shown such staying power over 30 years?

The broad look at the websites of mid-size congregations says that UU congregations place a high value on having a strong, diverse music program. All congregations want a "vital" music program, even if they can't define exactly what that is. The broad data review combined with more in-depth responses from music leaders shows that some congregations are better than others at meeting that standard, due to the depth of commitment to professional music resources, the pool of internal talent, the skill set and interests of their music director, the presence and skills of amateur/lay music leaders, the willingness of the congregation to accept diversity and change in the music program, the active engagement of the minister, and the ability to overcome a cultural bias against seeing certain genres as appropriate for church services.

The proposition I laid out at the beginning of this study was:

"On balance, my sense is that a diverse congregation will be happy with the overall music program only if the music gives them something they can connect with, while also giving them space to tune out musical styles they don't like."

The approach of mid-size congregations in general and the congregations selected for in-depth review in particular, bears out my initial proposition. It is also clear that for an alternative music program to flourish for a long period, with so many variables involved, there is a certain amount of luck involved. Remember that luck favors the prepared music leader.

There have been 9 ministers and 11 music directors, including interims that I've worked with. What is the key to carrying the program through transitions?

The number one key is establishing a strong relationship with the minister. Music directors were in complete agreement that fitting the music to the sermon, and to a lesser extent working to create an overall feel for a Sunday service are must haves. At the same time, there is less than a fifty-fifty likelihood that the minister will have the musical knowledge to make informed selections. The leader of an alternative music program is in the same position as the music director. Professional performers said the same thing -- because they are bringing in music that is outside mainstream church music, they have to work closely with the minister to select appropriate music. In my mind, it comes down to developing a trusting relationship, which in turn comes from trying out new music and seeing a good reaction from the congregation.

The second key is maintaining good communication with the music director. Unless the music for the morning is entirely from alternative genres, which is not the pattern in the majority of congregations, the alternative music leader has to coordinate with the music director for there to be a reasonable chance to avoid jarring style clashes. The responding music directors put a high value on these relationships, preferring to work with a strong pool of internal musicians and lay music leadership to going to the local pool of professional musicians to support Sunday services.

My initial proposition, that the relationship with the minister is key, was strongly endorsed by the study findings, with the additional clear point made by music directors about the importance, for a lay music leader, of keeping up a close dialogue with the music director.

What does "a commitment to inclusiveness" in music mean?

On the question of inclusiveness, music directors agree with my initial proposition, that inclusiveness is critical, and that our hymnals can fulfill only a

piece of that mission.

Three-quarters of the responding music directors said that offering music from a wide variety of cultures is extremely or very important. The website review confirms that as a principle for the vast majority of UU congregations. Directors also said, emphatically, that hymns are not the primary source for diversity. So to the extent that congregations want to move from *talking* about diversity to *doing* diversity (to paraphrase Matt Meyer), music is going to be critical.

The broad website review indicates that congregations are not yet certain of the marketing impact of promoting alternative genres. The analysis of the data on actual performance frequency of various genres suggests the same thing, with indications that classical music is not played as often as websites might say. Here is that survey data again --

What percent of your Sunday mornings feature this genre?	
Answer Options	% of services
Classical	32%
Liturgical/sacred choral music repertoire	29%
Gospel or spirituals	21%
Country	5%
Rock	12%
Pop/contemporary/Broadway	20%
Folk/Celtic	16%
Jazz	13%
Bluegrass	7%
Blues	6%
Contemporary Christian/Praise	5%
World	17%
Drumming (other than as part of a band)	13%

Keep in mind that the data comes from congregations that were selected because their web pages described vibrant music programs with obvious

diversity. If web pages for 269 congregations present, in the aggregate, a picture that skews toward Sunday reality, with significantly more use of classical music than in the detailed study group, then there is room for growth in musical diversity in a lot of our congregations.

Program expansion comes with some challenges that can be seen in the data. First, the data points to the need for music directors to have a much broader appreciation for alternative genres than might have been true ten or twenty years ago. The directors surveyed recognize that the age 18 - 35 demographic is important, which makes the music from the mid-90's to last week much more important. While millenials may arrive at a congregation with some emotional connection to the "church music" they heard growing up, good music planning would include trying to tap into the emotional content of contemporary music.

Second, there is a need for music directors to develop some skill in playing and leading alternative genres. It appears that the combination of an adult choir, paid accompanist, and the music director, primarily on keyboard, is carrying about two-thirds of the musical load. If two-thirds of the music is coming from the choir / accompanist / music director, and the standard church music repertoire is only about half the music, then there is a fair amount of alternative music being offered by choirs and music directors, whether through improvisations on hymns or other improvisations, original works, or performing in one of the other genres that other questions tracked. For congregations that want to follow the path of making music programs more inclusive, there is an obligation to provide their music directors with the opportunity for training and the financial resources to make it possible.

How does "inclusiveness" in music relate to UU principles and sources, and how does it impact the spiritual life of the church?

I was surprised that the notion of directly referencing the Principles and Sources did not have more traction with music directors. That said, they work hard at being inclusive through very practical approaches, and they express clearly that music has a deep spiritual component.

One approach of music directors is that it is safe to assume that the Seven Principles inform ministers' sermons, so by tying the music to the sermon -- which all music directors recognize as very important -- the music will relate to the Principles. A second is to try to have the music reflect common ethical values. And a third approach is to affirm the validity of all music and the deep emotional chord it can strike. Given the time that music directors have to discuss, select, and rehearse music for any given Sunday, any of those approaches are sound.

Trying to be deliberate in expanding Sources is much more challenging, and was hardly cited as a goal at all by respondents. There are not enough UU composers, not enough widely identified and distributed UU music, to avoid going directly to the source material of other traditions, and that approach can be a religious language minefield.

Going back to the notion of striking deep emotional chords -- that is where both music directors and performers offered compelling opinions that the role of music is to touch people directly, evoke deep feelings, and move them spiritually, without any necessary intervention of language. Greg Greenway of Brother Sun put it this way -- *"Having been involved with many ministers in the UU church, it seems a consensus that music is fundamental in getting the experience of our services out of our frontal lobes. Music is a magical combination of the intellect and the body. People respond physically to music in some way."* David Tamulevich, for Mustard's Retreat, echoed that sentiment -- *"I want to have a message that resonates with me....and potentially with the congregation...something that has the potential to complement the service and transcend the "words" of it, [going] to that one and one = three place that music/songs can take everyone. I want the music to make the congregation feel."* And again, from Sarah Dan Jones -- *"Even with the choir, I think that being part of the whole is important. It is not a performance, but a way for those present to connect to the community, and the Holy, through a different avenue than words alone."*

Do bluegrass, blues, gospel, country, and folk music have as much validity in a worship context as classical and liturgical music? Where do you draw the line (if at all)?

My answer was "yes" and "There is no line to be drawn," but for all except the folk/Celtic and gospel categories, that notion was pretty well rebuffed. Looking first at the broad survey of 269 congregations, bluegrass, blues, and country barely rate a mention. In the survey -- from congregations that present themselves as successful in diversifying their music programs, those genres all rank at the bottom, down there with Christian praise music. Rock music is twice as popular as a service element. What is going on? All three of those genres feature universal themes that can be put into context to fit with a sermon; all three have a lot of very good amateur players, so it's likely that mid-size congregations have the talent within the congregation; all three enjoy broad cultural acceptance. Country music in particular can draw sold-out stadium crowds, as I can attest to, having attended a George Strait concert with 55,000 other fans; does anyone think that I might have been the only UU there at Gillette Stadium?

Music directors can be forgiven for lack of familiarity with blues, bluegrass, bluegrass gospel, and country music, simply by virtue of their musical training. Ministers are certainly not unaware of these alternative music forms, but I believe they are hesitant to use them because of fear of the congregation's reaction. This is perceived as low-brow music that is best not offered in a high-brow setting. In preparation for this sabbatical, I did extensive research trying to identify any Universalist blues musicians among the hundreds of Delta blues players of the 20's, 30's, and 40's. I read the history; I talked to blues musicologists; and I turned up nothing. UU's claim classical composers as our own, but not blues masters. Not our kind of music. Country music likewise, with the added difficulty that a lot of country music is misogynistic and jingoist. And where, we ask, is the spirituality in bluegrass?

In Needham we play a good deal of bluegrass, in particular bluegrass gospel

music, some country, some blues. Introducing the music is a work in progress, but I will say that the sky has never fallen. The most common reaction is, "Wow, I never thought I'd hear *that* in church. Let's do it more often!"

What about cultural misappropriation?

This simply didn't come up as an issue in the context of the survey. However, it has been the topic of some lively emails in the UUMN discussion group, so there is room for a good deal more conversation. It is also an important element of the UUA certification program. The music directors appeared to second my proposition that if the musicians work with the minister, who can ask the right questions about the cultural context for the music, and if they can play with authenticity and feeling, the risk of cultural misappropriation is minimized. The performers who responded to open-ended questions about how they work with UU congregations were very clear -- their focus is on the emotional and spiritual impact of the music, and they choose to perform music that they can perform genuinely, and well.

How important is "quality" of musical performance?

Given the typical background of a music director or choir director, their own performance excellence is close to a given, at least on keyboards and in conducting. Music Committees screen for playing ability, knowledge of choral repertoire, and to some extent the knowledge of UU repertoire, especially as more music leaders go through the UUA certification program.

At least half the music over the course of the church year, though, is going to come from some combination of a choir or choirs and members of the congregation offering their musical gifts. What standards apply to them? A few music directors touched on this in their open-ended comments --

"Energy. Diversity. High standards of musical excellence and, of course, highly dedicated Volunteers."

"A very high level of trained volunteer musicians, a lot of organization and high standards for quality."

Others wrote more about the community aspect of performance ---

"I believe that music is a gift of being human. Although not everyone has developed music skills, we can all enter into music-making at different levels."

"While we have many formally (and informally) trained musicians, our avoidance of any sort of hierarchy or "snootiness" in favor of a community of peer musicians who can play in various combinations, and with a casual but attentive attitude, in whatever genre is needed, is what is key at our church."

And writing about what contributes to the success of a music program---

"The variety of music and highly talented musicians, and especially the very non-cliquish attitude of the church regarding musicians - new musicians are welcomed 'into the fold' immediately and invited to participate in services."

"Depth of musical talent and commitment within the congregation, and loving support of congregational musicians from music director, minister, and worship associates."

What is the impact of welcoming non-singers into a musical ensemble, and how does that relate to recruiting performers?

The impact was only hinted at on websites and in music leader responses. The website descriptions of musical groups that offer music in addition to the choir, and the music director statements about being welcoming and supportive point to a generosity of spirit that I would expect from UU congregations. People who can't sing will usually self-select out of a formal choir, but a lot of congregations have descriptions of musical alternatives for non-singers. Alternatives include groups like the First Parish Singers, "pop-up" choirs, instrumental ensembles, drumming groups, and various group opportunities outside the worship setting.

How important are the congregation's expectations?

Let's go back to the music directors' responses --

How important is the congregation's musical taste in choosing the music?	
Answer Options	Response Percent
Extremely important	12.5%
Very important	37.5%
Important	25.0%
Somewhat important	25.0%
Not at all important	0.0%

Music directors are trying to balance the program's appeal to visitors, including the expectations of the age 18 - 35 demographic, continuing to appeal to the current members, and the minister's needs in creating the Sunday service. Overall it's the minister, their sermon topic, and the desire to create a coherent feel for a service that come out ahead. For long term job security, paying attention to the congregation is important, and at the same time, leadership from the minister combined with creative input from the music director creates an opportunity for musical growth.

How much time does it take to be deliberately inclusive?

My best guess is that the total commitment is 50 - 70 hours each month, with 10 - 15 of that coming under the "director" heading. Someone has to do the organizing, and a music director working 16 hours a week is not going to have the time to do this. That's why music directors so highly value the contribution of congregation members and their relationship with whoever is going to take the lead on alternative music. My own view is that if congregations are truly committed to a diverse program and want to assure its continuity, they should budget for an increase in hours for their professional staff and a fund for hiring local professionals, so that as the congregational talent pool ebbs, as will almost invariably happen from time to time, the music director will have both the time and resources to reach out to the community of professional

musicians.

How much money does it cost to be inclusive?

If the program is built on congregation members sharing their gifts, as so many websites put it, the dollar cost is low. The volunteer solution, though, comes with issues of sustainability, music quality, volunteer burnout, and relations with the music director. The directors in the survey group reported wide differences in the size of their budget for hiring outside musicians. A congregation that wants to grow and sustain a very diverse music program will have to budget far more than the reported mid-point of \$800.

Other Observations

Music professionals as staff

It was not surprising that larger congregations are more likely to have a music director, but the difference was not huge, and 91% of all of mid-size congregations have formal music leadership. What *was* surprising was the gap between smaller and larger congregations in whether or not they treat the music director as a member of staff. Given how important the relationship between minister and music director is said to be by the directors themselves, it appears that there is significant room for better professional recognition in the 150 - 275 member congregations.

The depth of experience among UU Music Directors

In selecting the 40 congregations that would be surveyed to gather more in-depth information about their music programs, I tried to stick with descriptions of the programs on their websites. The review was thorough, which meant that it included looking at the bios of the music directors when they were given space to talk about who they are and what they have done. I know how hard musicians have to work to piece together a viable career in music, one that is

artistically satisfying and pays the bills. I've talked with hundreds of musicians about the business side of music from a performer standpoint, and I work with a lot of agents who work on the promotion and booking side. It is a very tough business, and for folk, jazz, roots, contemporary sing-songwriter, early music and musical theater types it has to be a labor of love. Even knowing that, I was amazed by the quality and depth of experience of some of the musicians who are willing to take church jobs. There was a strong correlation between the professional backgrounds of music directors and the diversity of the programs they lead. Which came first is a question for future study. My guess would be that strong programs attract strong music leaders, and music leaders with deep professional interest in performing, composing, and conducting use those skills to make good programs better.

The impact of the music program on membership growth

I did not set out to quantify the impact of having a diverse music program, because I did not believe that that question could be addressed without first getting a grip on what diversity means in the context of Sunday services. Even then I'm not sure exactly how you would want to quantify the impact. A measurable increase in new members? Member retention? Minister satisfaction and longevity in the pulpit? Music director satisfaction and length of tenure? How much the energy in the music program carries over into other aspects of congregational life? The impact on the status of the congregation in the community? The only one of these questions I attempted to research with the sample of music program leaders was growth, which is a combination of new member additions and the retention rate for established members. There is a strong consensus that a solid music program contributes to growth, helping to attract new members, retain new people, and draw people into the life of the congregation. The lack of solid data means to me that congregations are missing the opportunity to dig deeply into why people are attracted and why they stay. Music directors have a large stake in this research. It would be a worthwhile task for the UUMN to plot strategies for active engagement in the

data collection effort by member music directors.

The prevalence of children's choirs

I had no expectations regarding the prevalence of children's choirs. Overall, it's only 25%, and even in larger mid-size congregations it's less than half. I believe that there are two forces at play here. First, music directors, especially in smaller congregations, do not have the time to do it, because the smaller churches feel that they cannot budget the extra hours it takes to manage any kind of youth choir. In my opinion, that represents a missed opportunity to get kids involved in the spiritual life of the church. Also in play is the specialized musical repertoire knowledge and teaching skill set it takes to get children (and their parents) committed to a music program. Congregations that can afford it should consider the potential return on an investment in a children's music leader, and the training and other resources that it takes to develop a strong program.

POSTSCRIPT AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

This sabbatical study was designed to be a reflection on the uses of various musical genres in worship, an analysis of the actual prevalence of various musical styles in our UU congregations, and a chance to compare my work as a lay music leader with the broader UU community. There was no intention to generate recommendations to fix anything, because our uses of music are part of an evolution of worship, and no one can claim to know for sure where that evolution is headed. Like any study author, though, I am willing to offer some commentary on areas for future study and opportunities for reflection.

- The study methodology looked at a 100% sample of websites, with 15% of those elected for further analysis. Though it would be time-consuming to survey all of the music directors in mid-size congregations about their use of various genres, their frequency, their mixing on a given Sunday, it would not be expensive and would clarify the general impressions of diversity developed in this project.

- More study is needed on the hours worked, compensation, uncompensated time worked, and other job-related questions for our music directors. The UUA Office of Church Staff Finances has this project in the planning phase (for all staff in our congregations). The UUMN is active as well in trying to address the uncompensated time question.
- Volunteer music leaders need to have a plan to develop and maintain strong relationships with their minister and their music director. The questions of what music fits with a sermon (or doesn't) and what music can do to enhance the overall feel of a Sunday service are not ones that can be answered with an occasional meeting. The volunteer music leader, music director, and minister could begin a discussion of what "fitting music to a theme" really means. When there are words involved, the picture may be fairly clear. When the music is instrumental, how do you judge? Is Bach a better fit than a slow country waltz? Does *any* classical music really have a theme that the average congregant can relate to?
- In the same vein, I believe that congregations would benefit from a discussion of why certain genres are used only infrequently, if at all. I have suggested that this is a high brow versus low brow perception, especially in the case of country and blues music. In the end, it's all just music that has to stand on its own. Pete Seeger appears to be OK, because UU's have adopted him as "one of us," but how about Brad Paisley or Mississippi John Hurt?
- There is opportunity for a rich discussion around selecting music for the present members of a congregation versus selecting music that will appeal to seekers. Music directors were clearly of two minds on this – for them it is a both/and proposition. At a higher level, congregations could use the discussion of music as a lead-in to the broader discussion of whether they *want* to grow and who they want – or don't want -- to attract, and why.
- We appear to be a long way from understanding "inclusiveness" and its relationship to our Principles and Sources. This could be fertile ground for discussion at the congregational level -- "How inclusive do we want to

be?" -- would be a good starting point. There is also room for interesting dialogue among the minister, the music director, and volunteer music leaders about how the music directly incorporates our UU Principles and Sources, something that happens mostly obliquely now.

- The idea clearly presented by professional performers with some history of UU involvement, and by some of the music directors, that the intent of music is to directly tap into people's emotional center -- to have a transcendent experience, beyond words -- is worth a lot more reflection. The UU ministers I have known have not been visibly open in their support of turning off intellect in favor of direct experience. Why is that bias so strongly rooted?
- Volunteer music leaders would be well-served to compile and categorize their repertoire, as I did for this project. I'm certain that the effort will help future music planning. As they make their compilations, they can reflect on whether or not the program could benefit from more diversity.
- Music directors could add a lot to discussions of musical diversity if they tracked all of the music played over the course of a church year, categorized by genre (their categories, not necessarily mine), so that everyone can be looking at the same data. Once that work is begun, changes can be tracked over time. We have begun that work in Needham, and it is already paying dividends in Music Committee discussions.
- There is room for a serious discussion about the meaning of "quality" in church music. Who is being measured? Are the standards different for professional staff versus congregation members and volunteer leaders offering their "gifts"? Are the standards different for children? Are the standards different when the choir is trying to feature a world music genre that is out of their comfort zone, and perhaps beyond their skill level? Who sets the standards? Who does the evaluation?
- Congregations that do not currently include their music director as staff could benefit by a reflection on why that is the case. If the music director is viewed as simply the person who rehearses the choir and plays for hymns, it's hard to see where the incentive lies to move the music

program forward.

- Many of our congregations are in urban areas, with multiple possibilities for collaboration with music schools, local high school orchestras, and community music groups. If the music director is given the direction, the permission, the encouragement, and the budget to connect with these kinds of groups, the congregation will benefit.
- The same goes for connecting with performers who are touring in the church's catchment area. Folk performers in particular are often looking for gigs to fill in around larger appearances and will often respond positively to play a Sunday service. Again, there is a budget discussion that goes along with this.
- Finally, congregations need a clear plan for capturing data about why new people seek them out and why they stay. Music leaders are confident, as a group, that music plays a big role, but there is very little hard data. Until the data is available for discussion, it's all just speculation.

Many thanks to the people and organizations that made this sabbatical work possible, beginning with the UUA, a religious organization that extends the opportunity to take a sabbatical to its non-clergy staff. The UUMN provided the repertoire analysis I needed to make an informed comparison of "alternative" and "church" music, and their email group provided endless hours of interesting reading on every topic important to church musicians. Many UU music directors both took the time to complete (yet another unsolicited) survey, and then took more time to offer their thoughtful comments on their own programs. My friends in the performer community offered commentary that only performers could make, reflecting on their music through the eyes of artists. Thank you to my wife Elizabeth, who both edited the manuscript and helped bring clarity to some of the murkier analysis. And finally, thank you to Patti Angelina, the Manager of UUA Insurance Plans, who kept a very large enterprise running smoothly while I was away, and to my other compatriots in the UUA Office of Church Staff Finances who helped Patti cover for me and assured people that I hadn't left for good.

Appendix A -- First Parish Singers Repertoire

Title	Composer	Lyricist	Genre	Theme
PUSH	Sarah McLachlan	Sarah McLachlan	pop	acceptance
WATERFALL	Cris Williamson	Cris Williamson	pop	acceptance
SONG OF THE SOUL	Cris Williamson	Cris Williamson	pop	acceptance
WHEN I'M GONE	Phil Ochs	Phil Ochs	folk	activism
ELLA'S SONG	Bernice Johnson Reagon	Bernice Johnson Reagon	folk	activism
THE GREAT PEACE MARCH	Holly Near	Holly Near	folk	activism
IT ISN'T NICE	Malvina Reynolds	Malvina Reynolds	folk	activism
BLOWIN' IN THE WIND	Bob Dylan	Bob Dylan	folk	activism
WALLS AND WINDOWS	Judy Small and Pat Humphries	Judy Small and Pat Humphries	folk	activism
WHAT DID YOU LEARN IN SCHOOL TODAY?	Tom Paxton	Tom Paxton	folk	activism
THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN'	Bob Dylan	Bob Dylan	folk	activism
COMMON THREAD	Pat Humphries	Pat Humphries	folk	activism
THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND	Woody Guthrie	Woody Guthrie	folk	activism
IF I HAD A HAMMER	Pete Seeger and Lee Hays	Pete Seeger and Lee Hays	folk	activism
TEACH YOUR CHILDREN	Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young	Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young	folk	activism
DOWN BY THE RIVERSIDE	trad	trad	spiritual	activism
THERE BUT FOR FORTUNE	Phil Ochs	Phil Ochs	folk	activism
AKASHA WIND	L J Booth	L J Booth	folk	beauty of nature
RIVER	Bill Staines	Bill Staines	folk	beauty of nature
GARDEN SONG	Dave Mallett	Dave Mallett	folk	beauty of nature
DIRT	Jon Gailmor	Jon Gailmor	folk	beauty of nature
I'M A MAMMAL	Cindy Kallet and John Blodgett	Cindy Kallet and John Blodgett	folk	beauty of nature
HOMEGOWN TOMATOES	Guy Clark	Guy Clark	folk	beauty of nature

ALL GOD'S CRITTERS	Bill Staines	Bill Staines	folk	beauty of nature
RETURN TO POOH CORNER	Kenny Loggins	Kenny Loggins	pop	childhood
THE HOLLY AND THE IVY	trad	trad	trad carol	Christmas
STAR IN THE EAST	trad	trad	Sacred Harp	Christmas
CHILDREN, GO WHERE I SEND THEE	trad	trad	trad carol	Christmas
THE VIRGIN MARY HAD A BABY BOY	West Indies carol	West Indies carol	trad carol	Christmas
THE CHERRY TREE CAROL	trad	trad	trad carol	Christmas
LAST MONTH OF THE YEAR	trad	trad	trad carol	Christmas
THE BOAR'S HEAD	trad	trad	trad carol	Christmas
I WONDER AS I WANDER	John Jacob Niles	John Jacob Niles	trad carol	Christmas
THE CIRCLE GAME	Joni Mitchell	Joni Mitchell	folk	circle of life
CIRCLE OF LIFE	Elton John & Tim Rice	Elton John & Tim Rice	folk	circle of life
TURN, TURN, TURN	Ecclesiastes and Pete Seeger	Ecclesiastes and Pete Seeger	folk	circle of life
RIPPLE	Jerry Garcia	Robert Hunter	folk rock	circle of life
CIRCLE OF THE SUN	Sally Roger	Sally Rogers	folk	circle of life
TOO MANY MARTYRS	Phil Ochs & Bob Gibson	Phil Ochs & Bob Gibson	folk	civil rights
HARRIET TUBMAN	Walter Robinson	Walter Robinson	spiritual	civil rights
IF YOU MISS ME AT THE BACK OF THE BUS	Carver Neblett	Carver Neblett	folk	civil rights
OH, FREEDOM	trad	trad	folk	civil rights
FOLLOW THE DRINKIN' GOURD	trad	trad	spiritual	civil rights
THE COLOR SONG	Patricia Shih	Patricia Shih	folk	civil rights
READY FOR MEMPHIS	Neal Hagberg	Neal Hagberg	folk	civil rights
CRAZY IN ALABAMA	Kate Campbell, Kenya Slaughter Walker	Kate Campbell, Kenya Slaughter Walker	folk	civil rights
WE SHALL OVERCOME	Horton, Hamilton, Carawan & Seeger	Horton, Hamilton, Carawan & Seeger	folk	civil rights
COUNTRY NATION	Brad Paisley, Chris Dubois, Kelley Lovelace	Brad Paisley, Chris Dubois, Kelley Lovelace	country	common bonds
WASN'T THAT A TIME	Lee Hays & Walter Lowenfels	Lee Hays & Walter Lowenfels	folk	courage

FAREWELL	Jim Sargent	Jim Sargent	folk	end of church year
THE LAST LEVIATHAN	Andy Barnes	Andy Barnes	folk	environmentalism
REQUIEM FOR THE GIANT TREES	Eileen McGann	Eileen McGann	folk	environmentalism
AMAROK	Greg Artzner & Terry Leonino	Greg Artzner & Terry Leonino	folk	environmentalism
PARADISE	John Prine	John Prine	folk	environmentalism
DAUGHTERS	John Mayer	John Mayer	pop	family
CHRISTIANS AND THE PAGANS	Dar Williams	Dar Williams	folk	family
IF I HAD WINGS	Yarrow - Yardley	Yarrow - Yardley	folk	finding happiness
PACK UP YOUR SORROWS	Richard Fariña / Pauline Marden	Richard Fariña / Pauline Marden	folk	finding happiness
LAY DOWN YOUR WEARY TUNE	Bob Dylan	Bob Dylan	folk rock	finding rest
ANYWAY	Maggie & Suzzy Roche	Maggie & Suzzy Roche	folk	forgiveness
GUANTANAMERA	Marti/Angulo/Seeger	Marti/Angulo/Seeger	folk	freedom
THE UNICORN SONG	Margie Adam	Margie Adam	folk	freedom
IT'S A PLEASURE TO KNOW YOU	Carl Williams	Carl Williams	folk	friendship
COUNT ON ME	Bruno Mars	Bruno Mars	pop	friendship
WATER FROM ANOTHER TIME	John McCutcheon	John McCutcheon	folk	generations
SO LONG, IT'S BEEN GOOD TO KNOW YA	Woody Guthrie	Woody Guthrie	folk	goodbye
OCTOBER ROSES	Linda Allen	Linda Allen	folk	graceful aging
BLESSED	Lui Collins	Lui Collins	folk	gratitude
THANKSGIVING EVE	Bob Franke	Bob Franke	folk	gratitude
SALT OF THE EARTH	Jagger/Richards	Jagger/Richards	folk rock	gratitude
THANKS TO LIFE (GRACIAS A LA VIDA)	Violeta Parra	Violeta Parra	folk	gratitude
CHILD OF MINE	Bill Staines	Bill Staines	folk	gratitude
MAY THE LIGHT	David Roth	David Roth	folk	gratitude
STEP INTO THE WATER	Lui Collins	Lui Collins	folk	gratitude
GREED	Bernice Johnson Reagon	Bernice Johnson Reagon	spiritual	greed
FREE TO BE YOU AND ME	Stephen Lawrence and Bruce Hart	Stephen Lawrence and Bruce Hart	folk	growing up

FALL IS HERE	Charlie Maguire	Charlie Maguire	folk	harvest
CANNED GOODS	Greg Brown	Greg Brown	folk	harvest and family
MUSIC TO MY EARS	Ricky Skaggs	Ricky Skaggs	country	healing
FROM A DISTANCE	Julie Gold	Julie Gold	folk pop	hope
SKY DANCES	Holly Near	Holly Near	folk	hope
JUBILEE	Bill Staines	Bill Staines	folk	hope and family
CONNECTION	David Grover	David Grover	pop	human family
THEY ALL SANG BREAD AND ROSES	Si Kahn	Si Kahn	folk	labor movement
BREAD AND ROSES	Mimi Farina	James Oppenheimer	folk	labor movement
DEPORTEE	Woody Guthrie & Martin Hoffman	Woody Guthrie & Martin Hoffman	folk	labor movement
PASTURES OF PLENTY	Woody Guthrie	Woody Guthrie	folk	labor movement
JOE HILL	Alfred Hayes & Earl Robinson	Alfred Hayes & Earl Robinson	folk	labor movement
SALVE LUX FIDELIUM	trad	trad	folk round	light
NO ONE IS ALONE	Stephen Sondheim	Stephen Sondheim	Broadway	loneliness
GIVE YOURSELF TO LOVE	Kate Wolf	Kate Wolf	folk	love
LOVE COMES TO THE SIMPLE HEART	Chuck Hall	Chuck Hall	folk	love
LET ME CALL YOU SWEETHEART	Leo Friedman	Beth Slater Whitson	pop	love
GOODNIGHT IRENE	Huddie Ledbetter	Huddie Ledbetter	pop	love
YOU ARE MY SUNSHINE	Gov Jimmy Davis	Gov Jimmy Davis	pop	love
MAY IT BE	Enya	Enya	new age	love
MOONDANCER	Lui Collins	Lui Collins	folk	love and acceptance
HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS	Sally Fingerett	Sally Fingerett	folk	love and acceptance
ARROW	Cheryl Wheeler	Cheryl Wheeler	folk	love and desire
URGE FOR GOIN'	Joni Mitchell	Joni Mitchell	folk	love ending
SHEEP GO TO HEAVEN	Cake	Cake	rock	meaning of life
DIGNITY	Bob Dylan	Bob Dylan	folk rock	meaning of life
SOMETIMES WHEN I GET TO THINKIN'	Buffy Sainte-Marie	Buffy Sainte-Marie	folk	meaning of life
BOTH SIDES NOW	Joni Mitchell	Joni Mitchell	folk	meaning of life

WERE YOU THERE?	trad	trad	gospel	mortality
SING ME OUT	Kate Campbell, Kevin Gordon	Kate Campbell, Kevin Gordon	folk	mortality
HOMECOMING	Jim Sargent	Jim Sargent	folk	opening of the church year
EVERYBODY KNOWS ELVIS	Kate Campbell	Kate Campbell	folk	pain of fame
JERUSLAEM TOMORROW	David Olney	David Olney	folk rock	Palm Sunday story
PEACE ON EARTH	Lui Collins	Lui Collins	folk	peace
WHAT'S SO FUNNY ABOUT PEACE, LOVE, AND UNDERSTANDING	Nick Lowe	Nick Lowe	pop	peace
NO MAN'S LAND	Eric Bogle	Eric Bogle	folk	peace in a time of war
POMPEII	Bastille	Bastille	rock	perishable greatness
ALLELUIA, THE GREAT STORM IS OVER	Bob Franke	Bob Franke	folk	redemption
FOREVER YOUNG	Bob Dylan	Bob Dylan	folk	salvation
WILL THE CIRCLE BE UNBROKEN	trad	trad	folk	salvation
THE CITY WHERE COMES NO STRIFE	A A Warsham	A A Warsham	bluegrass gospel	salvation
WE SHALL RISE	John E. Thomas	John E. Thomas	bluegrass gospel	salvation
DOWN IN THE RIVER TO PRAY	trad	trad	spiritual	salvation
DIG A LITTLE DEEPER	Ken Morris, arr: Fairfield Four	Ken Morris, arr: Fairfield Four	bluegrass gospel	salvation
COME AND GO WITH ME	trad	Adapt. & Arranged by Yarrow/Stookey/Travers/Okun	folk	salvation
WILL THE CIRCLE BE UNBROKEN	trad	trad	bluegrass gospel	salvation
JUST A CLOSER WALK WITH THEE	trad	trad	spiritual	salvation
ANGEL BAND	trad - arr. Stanley Brothers	trad - arr. Stanley Brothers	bluegrass gospel	salvation
PRECIOUS LORD, TAKE MY HAND	Rev Thomas Dorsey	Rev Thomas Dorsey	spiritual	salvation
RIDE ON, KING JESUS	trad	trad	gospel	salvation
WONDROUS LOVE	trad, Southern Harmony	trad, Southern Harmony	trad, Sacred Harp	salvation
SINCE I'VE LAID THIS BURDEN DOWN	Mississippi Juhn Hurt	trad	bluegrass gospel	salvation

NEARER MY GOD TO THEE	trad - arr. Mississippi John Hurt	trad - arr. Mississippi John Hurt	bluegrass gospel	salvation
NaCl	Kate and Anna McGarrigle	Kate and Anna McGarrigle	pop	science, with a grain of salt
TO DRIVE THE COLD WINTER AWAY	trad	trad	trad carol	solestice
LORD OF THE DANCE	trad	trad	trad Shaker	solestice
IN THE BLEAK MIDWINTER	Harold Darke	Christina Rossetti	trad carol	solestice
FIELD BEHIND THE PLOW	Stan Rogers	Stan Rogers	folk	spring and farming
ROOTY TOOT TOOT FOR THE MOON	Greg Brown	Greg Brown	folk	taking life less seriously
CLOSER TO FINE	Indigo Girls	Indigo Girls	folk	taking life less seriously
ATHEISTS DON'T HAVE NO SONGS	Steve Martin	Steve Martin	bluegrass gospel	UU anthem
THERE WERE ROSES	Tommy Sands	Tommy Sands	folk	war and its cost
HAY UNA MUJER DESAPARECIDA	Holly Near	Holly Near	folk	war and its cost
THE LADIES GO DANCING AT WHITSUN	Austin John Marshall	Austin John Marshall	folk	war and its cost
A-SOALIN'	Stookey/Batteaste/Mezzetti	Stookey/Batteaste/Mezzetti	folk	wassailing