

## **ART MUSIC MELODIES AND SINGING**

If a person desires to deliver a discourse, it will prove more effectual after musical melodies.

‘Abdu'l-Baha

### **1. Abrogation of laws concerning music**

We have made it lawful for you to listen to music and singing. Take heed, however, lest listening thereto should cause you to overstep the bounds of propriety and dignity. Let your joy be the joy born of My Most Great Name, a Name that bringeth rapture to the heart, and filleth with ecstasy the minds of all who have drawn nigh unto God. We, verily, have made music as a ladder for your souls, a means whereby they may be lifted up unto the realm on high; make it not, therefore, as wings to self and passion. Truly, We are loath to see you numbered with the foolish.

Baha'u'llah

Abdu'l-Baha has written that "Among certain nations of the East, music was considered reprehensible". Though the Quran contains no specific guidance on the subject, some Muslims consider listening to music as unlawful, while others tolerate music within certain bounds and subject to particular conditions.

There are a number of passages in the Baha'i Writings in praise of music. Abdu'l-Baha, for example, asserts that "music, sung or played, is spiritual food for soul and heart".

O bird that singeth sweetly of the Abha Beauty! In this new and wondrous dispensation the veils of superstition have been torn asunder and the prejudices of eastern peoples stand condemned. Among certain nations of the East, music was considered reprehensible, but in this new age the Manifest Light hath, in His holy Tablets, specifically proclaimed that music, sung or played, is spiritual food for soul and heart.

The musician's art is among those arts worthy of the highest praise, and it moveth the hearts of all who grieve. Wherefore, O thou Shahnaz, play and sing out the holy

words of God with wondrous tones in the gatherings of the friends, that the listener may be freed from chains of care and sorrow, and his soul may leap for joy and humble itself in prayer to the realm of Glory.

## 2. The effect of music

They who recite the verses of the All-Merciful in the most melodious of tones will perceive in them that with which the sovereignty of earth and heaven can never be compared. From them they will inhale the divine fragrance of My worlds--worlds which today none can discern save those who have been endowed with vision through this sublime, this beautiful Revelation. Say: These verses draw hearts that are pure unto those spiritual worlds that can neither be expressed in words nor intimated by allusion. Blessed be those who hearken.

Baha'u'llah

What is music? It is a combination of harmonious sounds. What is poetry? It is a symmetrical collection of words. Therefore they are pleasing through harmony and rhythm...In the world of existence physical things have a connection with spiritual realities. One of these things is the voice, which connects itself with the spirit; and the spirit can be uplifted by this means...In short: melodies, though they are material, are connected with the spiritual, therefore they produce a great effect. A certain kind of melody makes the spirit happy, another kind makes it sad, another excites it to action. All these feelings can be caused by voice and music, for through the nerves it moves and stirs the spirit...Whatever is in the heart of man, melody moves and awakens. If a heart full of good feelings and a pure voice are joined together, a great effect is produced. For instance: if there be love in the heart, through melody, it will increase until its intensity can scarcely be born; but if bad thoughts are in the heart, such as hatred, it will increase and multiply. For instance: the music used in war awakens the desire for bloodshed.

The meaning is that melody causes whatever feeling is in the heart to increase. Some feelings occur accidentally and some have a foundation. For example; some people are naturally kind, but they may be accidentally upset by a wave of anger. But if they hear music, the true nature will reassert itself. Music really awakens the real, natural nature, the initial essence. a musical and melodious voice inspireth life to an attracted heart, but lureth toward lust those souls who are

engulfed in passion and desire.

Whoso cleaveth to justice, can, under no circumstances, transgress the limits of moderation. He discerneth the truth in all things, through the guidance of Him Who is the All-Seeing. The civilisation, so often vaunted by the learned exponents of arts and sciences, will, if allowed to overleap the bounds of moderation, bring great evil upon men. Thus warneth you He Who is the All-Knowing. If carried to excess, civilisation will prove as prolific a source of evil as it had been of goodness when kept within the restraints of moderation.

Baha'u'llah

Take heed, however, lest listening thereto should cause you to overstep the bounds of propriety and dignity. Let your joy be the joy born of My Most Great Name, a Name that bringeth rapture to the heart, and filleth with ecstasy the minds of all who have drawn nigh unto God. We, verily, have made music as a ladder for your souls, a means whereby they may be lifted up unto the realm on high; make it not, therefore, as wings to self and passion. Truly, We are loath to see you numbered with the foolish.

Baha'u'llah

although sounds are but vibrations in the air which affect the ear's auditory nerve, and these vibrations are but chance phenomena carried along through the air, even so, see how they move the heart. A wondrous melody is wings for the spirit, and maketh the soul to tremble for joy.

Music is one of the important arts. It has a great effect upon human spirit. Musical melodies are a certain something which prove to be accidental upon etheric vibrations, for the voice is nothing but the expression of vibrations, which, reaching the tympanum, affect the nerves of hearing. Musical melodies are, therefore, those peculiar effects produced by, or from, vibration. However, they have the keenest effect upon the spirit. In sooth, although music is a material affair, yet its tremendous effect is spiritual, and its greatest attachment is to the realm of the spirit. If a person desires to deliver a discourse, it will prove more effectual after musical melodies.

O nightingale of the rose-garden of God!

Singing melodies will bring animation and happiness to the world of humanity, the hearers will be delighted and joyful and their deeper emotions stirred. But this gladness, this sense of emotion is transitory and will be forgotten in a short time. However, praise be to God, thou hast blended thy tunes with the melodies of the Kingdom, this wilt impart solace to the world of the spirit and wilt everlastingly stimulate spiritual feelings. This will last for ever and endure the revolution of ages and centuries. Upon thee be the glory of the most glorious.

O servant of Baha! Music is regarded as a praiseworthy science at the Threshold of the Almighty...chant verses at large gatherings and congregations in a most wondrous melody...to enrapture the Concourse on High....Try, if thou canst, to use spiritual melodies, songs and tunes, and to bring the earthly music into harmony with the celestial melody. Then thou wilt notice what a great influence music hath and what heavenly joy and life it conferreth. Strike up such a melody and tune as to cause the nightingales of divine mystery to be filled with joy and ecstasy.

When music of this world is blended with that of the kingdom men's hearts will be so enraptured that their spirits will soar high with ecstasy.

Thy little book of poems, which were very sweet, was read. It was a source of joy, for it was a spiritual anthem and a melody of the love of God.

Continue as long as thou canst this melody in the gatherings of the beloved; thus may the minds find rest and joy and become in tune with the love of God. When eloquence of expression, beauty of sense and sweetness of composition unite with new melodies the effect is very great, especially if it be the anthem of the verses of oneness and the songs of praise to the Lord of Glory.

Endeavour your utmost to compose beautiful poems to be chanted with heavenly music; thus may their beauty affect the minds and impress the hearts of those who listen.

Thus should it be among the children of men! The diversity in the human family should be the cause of

love and harmony, as it is in music where many different notes blend together in the making of a perfect chord. If you meet those of different race and colour from yourself, do not mistrust them and withdraw yourself into your shell of conventionality, but rather be glad and show them kindness. Think of them as different coloured roses growing in the beautiful garden of humanity, and rejoice to be among them.

Henceforward we shall always be together, heart and soul and spirit, pressing forward in the work till all men are gathered together under the tent of the Kingdom, singing the songs of peace.

### 3. The divine source of music art and poetry

O people of Baha! The source of crafts, sciences and arts is the power of reflection. Make ye every effort that out of this ideal mine there may gleam forth such pearls of wisdom and utterance as will promote the well-being and harmony of all the kindreds of the earth.

Unveiled and unconcealed, this Wronged One hath, at all times, proclaimed before the face of all the peoples of the world that which will serve as the key for unlocking the doors of sciences, of arts, of knowledge, of well-being, of prosperity and wealth.

The light which these souls radiate is responsible for the progress of the world and the advancement of its peoples. They are like unto leaven which leaveneth the world of being, and constitute the animating force through which the arts and wonders of the world are made manifest. Through them the clouds rain their bounty upon men, and the earth bringeth forth its fruits. All things must needs have a cause, a motive power, an animating principle. These souls and symbols of detachment have provided, and will continue to provide,

the supreme moving impulse in the world of being.

The soul that hath remained faithful to the Cause of God, and stood unwaveringly firm in His Path shall, after his ascension, be possessed of such power that all the worlds which the Almighty hath created can benefit through him. Such a soul provideth, at the bidding of the Ideal King and Divine Educator, the pure leaven that leaveneth the world of being, and furnisheth the power through which the arts and wonders of the world are made manifest. Consider how meal needeth leaven to be leavened with. Those souls that are the symbols of detachment are the leaven of the world. Meditate on this, and be of the thankful.

Baha'u'llah

As to the wonderful melody whereby thy spirit was revived, verily it is a melody of the melodies of the divine music, which will cause the spirits to ascend unto the Supreme Horizon and will (cause) the mysteries to be unfolded.

O maid-servant of God! Be one of the angels of peace and a saint in the world. Verily thy Lord will cause thee to listen to that wonderful melody, through the spiritual instrument.

8. O ye beloved of Abdu'l-Baha and ye handmaids of the Merciful! It is early morning, and the reviving winds of the Abha Paradise are blowing over all creation, but they can stir only the pure of heart, and only the pure sense can detect their fragrance. Only the perceiving eye beholdeth the rays of the sun; only the listening ear can hear the singing of the Concourse on high.

#### 4. The Angelic Musicians

From amongst all mankind hath He chosen you, and your eyes have been opened to the light of guidance and

your ears attuned to the music of the Company above; and blessed by abounding grace, your hearts and souls have been born into new life. Thank ye and praise ye God that the hand of infinite bestowals hath set upon your heads this gem-studded crown, this crown whose lustrous jewels will forever flash and sparkle down all the reaches of time.

8. O ye beloved of Abdu'l-Baha and ye handmaids of the Merciful! It is early morning, and the reviving winds of the Abha Paradise are blowing over all creation, but they can stir only the pure of heart, and only the pure sense can detect their fragrance. Only the perceiving eye beholdeth the rays of the sun; only the listening ear can hear the singing of the Concourse on high.

## 5. The New Music of the Baha'i Era

Music, as one of the arts, is a natural cultural development. and the Guardian does not feel that there should be any cultivation of "Baha'i Music" any more than we are trying to develop a Baha'i school of painting or writing. The believers are free to paint, write and compose as their talents guide them. If music is written, incorporating the sacred Writings, the friends are free to make use of it, but it should never be considered a requirement at Baha'i meetings to have such music. The further away the friends keep from any set forms, the better, for they must realise that the Cause is absolutely universal, and what might seem a beautiful addition to their mode of celebrating a Feast, etc., would perhaps fall on the ears of people of another country as unpleasant sounds - and vice versa. As long as they have music for its own sake it is all right, but they should not consider it Baha'i music.

As regards producing a book of Baha'i songs, your understanding that there is no cultural expression which could be called Baha'i at this time (distinctive music, literature, art, architecture, etc., being the flower of the civilisation and not coming at the beginning of a new Revelation), is correct. however, that does not mean that we haven't Baha'i songs, in other words, songs written by Baha'is on Baha'i subjects.

Also you raise the question of what will be the source of inspiration to Baha'i musicians and composers; the music of the past or the Word? We cannot possibly foresee, standing as we do on the threshold of Baha'i culture, what forms and characteristics the arts of the future, inspired by this Mighty New Revelation, will have.

All we can be sure of is that they will be wonderful; as every Faith has given rise to a culture which flowered in different forms, so too our beloved Faith may be

expected to do the same thing. It is premature to try and grasp what they will be at present.

(50 years ago!)

I earnestly hope that thou wilt memorise all the Persian poems revealed by the Blessed Beauty and wilt sing them in a voice of incomparable sweetness at Baha'i meetings and gatherings. The day is not far distant when these poems will be set to Western music and the sweet accents of these songs will reach the Abha Kingdom with exceeding joy and gladness.

from the borders of the wilderness  
the tall grasses are standing like advance guards before  
the cypress and jessamine trees; while the birds are singing  
among the rose branches like the angels in the highest  
heavens, announcing the glad-tidings of the approach  
of that spiritual spring, and the sweet music of  
their voices is causing the real essence of all things to  
move and quiver.

O my spiritual friend! Dost thou know from what  
airs emanate the notes sung by those birds? They are  
from the melodies of peace and reconciliation, of love  
and unity, of justice and security, of concord and harmony.  
In a short time this heavenly singing will intoxicate  
all humanity; the foundations of enmity shall  
be destroyed; unity and affection shall be witnessed in  
every assembly; and the lovers of the love of God at  
these great festivals shall behold their splendour.