

in the groove: music @ the crossing

This resource written, compiled and edited by
Christine Jugueta, Dee Lavender & Stephanie Spellers

Additional contributions by
Chris Ashley, Ed Broms, Penny Larson, Ashley Merrell & Justin Newry

Based on reflections from The Crossing's music team members,
past & present, during a retreat held August 27-30, 2008.
Made possible through a grant from the Calvin Institute of Christian
Worship, Grand Rapids, MI, with funding from Lilly Foundation Inc.

© 2008 the crossing @ st. paul's episcopal cathedral-boston

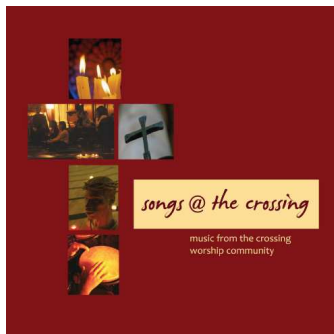


in the groove
music @ the crossing

reading is only part of the experience!

join us for worship @ the crossing
every thursday at 6pm.

or buy your copy of songs at the crossing,
the crossing's first cd.



get more info at www.thecrossingboston.org.
call us at 617.482.4826, x318.

table of contents

Music @ The Crossing	2
What is the Groovement?	3
Guiding Principles and Practices	4
Getting Started	5
An Evening @ The Crossing	6
Resources	7

music @ the crossing

Music is one of the first things people mention when they talk about any worship community, and true for The Crossing. We're a community where listening is the first priority, where celebration and tears and questions are all held with love, where the sermons are like show and tell, where Jesus is alive and so are we. The music emerges organically from that community.

From our start in 2006, we've been listening to each other, to friends and people around us who yearn for an authentic, passionate encounter with God. What we learned was how much folks crave silence and breath, and also crave space to celebrate, wail and groove. We knew music could open a channel for people to share those experiences. So we started with different styles of church music: gospel to chant, spirituals to hymns. These familiar, simple tunes grounded us in tradition. Then we incorporated the sounds that make people groove on the street, in the office, in the car, at home when they think nobody's looking. We wanted to bring prayerfulness and wisdom teaching into every corner of our everyday lives.

As we kept listening, we discovered that, for a lot of us, the sound that best captures this spirit comes in soul music: funk, rhythm and blues (R&B), pop, neo-soul. Born from the gospel tradition, these "old-school" songs tend to speak hopefully about liberation, justice and love, and to draw communities together across boundaries. It's true that they're often hip and popular. But the reason they're popular is that they facilitate community and strum away at something deep, warm, nostalgic and spiritual in us. That's why they call it soul music. That soul, that groove, provides the ground on which our worship is built.

What is the "soul" music that brings life to the community around your church?

what is the groovement?

What is "groove"?¹ Technically, it's a long, narrow channel cut into hard material to provide a slot for another object to slide into place. In music, it's the sense of propulsive, rhythmic "feel" created by the rhythm section. Bassist Steve Telehus explains that groove happens when "even the people who can't dance wanna feel like dancing." In life, groove is "an express train to your soul that shows you in just a few notes what it means to be a human being."

¹ TalkBass.com conversation on groove, 11/17/07. There's more: Berklee College of Music's Jonathan Feist explains that "groove is a multi-dimensional musical device that generally serves as a bed for a lead melody ... Grooves include recurring rhythmic and harmonic patterns, such as a drum beat, chord patterns, and melodic fragments or "background lines," which are like melodic motifs. ... Most popular music is groove-based." <http://jonathanfeist.berkleemusicblogs.com/2008/09/04/what-is-a-groove/>

resources

Chanting Communities: Agape International (Ricki Byars Beckwith); Iona (John Bell); Taize (France); Praxis of Prayer & All Saints Corpus Christi (Praxis/Lynn Bauman); St. Gregory of Nyssa (San Francisco); Catholic and Episcopal monastic communities (Society of St. John the Evangelist-Cambridge;)

World Chant/New Age Artists (who draw from Christian & Universal repertoire): Libana, Sarband, The Miserable Offenders, Lisbeth Scott, Biomusique, Vas, Sheila Chandra, Tina Malia, Yeh Dede

Hymnals: Episcopal Hymnal 1982, Lift Every Voice and Sing I and II, Wonder Love and Praise, African American Heritage Hymnal, With One Voice

Emergent Grooves: Dwell (Vineyard Music), Songs for a Revolution of Hope (Restoration Project); Urban Hymnal (Tara Ward, Zadoc Wartes), Church of the Apostles

Pop Artists with positive lyrics and a global/justice message: Paula Cole, Sarah McLachlan, Joan Osborne, Paul Simon, Alanis Morissette, Nina Simone, Joni Mitchell, Bob Marley, Lizz Wright, India Arie, U2, Brand New Heavies, Peter Gabriel, Sting

Popular Christian Grooves: Kim English (house), Take 6 (jazz/r & B), Rebecca St. James, Jennifer Knapp, Jars of Clay, David Crowder (pop/rock)

Neo-soul/Pop Soul Gospel: Debra Killings, Lisa McClendon, Mary Mary, Teresa Thomason

Neo-Soul/Pop Soul: Angie Scott, Zap Mama, Angie Stone, Donnie Dwele, Erykah Badu, Jill Scott, John Legend, Leelah James, Lauren Hill, Ledisi, Mary J. Blige, Meshell Ndegeocello, Natasha Beddingfield, Corinne Bailey Rae, Amy Winehouse, Eva Cassidy, Erykah Badu, Colby Caillat

Popular Groove: Bill Withers, '70s funk-disco, Earth Wind & Fire, Michael Jackson, Janet Jackson, Stevie Wonder, Kool & the Gang, Parliament Funkadelic

Gospel: Kirk Franklin, Richard Smallwood, Yolanda Adams, Justin Newry (new gospel), Tramaine Hawkins, Commissioned, The Winans Brothers, Tye Tribbet And Greater Anointing, Israel and New Breed, Freda Battle and the Temple Worshipers, Hezekiah Walker, Fred Hammond, John P. Kee, Soweto (African Gospel)

World/Jazz Groove-styles: "groove lounge" radio, Putamayo series, African, Brazilian, Sergio Mendez, Bobby McFerrin, Rachele Farrell

an evening @ the crossing

Music at The Crossing falls into several categories, each of which has its place in the order of worship (our CD, *Songs @ The Crossing*, includes examples of each.)

OPENING CHANT

Our opening chant is quiet, simple, mantra-like. These chants are lovely acapella, or with bass, African drum or a very simple keyboard.

GATHERING SONG

The Passing of the Peace (greeting) comes toward the start of our worship, and this gathering song calls people back to the circle. Ideally, it should create a sense of building energy, and begin to link with the night's themes. It's also a good time to encourage people to harmonize, and to introduce modulations (the emotion-stirring shift from one key to the next, in the middle of a song).

GOSPEL CHANT

Like the "heightened speech" practiced in the synagogue for millennia, our cantor reads the text while allowing a melody to gently lift the expression of the words. It's less like a song, more like a voice filled with feeling and meaning.

OPEN SPACE

(CD does not include Open Space songs but ...) Open Space is a 5-minute interlude after the sermon, a time to let words and ideas sink in. We explore original compositions, full hymns sung to a jazzy or funky groove, world music, alt pop, songs with justice themes. And sometimes we take it easy and chant.

PRAYER CHANT

This chant calls people to prepare for prayer. We tend toward a short, contemplative phrase – "O Lord hear my prayer, when I call, answer me" OR "Abba, Jesu, Spiritus, Spiritus" – that is sung between prayers.

AT THE TABLE/CLOSING SONG

The tone of the gathering shifts as we gather at the table and prepare to share Eucharist. Instrumental music announces it's time to bring our bodies to the table. The groove gets a little more funky, and the energy builds and builds up to the moment when the celebrant ends the prayer over bread and wine. That said, the song doesn't compete with the prayer taking place, but instead grounds the voice of the celebrant.

The closing song usually flows out of the table music. It can be a song of celebration, hope, new life, blessing, grace or redemption. It's best to have simple phrases that can be called out so that people don't need to shuffle paper. It's also a good time to introduce key changes/modulations and to raise volume and energy.

Every city, every town, every neighborhood has a different groove, a particular undercurrent, a texture and rhythm. That groove comes from the street, the grocery store, the cars rolling by. It is the hum underneath every sound, like the drones created in Indian music, or the vibration of the Tibetan monk's chant. It is a thread, a current that compels us and helps us to orient to what is primordial and holy.

"The Groovement" is our effort to encourage the wider church we love to bring groove into music and worship and life. The Groovement is an approach, a way of hearing, a way of healing, a way of bringing together the day-to-day soundtracks of our lives and finding God under it all. Why can't church be rooted in that groove, too?

guiding principles and practices

There's no need for folks to mimic what we do at The Crossing. Instead, we'd like to offer you some suggestions on how you might launch your own Groovement. Here are just a few principles to help you to discern what's authentic for you AND for the community as you're seeking to live God's mission.

- **LISTEN:** Listen to your own traditions, to the songs and sounds that are familiar for your congregation and feel like home. And then listen to songs and sounds that are familiar, liberating and healing to people just beyond your congregation (and often to people inside your church, who might be leaving part of their identity at the door). Ask people to tell you about their "heart songs" or what is "soul music" for them. Listen for God in those stories.
- **BLEND:** Then have some fun blending genres: a bass or rhythmic groove from a popular song laid underneath the words and melody from a chant or hymn. Give people enough familiar hooks to recognize and say, "Yes, I love that song!" Allow enough difference to have people say, "Wow, I've never felt like that or heard the words that way, when I've sung it before." Imagine combining "Amazing Grace" with the groove from a favorite soul song. That's the idea!
- **BUILD BRIDGES:** As we bring together different styles, we're bringing together different worlds. People can discover the gifts of other cultures, and maybe even find that they love their brother or sister from another culture more because they have sung their songs. You're opening the way to deeper relationship and solidarity.

- **EMPOWER:** The style of music should empower the voices, leadership and priesthood of the gathered people. Let people improvise on top of the melody, learn to listen to each other and take responsibility for creating sacred space and sound together.
- **LET GO:** Release the need for perfection and the desire to have worship that sounds like a good concert or “performance.” Instead, prepare well, have regular conversations about what’s going on and why, and then step back and make room for the Holy Spirit to move in your midst.
- **BE QUIET:** Don’t be afraid to build in deliberate silences using bells, prayer bowls or gongs. We could all use some space to breathe.
- **GREEN GROOVE:** In other words, recycle. Keep your grooves and best songs in a database and recycle them according to season and theme. Feel free to mix and match different grooves with different hymns and chants.
- **KEEP IT SIMPLE:** Sing refrains and chants or, if you’re singing a hymn, use a couple of verses instead of all six. Have a few pieces that are sung in every service, like the Lord’s Prayer or a simple prayer chant. This helps the congregation to feel grounded, and lets them know you’re not going somewhere without them.
- **FACILITATE PARTICIPATION:** Listen to the congregation as they sing, and notice patterns of participation. Notice what is easy and difficult for people to sing (you may like singing pop songs, but the structure of a pop song – especially the verses – is often better suited to a single voice, not a congregation). When you introduce a song that may prove more challenging, make it clear what’s being asked, and balance it with another song that’s familiar.
- **GEAR TOWARD THE NEWCOMER:** Especially if you’re doing alternative worship and connecting with people who might not have a church background and might be with you for the first time (or return on an irregular basis), don’t assume you can just repeat a song next week and people will remember. Always think about the experience of the person walking into church for the first time.

getting started

1. **PRAY AND LISTEN.** Pray together. Listen to each other and to God and to the community around you, and then ask God to grant you a vision of the mission before you. Who could you be welcoming? Who needs to know they are beloved of God? What parts of their souls are people leaving outside the sanctuary?
2. **PUT EVERYTHING ON THE TABLE.** Have a music pow-wow, inviting non-musicians and musicians, members and non-members to come play songs, hymns and poems that are the most holy, inspiring and meaningful in their lives.
3. **DISCERN.** There will be lots of ideas, so tie the new music back to your vision, know your resources and use them wisely, and gauge when and how to introduce new music to your congregation.
4. **GATHER A TEAM.** The music director should gather a team with the skills to create the music that is at the community’s heart. Not only classically trained musicians, not just gospel singers, not just pop artists, but people who can cross genres. Can’t stretch the staff? Work with what you’ve got, but prepare to learn and grow.
5. **PACE IT.** If you’re introducing “groove” into an existing worship service, try it first in limited ways: an opening chant before worship begins, a song before the Gospel reading, a mantra-like song people don’t have to read during Communion. If you’re organizing a worship gathering with new music, you can establish a pattern, repeating songs throughout a month or season.
6. **REPEAT:** Keep singing a selection until people get it and can relax with it. Allow the congregation time to get confident and look away from the screen or paper. That’s part of why we so often use chant: the words become a mantra. The more you repeat, the deeper it goes and the more you can play and improvise.
7. **GET AWAY FROM PAPER:** Help the group to sing without their eyes glued to the paper. One strategy is calling out the coming verses (“lining people in”, a gospel music convention.)
8. **KEEP LEARNING:** If you’re not sure how to engage a particular style of music, learn from the folks who do. Visit clubs, evangelical and gospel-based churches; listen to the radio. Or just ask someone for whom that style is home to teach you.