

May 26, 2015

TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS, CIRCUIT OVERSEERS, AND CONVENTION COMMITTEES

Re: Music at Theocratic Events

Dear Brothers:

This letter replaces the letter dated March 27, 2008, to all bodies of elders on the same subject. Paragraphs 6 and 7 of this letter contain updated information regarding the music played before and after congregation meetings and before assembly and convention sessions.

A number of reports have been received indicating that some congregations consistently play the music for singing so softly that it is difficult for some to sing in a heartfelt manner. In other cases, it appears that the volume of the music is normally so loud that it drowns out the voices of the congregation. The brothers who operate the sound system in the Kingdom Hall are encouraged to avoid both extremes. Some thought must be given as to how this can be accomplished.

Brothers assigned to operate sound systems must take seriously the fact that instrumental music is rightly featured in true worship, whether it is played to be listened to or used as an accompaniment to singing. Music and song are gifts of God by which Jehovah's faithful servants can render praise and thanksgiving as well as give expression to deep emotions of both sorrow and joy. Jehovah's angels have raised their voices in poetic expressions of praise upon observing the wondrous works of our magnificent Creator. (Job 38:7; Luke 2:8-14) The Bible record shows clearly the wide range of expression in music and song. Consider, for example, the triumphant song of victory on the lips of Moses and the sons of Israel on their being delivered from the Egyptian military forces at the Red Sea, or the numerous prayers and supplications of David set to music in the Bible book of Psalms. Also, give thought to what would have been the tenor and tone of the singing of Jesus and his eleven faithful apostles at the conclusion of the Lord's Evening Meal and before going out to the Mount of Olives.—Matt. 26:30, ftn.

It is important to take note of the tenor and tempo of our Kingdom songs. Some of them are expressions of fervent prayer to Jehovah, thanksgiving, or heartfelt supplication, while the words of others remind us of our Christian responsibilities. Some songs are written to bring comfort. Others reassure us of Jehovah's protection and the promised reward for faithfulness. All of us enjoy raising our voices in singing the lively encouragement to remain steadfast and to keep busy serving Jehovah, declaring his glory, and making new disciples.

So it is that a little increased volume may be appropriate for full-throated singing of the lively, more vigorous songs. However, many prayerful expressions would naturally be rendered with a somewhat softer voice and perhaps with slightly less volume. Keep in mind that the music is to lead those singing the song. The important thing for the brothers who handle the sound equipment is to remain always alert and attentive to their assigned responsibilities in this matter.

Bodies of elders should make arrangements to play Kingdom songs over the sound system **before and after congregation meetings**. Such music should not be allowed to drown out or overshadow the interchange of encouragement that comes from Christian association and theocratic conversation.

The situation is different at **assemblies and conventions**. Prerecorded musical preludes are provided for use **at the start of each session**. These are part of the program, and are usually ten minutes in duration. The purpose of these preludes is not to provide background music for conversations and association. Instead, they are a means to indicate that the large crowd should end their conversations and be seated. Sitting and quietly listening to the music also helps us to prepare our mind and heart to absorb the spiritual program to follow. The prelude is considered part of our worship, similar to the singing of the assigned songs at these events. Hence, the volume should be at a higher level than the volume of the background music that congregations play before and after their weekly meetings. The prelude music should initially be loud enough to be heard clearly over the conversations that have been in progress. As the audience settles into their seats and listens to the music, the volume level may be lowered so as not to overpower the now quiet and attentive audience. Good judgment must be used to accomplish the purpose of the prelude music while ensuring that it is not uncomfortably loud. The session chairman should enthusiastically invite the audience to be seated to listen to the prelude music.

If on occasion there are different opinions as to the application of what has been set forth in this letter, no individual should resort to forcing his personal opinion on others. All matters are to be resolved by the local elders or, in the case of assemblies and conventions, the brothers responsible for oversight of the program.

May you find these comments both helpful and encouraging. We should avoid making specific rules about somewhat technical matters. However, if we understand the spirit to be displayed on every occasion with regard to the use of music in our worship of Jehovah, this will assist us greatly in determining what is appropriate. Similar principles could be applied to other public and private gatherings of Jehovah's true worshippers, such as wedding receptions, dinners, and other social occasions. Of course, at all times and under all circumstances, our endeavor is to do all things for God's praise and glory.—1 Cor. 10:31; Col. 3:17.

Be assured of our warm Christian love and greetings.

Your brothers,

*Watch Tower B. & J. Society*  
OF PENNSYLVANIA

PS to secretary:

This letter has been added to the list of policy letters that will be cited in *Index to Letters for Bodies of Elders* (S-22).