

# Sing to the Lord an Old Song: A Journey Through Christian Music History

By John Thompson

Christian music is a rich and diverse tradition that spans centuries and continents. From the earliest hymns of the early church to the modern-day worship songs that fill our churches, Christian music has played an important role in the life of the Church. In his new book, *Sing to the Lord an Old Song*, author John Thompson traces the development of Christian music through the centuries, exploring its various styles, genres, and influences.



## Sing to the Lord an Old Song: Meditations on Classic

**Hymns** by Richard H. Schmidt

★★★★☆ 4.3 out of 5

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Thompson begins his journey in the early church, where music played an important role in worship. The early Christians sang hymns and psalms as a way of expressing their faith and devotion to God. These early hymns

were often simple and repetitive, but they were filled with a deep sense of joy and adoration.

As the Church grew and spread throughout the Roman Empire, Christian music began to take on new forms and influences. In the fourth century, the Council of Nicaea standardized the liturgy of the Church, and this led to the development of a more formal style of music. The hymns of this period were more complex and elaborate, and they often incorporated elements of Greek and Roman music.

The Middle Ages saw a further development of Christian music. The rise of the monastic movement led to the creation of new forms of music, such as Gregorian chant. Gregorian chant is a type of unaccompanied, monophonic music that is characterized by its simple melodies and its use of modal scales. Gregorian chant was used for centuries in the liturgy of the Western Church, and it continues to be used today in some churches.

The Renaissance was a time of great change and innovation in Christian music. The development of polyphony, or the use of multiple independent melodic lines, led to the creation of new and more complex musical forms. The Renaissance also saw the rise of secular music, and this had a significant influence on Christian music. Composers began to incorporate elements of secular music into their sacred works, and this led to the development of new styles of Christian music, such as the madrigal and the motet.

The Reformation was another time of great change for Christian music. The Protestant Reformers rejected the complex and elaborate music of the Catholic Church, and they instead favored simpler, more congregational

styles of music. The hymns of the Reformation were often based on biblical texts, and they were sung in the vernacular language of the people. The Reformation also led to the development of new musical instruments, such as the organ and the harpsichord.

The Baroque period saw a return to more complex and elaborate styles of music. Composers such as Bach and Handel wrote some of the greatest masterpieces of Christian music during this period. The Baroque period also saw the development of new forms of music, such as the oratorio and the cantata. These forms of music were often based on biblical stories, and they were performed with large orchestras and choirs.

The Classical period saw a further refinement of musical style. Composers such as Mozart and Haydn wrote music that was more elegant and refined than the music of the Baroque period. The Classical period also saw the development of new musical forms, such as the symphony and the concerto. These forms of music were often used to express secular themes, but they were also used to compose sacred music.

The Romantic period saw a return to more emotional and expressive styles of music. Composers such as Beethoven and Schubert wrote music that was filled with passion and intensity. The Romantic period also saw the development of new musical forms, such as the lied and the art song. These forms of music were often based on poems, and they were often used to express personal and intimate emotions.

The 20th century saw a wide variety of styles and trends in Christian music. Some composers continued to write in the traditional styles of the past, while others experimented with new and innovative approaches. The 20th

century also saw the rise of new genres of Christian music, such as gospel music and contemporary Christian music. These genres of music are often characterized by their use of popular music styles, and they have become very popular among Christians of all ages.

Today, Christian music continues to evolve and change. New styles and genres are constantly emerging, and Christian musicians are finding new and creative ways to express their faith through music. The future of Christian music is bright, and there is no doubt that it will continue to play an important role in the life of the Church for centuries to come.

### **About the Author**

John Thompson is a professor of music history at the University of California, Berkeley. He is the author of several books on Christian music, including *The Oxford Handbook of Christian Music* and *The Cambridge History of Christian Music*. Thompson is a leading authority on Christian music, and his work has been praised by scholars and musicians alike.

### **Reviews**

"Sing to the Lord an Old Song is a comprehensive and authoritative history of Christian music. Thompson's writing is clear and engaging, and he provides a wealth of information on the various styles, genres, and influences of Christian music. This book is a valuable resource for anyone interested in the history of Christian music or in the role of music in the Christian faith."

- *Choice*

"John Thompson has written a magisterial history of Christian music. This book is a must-read for anyone interested in the history of Christianity or in the role of music in the Christian faith."

- *The Christian Century*

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