

“The Red Cup”
by Sam Moffett

I don't consider myself to be a very religious person. When I was growing up, my parents came from different religious backgrounds, and for that, they didn't make me go to a specific church. But, like many who don't grow up within a certain religious community, I was always curious about them. So, I read. I would read from different texts. I took classes in college on Eastern Philosophy, and studied different religions through those means. Often, our projects involved having us attend religious ceremonies to which we weren't accustomed. I was always able to find things I liked in every text I read and faith I observed, and some things that I would rather not abide by (I'm sure many can relate!).

Although different religious communities have different views, one thing remains in common with almost every kind of worship: Music. No matter the many disagreements that exist across the different faiths in our country and in our world, most agree that music helps them connect to their chosen deity.

How many of you think the music you hear in here helps connect you to our great covenant? If so, then I'm doing my job!

A few weeks ago, in one of my classes at Hartt, a world-renowned composer and theorist named Jonathan Berger came in to give us a lecture. One of stories he told us was of this old Cathedral in Europe, that's existed since the late 16th century and has never been renovated. He took a trip there and asked the music director about a lesser-known composer that had worked for the church during its inception. To his surprise, the music director led him to his office, where, in a file cabinet, he had stacks of original music scores from that composer, over 400 years old that have never been performed. So, he took them and recorded them.

I don't know if you're aware of this, but we have the technology nowadays to capture the specific reverberations of a space. He had an experiment where he recorded these pieces in an anechoic chamber, (which is to say, NO reverberation) and would plug those recordings into different captured reverberations.

The reverberations he had were of different churches that practice the same faith, in the same country, or even the same city. And we as a class were given a blind listening test, in which he would ask us which version of the recordings we liked best. And when we got to one particular one, almost every hand in the room shot up. We collectively agreed that this one space was the best one. And wouldn't you know it, it was in that same church that the pieces were written in.

That got me thinking: When musicians write or choose music for their worship community, they are choosing it for their specific *space*. They're saying “What music is going to sound best in THIS space, to connect THIS community to THEIR spirit?” That's essentially my job here. And while I haven't quite yet come to understand the acoustic confines of this... “unique” space, I've come to understand a bit about our spirit. What strikes me as so powerful about this community is that, that spirit can be... anything.

You may remember a few years ago, there was a lot of controversy surrounding Starbucks Coffee Shop. While they typically print Christmas-themed designs on their cups around the holidays, one year they decided to print a solid red cup. This made some people in the Christian community particularly upset, for fear that they aren't being represented. And at first, I was pretty apathetic to the whole thing. I figured "Well, I celebrate Christmas with my family, and I don't really care what other people do, so why should I care, right?"

But I started to think about it, and I realized that Starbucks was actually sending an incredibly profound invitation to the world. It was a reminder that the world is not a *Christian* space. It's not a Jewish space, or an Islamic space. The world is a space in which we *all* live. The world is a place where we *all* believe in something, even if it's not a God. I started to see the red Starbucks cup in a different way. I saw it as a blank easel on which you could project your own faith. You can draw your God on it. You can even draw your favorite football player on it.

One of the things I love about this community, this environment, this... space, is that, in many ways, *we are the red cup*. The seven truths we live by talk about fairness, equity, the value of each individual, respecting democracy... None of them talk about honoring a certain God. We just agree to come together as a community, to respect, love, and help one another. All are encouraged to come in and thrive in their *own* faith, connect with their *own* spirit.

So, why did I choose music of different faiths for this music Sunday? To remind you all that in here, we drink from the red cup. In here, you are encouraged to let the music take you towards your spirit, in whatever way it does that.

And faith doesn't have to be in a certain God, for those of you who don't believe in one or are not sure. I'm a self-proclaimed agnostic, but there is one thing that at times is harder for me to believe in than any God... myself.

Through whatever insecurities I have, whatever mistakes I have made in the past, believing in myself can be a hard task. The holiday season reminds me that if I need to enliven my faith in anything, it's me. And I'll admit, there are songs that connect me with that faith at times. *Son of Man* by Phil Collins from the Tarzan Soundtrack is one. *Jump*, by Van Halen is another, (I know the lyrics have a more negative connotation, but I'm more of a music listener than a lyric listener, and that beat is very pump-up!).

I want you all to think about this: What is it that *you* need to have faith in this holiday season? For some of you, it might be God. Maybe it's yourself. Maybe it's a member of your family, or a past friend who has wronged you. Maybe it's a politician, or your favorite sports team. What is your idea of spirit? How can you strengthen your faith in that spirit? And remember, in here, you can do that. In here, we are with you. It is in here that we dwell in peace with you, in here that we seek the truth in love with you, and in here that we help you, and one another. In here, we drink from the red cup. So may it be.